A Mayfair Magician

A Romance of Criminal Science

by George Griffith-Jones, 1857-1906

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Prologue

Despite the venerable antiquity of the saying, it is not always true that "Out of evil cometh good," but certainly out of the apparent evil of the snow-burst which, on the morning of a Christmas Eve not many winters ago, suddenly buried H. M. Prison at Nethermoor from the sight of heaven and cut it off from all communication with the rest of earth, there came to me two good things in the shape of spontaneously offered and most generous hospitality, and one of the strangest stories of what I can only call inverted genius and diverted human power that it has ever been my good fortune to hear.

I had been visiting Nethermoor, which, as you doubtless know, is situated on one of the southern slopes of the Scottish border hills, during the course of a series of studies of British and Continental prison systems, and I had to be up early to catch the train to Newcastle if I was to have any chance of spending Christmas at home. But when the doctor, or to give him his official title, the Principal Medical Officer, who had kindly given me a bed, came to my door at daybreak, I heard his pleasant North Country burr saying across the frontiers of the Land of Nod—

"I'm thinking ye'll have to eat your Christmas dinner off prison fare or something like it this year, Mr Griffith. Get up and take a look at the snow."

I mustered resolution for the plunge and crept shivering to the window. Yes, there was no doubt about it. Southward and to east and west the white wilderness mingled with the grey sky, and there was no more chance of making the seven-mile drive to the station than there was of bringing the Scotch Express up to Nethermoor. It was in this manner that I came to pass my only Christmas, so far, within prison walls.

My host was one of the most interesting of the many interesting men I have had the good luck to meet. He was a prison doctor by choice, not from necessity. If I were to publish his name and give the locality of the prison a little more exactly—which I faithfully promised not to do—he would be recognised as one of the most distinguished psychologists of the day. He had a splendid London practice, but the attractions of his favourite science were too strong for him, and he gave it up to study criminal psychology under what he rightly considered to be the most favourable circumstances.

I had made the last round with him and the Governor and duly inspected the preparations for the very mild festivities which his Majesty's involuntary guests are permitted to indulge in when, just as we were leaving the great kitchen, he asked me sotto voce to particularly notice a prisoner who had already attracted my attention owing to the fact that he was wearing a mask and goggles of the style that motoring has brought into fashion.

In spite of the cropped hair and the closely-sheared stubble which covered his cheeks and chin, one could recognise his face at once as that of a man of more than ordinary mental power t even deprived, as it was, of those principal organs of expression, the eyes, which were completely hidden, as I thought on account of ophthalmia, by the huge goggles. Even the hideous prison livery, too, was not sufficient to entirely disguise a distinction of form and a grace of movement which is seldom or never found in the true or natural born criminal.

"This is the season with us North Country folk for story telling," said my host, as we tramped back to his house along one of the lanes that one of the spade-gangs had made, "and when we get to our grog after supper I'll tell you the story of that man with the goggles and why he wears them; but if you ever tell it again, of course you'll use different names and places—and maybe mix a bit of fiction with it."

I promised all but the last, and that he left to my discretion.

Over supper we naturally fell into a discussion of that most absorbing of all topics for the criminologist—the possible nature of that essential difference of mental function which divides what are commonly called the criminal from the honest classes.

"Of course, I needn't remind you," said my host, when he had put a couple of fresh logs on the blazing fire and we had pulled our chairs round and loaded our pipes, "that the first thing the really scientific student of crime, the man who wants to get at the truth, has to do is to get rid once for all of what is called the moral view of crime. He has nothing to do with the right or wrong of the matter, but only with the why and the wherefore. Naturally the student must not carry that principle outside his study. If he does he will have a good chance of getting into trouble with the policeman, and it is just for that reason that the man I called your attention to in the kitchen is here wearing those goggles in prison instead of occupying a distinguished, in fact, I might say a unique, position in the world of science. It is a terrible pity," he concluded with something like a sigh.

"Yes," I assented, "it hardly seems, somehow, in the fitness of things that such a lot of knowledge as he must have should be shut up in a prison cell. Still, he may be persuaded to make a legitimate use of it when he gets out."

"He will never get out," was the somewhat startling reply. He is a prisoner because he failed to realise that there are some things—human life and honour and happiness for instance—which may not be sacrificed on the altar of science, even for the possible ultimate benefit of humanity, and he will die a prisoner because there is no law on the British Statute Book under which he could be hung for the crime he committed, murder though it was."

"That sounds promising, doctor," I said after a few pulls at my new-lit pipe. "But what about the goggles—are they part of the punishment for this new sort of crime?"

"They," replied my host, "are not a punishment. They are only a protection, not for his eyes, but against them. Ah! I see you hardly follow me. Well, never mind, you will see what I mean shortly."

The doctor took a pull at his grog and two or three meditative whiffs at his pipe, and then proceeded to tell me the story of the convict with the goggles, which I reproduce in the following chapters from the notes which I took the same night and also others of lengthy conversations which we had on the subject during the week for which the snow kept me a not unwilling prisoner at Nethermoor.

Chapter I

Enstone Manor, one of the finest as well as one of the oldest estates between the Pennines and the North Sea, came into the possession of the late owner, Sir Godfrey Enstone, in this fashion. He was a younger son, but everyone said that he ought to have been the elder, with his handsome face and stalwart figure and high spirit, albeit the last was wont on occasion to flame up somewhat swiftly to anger. The heir and only other child was more of a throw- back to some remote generation than the son in spirit as well as in blood of his own father and mother, for he was not only mean to look upon, but he was in disposition and nature everything that a gentleman ought not to be—secretive, underhand, revengeful, and as close-fisted as a Dutch miser.

That, however, is not germane to the story save in so far as it was responsible for the everlasting quarrels between the brothers which ended when Archibald, the elder, managed to get Godfrey into terrible hot water with his parents over some youthful escapade, and received at his hands a thrashing so sound that Archibald received injuries from which he never quite recovered. Of course, Godfrey was deeply and sincerely penitent when he cooled down and recognised what his momentary passion had led him to do; but his father would have none of his repentance, and so in the end he gave him five hundred pounds and his curse and bade him never let him see his face again. Like most curses, that one duly came home to roost under the old roof-tree.

Godfrey disappeared utterly for over twenty years. The old baronet and his wife died within a few months of each other of pneumonia following influenza. The heir succeeded—a soured, enfeebled misanthrope, who hated women and believed that all the girls of the countryside and in London were after his money and position, whereas no decent woman would have married him if he had been a duke and a millionaire. He killed himself with quack medicines and drugs in little more than a year, and then the solicitors set to work to find Sir Godfrey, as he was now, if alive.

For two or three years nothing was heard of him, and the estate was managed by trustees, appointed by the Court of Chancery. Then, without any notice, he walked one day into the solicitor's office and explained that he had only heard of

the deaths of his father and brother six weeks before in Hong Kong, on his return from a three years' exploring expedition in Central and North-Eastern Asia.

However, he had made his money; he was evidently very wealthy, and when he had established his identity and taken possession of the carefully-nursed estates he was one of the richest men in the North Country. But although there was no doubt as to his being Godfrey Enstone, all who had known him before his banishment agreed that no one could well have been more unlike what one might have expected "Master Godfrey" to grow up than the thin, grave, slightly- stooping, parchment-skinned man who seemed to have little or no interest in life beyond his estates and his scientific studies—which some of his sporting neighbours looked upon with frank and openly-expressed suspicion.

There was, however, one exception to this rule. He brought back with him a fine, strapping, honest-faced young fellow of about twenty-two, whom all his friends at first hoped was his son. But the world soon learnt that he was really the son of an old comrade and fellow-adventurer, who had lost his life in saving Sir Godfrey's. He had adopted him, and one of the first things he did when he got settled was to go through the legal process of giving him his name and declaring him his heir to the estates, which were unentailed, and his own personal property.

The title was to die with himself. He had proved that a father's curse, whether rightly or wrongly given, was a grievous burden to bear. His own wife and child had died together of plague fifteen years before on the anniversary of his banishment. Five years later on the same day his own life had been saved only at the expense of that of the only friend he had on earth. He had not a single blood-relation in the world, and he had determined that the title should die with him and the blood line of Enstones cease to exist.

He had few friends, scarcely any at all in England; but, as the postmaster at Enstone was well aware, he had a large circle of corresponding acquaintances scattered nearly all over the world, and of these, according to the experience of the postmaster, the most frequent and constant was a certain Professor Jenner Halkine who appeared to possess addresses in pretty nearly every corner of the globe.

One morning at breakfast, nearly two years after his return, Sir Godfrey said to his adopted son, who was known legally as Harold Dacre Enstone— his father's name had been Dacre,—

"Harold, my boy, what do you say to a run up to London for a few days? You want some new guns and hunting-gear before the season, I believe, arid you could have a look round and choose them for yourself. It will be better than having them sent on approval."

"With pleasure, dad," was the reply; "but, of course, you're going too?"

"Oh, yes," said Sir Godfrey, with what was for him an unwonted eagerness. "The fact is that 1 have just had a letter from Professor Halkine and he tells me that he has at last made up his mind to give up wandering and pitch his tent permanently in England. He says his niece is growing up now and he doesn't think it quite fair to her to keep on the everlasting trek any longer. At anyrate, whatever that resolve may prove to be worth, he landed at Brindisi four days ago and will be in London the day after to-morrow. Curiously enough, although we've been friends on notepaper and in the scientific journals for years, this is the first time we have

been within about a thousand miles of each other. In this letter he asks me to call on him at Morley's Hotel on Wednesday and at last make his personal acquaintance."

Harold remembered as he spoke that Wednesday was the Anniversary, as they called it—the Black Day of the year on which Sir Godfrey never began or ended anything of importance, but he did not share his feelings on this subject, although they had never discontinued the custom of putting on black ties on the day of his father's death.

"That is distinctly curious," he said, laying down the paper he was reading. "It ought to be a very interesting meeting for you, though I hope you'll like the professor personally better than I like those theories of his, great man as he certainly is. I wonder what the niece will be like. Large and angular, most probably, with the muscles of a man and the complexion of a Jap. That's the worst of those travelling women. They're neither huggable nor kissable."

Two days later Mr Harold Enstone had the best of reasons to alter this very sweeping assertion. Sir Godfrey brought back an invitation to dinner from his hitherto unknown friend, whom he enthusiastically described as a most charming man and a thorough gentleman, and warned him that he was to meet the possibly formidable niece. Harold, somewhat against his inclination, found himself forced to agree with him as to the professor. He was certainly a man of birth, breeding and education, and in addition, he possessed that indefinable air of "at-homeness" which only travel can give. But for all that there was something about him, an air of quiet, repressed power which even suggested irresistible authority if once seriously exerted, which he found himself resenting during the first five minutes of conversation over the usual sherry and bitters.

In addition to this he possessed the most extraordinary pair of eyes that Harold had ever seen in a human head. They were very large—too large, in fact, for a man—and intensely luminous. They differed, too, in colour with every changing light. Sometimes they were dusky and sombre almost to blackness. When their owner got animated they brightened to a deep violet which at times paled slowly. When they looked towards the light, which they very seldom did, they were a greenish-grey with frequent glints of reddish fire in them. To look directly into them for more than a momentary glance was not possible without a disquieting feeling or rather suggestion of possible submission to the control of the forceful soul which was looking out of them —at least that was Harold's first impression of them.

But when he went into the drawing-room and he saw those same eyes set like glorious gems under a pair of dark, delicately-curved brows, and lighting up the most exquisitely lovely face his own glowing fancy had ever dreamed of, his opinion suddenly changed again, both as to rainbow eyes and women travellers.

"My niece, Miss Grace Romanes," said the professor, as the slender form and the royally-poised head, crowned with its diadem of red-gold coils, bowed before them. When the introduction was over Sir Godfrey looked at him with an expression which reminded him forcibly of his rash remark at breakfast the morning but one before. When Miss Romanes spoke he had some difficulty in repressing a visible start, as often happens when one hears for the first time a voice of extraordinary sweetness.

How the dinner and the couple of hours which followed at the Opera passed Harold never exactly knew, but when he got up the next morning with his soul full of the most fantastically delightful dreams, he first informed himself that he was little better than a drivelling idiot, and then expressed the opinion at breakfast that girls like Miss Grace Romanes ought not to be allowed to go about loose. It was not fair to men who had eyes in their heads and blood in their veins. Sir Godfrey sympathised laughingly with him and told him for his comfort that he had asked Dr Halkine and his niece to pay a visit to the Manor for the purpose of comparing scientific notes. He suggested that if Harold felt that the proximity would be more than his fortitude could safely risk, a month's fishing in Norway would afford excuse for a dignified retreat. Master Harold decided to take the risk and felt absurdly pleased with himself when a very few days later it developed into a delightful and yet harrowing certainty.

The conquest of Harold Enstone was as rapid as it was complete and irrevocable, and it was accomplished before his fair conqueror appeared to have the slightest knowledge of her unconscious triumph. She was a charming companion, perfectly natural and unaffected, as might be expected of a girl whose education had been begun and completed amidst the realities of life and the eternal problem of Nature instead of the artificial trivialities which form the surroundings of the average Society girl. This gave her an added charm in his eyes which no other woman could have had. His own life and education had been much the same, and so from the beginning there was a bond between them, of which, as she afterwards confessed, she must even then have felt the strength without realising it.

He had one of those open natures which make anything like concealment or the most innocent deception irksome and even unbearable where friends are concerned, and so, as soon as he had made up his mind to the inevitable, he went to his father—as he always called and considered him—and told him everything.

It so happened that on the morning of the same day Dr Halkine, with whom Sir Godfrey had apparently become the fastest friends, had promised to rent a snug little Dower House on the estate, so that he might settle down to the pursuit of his studies, not only in absolute quiet, but also in touch with a kindred spirit whose intellectual activities and scientific aspirations were practically identical with his own.

Curiously enough, as it seemed to him then, the ardent lover did not find himself able to look with unqualified approval upon this arrangement, despite the fact that it would give him the best of opportunities for an almost ideal love-making. In the first place, he liked difficulties, and this looked as though things were going to be made too easy for him in one sense and, therefore, perhaps, in another impossible, if Miss Grace ever got a suspicion that matters had been arranged this way. Again, he did not like the doctor. He was the only man he had ever felt uncomfortable with, and that was probably because he was the only man of whom he had ever felt in any sense afraid. He despised and, for her sake, reproached himself for this feeling, but it was no use, though, out of deference for Sir Godfrey's great liking for him, he kept his sentiments strictly to himself. At the same time he thought it only fair, both to Miss Romanes and himself, that she and

her uncle should be told frankly that he loved her and meant to win her if he could, before they finally decided to settle in the Dower House.

Sir Godfrey fully agreed with him and put the matter with perfect plainness before Dr Halkine, who accepted the situation with a quite philosophical consideration for a natural infirmity of age and sex, which interested him only as one of the inevitable phenomena of human life in its present phase. Whether or not he acquainted his niece with the state of affairs did not appear just then; but the house was taken and the two guests remained at the Manor till it was ready for their reception.

Harold naturally accepted the decision as a tacit permission to press his suit openly, and that he proceeded to do with such effect that within a month he felt justified in speaking out and asking Miss Grace to decide his fate for him. She did so with a quiet gravity which at once delighted and puzzled him. She gave him, with most sweetly gracious earnestness, permission to undertake the most entrancing of all tasks that a man can set himself to, the winning of a half-willing maid; but all through the conversation, which meant so much to him, he was haunted by a strangely chilling sense of impersonality in her manner. She was as sweet and gentle as the most exacting lover could wish his mistress to be—and yet there was a something wanting for which he was fain to account by the strangeness of her early surroundings and the unconventionality of her bringing up.

Both Sir Godfrey and his now almost inseparable companion, the doctor, gave their approval and their congratulations, but here again Harold was mystified and, in his father's case, somewhat angered to discover the same element of impersonality, the same suspicion of aloofness or mental detachment. Later on he told Grace of this, but she only increased his difficulties by turning those marvellous, all-compelling eyes upon him, each of them with a note of interrogation in it, and saying in a sweetly exasperating tone of unconcerned inquiry—

"I can't say that I have noticed anything uncommon in their manner, but surely one cannot expect men who pass most of their lives in the actual presence of the greatest mysteries of existence to be very deeply interested in this little love-affair of ours?"

As the said "love-affair" happened just then to be quite the most important matter for him within the limits of human concerns he entirely failed to agree with her. He said so both verbally and otherwise, and with that he was fain to be content until the Fates should vouchsafe an explanation, if ever they did, of a mystery in the presence of which he was, mentally speaking, as helpless as a little child.

Chapter II

That evening over their coffee and cigars after dinner Sir Godfrey and Harold were discussing the important events of the day, and when Sir Godfrey had, for

the third or fourth time, expressed his opinion of his great good luck in winning such a lovely girl for his wife, and—which he seemed to think quite as important—making such a close alliance with so distinguished a scholar as Dr Jenner Halkine, Harold, who had not spoken for several minutes, rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room.

"Dad," he said a trifle nervously, "I scarcely know how to put the thing even to you under the circumstances, especially as you and the professor are such great friends, but—well, to be quite frank—there's something about Dr Halkine that I can't understand and therefore, because of that, I suppose I don't like him."

"That, my dear boy," interrupted Sir Godfrey, "is one of the most natural things in the world. We most of us dislike what we don't or can't understand. It is, if I may say so without offence, one of the commonest infirmities in the human mind. A history of that particular phase of human character would also be a history of religious persecution as well as of the almost universal opposition to every new discovery and invention, until its truth and utility have been proved beyond the possibility of doubt,"

"Yes, I quite see what you mean," laughed Harold. And then he went on much more seriously, "I know, of course, that I stand on a very different mental plane to yourself and Dr Halkine. You are both miles above me in intellect and attainments, but this is more of a moral than an intellectual matter."

"My dear Harold, what do you mean?" exclaimed Sir Godfrey, looking up at him in sudden surprise.

"It's rather hard to explain," he replied, "and perhaps the easiest way to do it is this. The other day I went to have a talk with him, a straight one, as I had right to have, about the ancestry and so on of the girl I had made up my mind to marry if I could. I hadn't got the first two sentences out before those infernal eyes of his were looking right through the back of my head, and the whole course of my thoughts and intentions changed in a moment, and—well, we talked about something else that I didn't really care a rap about."

"And yet," replied Sir Godfrey, with a gentle smile, "if I mistake not, Miss Grace herself has eyes very like her uncle's, and because you have got her you think yourself the most fortunate fellow alive. Rather a curious position, isn't it?"

"Yes, dad," he laughed, with a sudden change of manner, "I suppose I am really the luckiest fellow on earth just now. There never was such a girl—"

"No, no, of course not," said Sir Godfrey. "There never is. Every man who is really and honestly in love with the girl he wants to marry thinks that, Harold, and if he didn't he would not be genuinely in love with her, I suppose. Well, go on. What were you going to say?"

"Naturally," he laughed again, "it must be so, but there is one thing I have been wanting to ask you lots of times since Dr Halkinecame—I mean since we got to know him and Grace pretty intimately. Have you ever noticed anything peculiar about his eyes?"

"What on earth do you mean, Harold?" exclaimed Sir Godfrey. "Certainly they are very wonderful eyes; I think the most beautiful pair of eyes I have ever seen in a man's head: but why should you trouble about that? Evidently his sister had the same and Miss Romanes has inherited them from her, and I presume that in your estimation no girl ever had such eyes as Miss Romanes."

"Of course, dad, of course. Why, when you look into them your whole soul seems to—No, I am not going to deviate into sentiment or what, I suppose, you would call lover's nonsense. I am asking about the doctor's eyes. I want to ask you whether, when he has been looking at you, you have ever felt an inclination to do the thing that you don't want to do; even to do something that you didn't feel at the moment to be quite right."

"My dear Harold," replied Sir Godfrey, seriously, "that is really a very grave question to put, because it involves one of the most intricate problems of psychology. I mean, of course, the possible influence of one mind over another convened through the medium of the optic nerve from the brain, the optic nerve being, as you know, the sole communication existing between the eye and the brain with the exception of those governing muscles which move the eyes. In common speech that is called hypnotism which, to those who have studied the subject at all deeply, means either anything or nothing— anything to the vulgar, nothing to the learned. I may say that our own researches, Halkine's and mine, have gone a good deal deeper than that.

"In short," he went on with a note of something like exultation in his voice, "I think I am in a position to say that we have arrived almost at the threshold of the greatest discovery in psychology that has ever been made. A most marvellous discovery, my dear Harold; one which might possibly result in the creation of a power which, in hands capable of using it wisely and well, might possibly solve all the problems which now perplex humanity— problems social, political, moral, all these might—no, I hardly dare trust myself to say what might not be accomplished through the exercise of such a power once under due control."

"Yes," said Harold, leaning forward over the back of his chair, "that is just the answer or something like it to the question that I asked you. You say that this power, whatever it is—and I suppose it really means a sort of reading the thoughts of others and turning them into the direction willed by the reader—means in plain English just this—that the person who really could do that could also command the thoughts of those whom he or she could get into sufficiently close communication."

"Really, Harold," said Sir Godfrey, after a long pull at his cigar, "I must congratulate you upon a very fairly succinct definition of the new power which, according to Halkine's researches and mine, may at any time be called into being. That is exactly what would happen, provided always a complete knowledge of the lines upon which the average mind of mankind works. We have been working very hard at it, but it is, as you can imagine, a problem full of intricacies, only a few of which have so far been unravelled even by the greatest of mental scientists.

"Of course you know that hitherto, among all the thousands of millions of human beings that have been born into this world, everyone, male or female, has been an impenetrable mystery to every other. No matter how intimate their social or friendly relations may have been, still the mystery remains. As Halkine was saying to me only last night after we had been at work for some hours on the subject, every human being resembles a triple-walled fortress. Those other human beings whom he meets casually in the world are those who only knock at the doors of the outer walls, and sometimes they are opened to them. His intimate acquaintances are allowed to pass the first door, but the second remains for ever

shut to them. Through that only his friends, one or two, perhaps, in a whole lifetime, are permitted to pass. But in the third wall there is no door. Within that central citadel the man is for ever alone with himself. It is the eternally inviolate abode of the human soul—the naked soul—that which no eyes of friend or wife or child or lover have ever looked upon; the mystery of mysteries, the problem of which every human being is the insoluble incarnation.

"That is as it has ever been," he went on, rising from his chair and beginning to walk up and down the other side of the room. "For this reason men, yes, and women too, have failed in accomplishing their highest ideals of conquest and empire. But for that Alexander would never have sighed for other worlds to conquer. Caesar would never have fallen under his friend's dagger at the foot of the throne of the world, and Napoleon would have died Emperor of the Earth instead of a prisoner at Saint Helena. You have asked me what I think of Professor Halkine's eyes? I tell you now, Harold, of course in the strictest confidence, that the day may come, not very far hence perhaps, when those eyes may be able to see through that inner wall which no mortal sight has yet penetrated, and then—"

"And then, or rather, before then," said Harold, straightening up and thrusting his hands into his jacket pockets, "with all due deference to you, dad, and in spite of the fact that he is Grace's uncle, I think he ought to be shot in the best interests of humanity. I quite see what you mean, but I don't believe the time has come yet for any man to wield such a tremendous power as that would be. Fancy a man who could see another man's soul as naked as he could see his body! No, I don't think that ever ought to be."

"I quite see what you mean," replied Sir Godfrey, quietly. It is only natural for you to think that way since you have not studied the subject, but still, I may remind you, as I said just now, that Miss Grace's eyes are very like her uncle's. What if they could see, for instance, into your soul, through that third wall of the inmost citadel?"

"Well, as far as I know," he replied, with a laugh, "there is nothing there that she is not welcome to see, and the most interesting that she would see would be the best conception of herself that I have been able to make. Of course, it is very imperfect, but I hope it is something like her."

"Spoken as a true lover should speak, Harold," laughed Sir Godfrey, "and not at all badly put. But she would also see the true reason why you asked me that question about her uncle's eyes—eyes which are so like her own. You take my meaning, of course?"

"I am afraid you are getting a bit too deep for me, dad," replied Harold, taking a fresh cigar out of his case. "Of course I see, or think I see, what you mean, but I must say that, much as I love Grace—and I do not believe any man could love a girl much more than I love her—I am bound to tell you that the reason why I asked you that question was that I'd give a good deal, if I had it, for her to be somebody else's niece, and for this searcher of souls to be safely back in Thibet contemplating the eternities and immensities and letting ordinary human beings alone."

"That, my dear Harold," said Sir Godfrey, "is exactly what a young fellow like yourself, with all the world before him, with his heart full of love and his veins full of good blood, would naturally say. But at the same time you will allow that such

things as these may look very different from the point of view of men like Halkine and myself who have all our passions behind us, and, as you put it, only the eternities and immensities before us.

"Yes, I quite see that, dad," answered Harold, throwing himself back into his arm-chair again, "but for all that I'm afraid I cannot agree with you.

Human nature, even of the best, is not perfect enough yet to be trusted with a power like that. At least, that is my opinion, and, with all due deference to him as Grace's uncle, if Dr Halkine tries any soul-searching experiments on her or myself after we are married I shall take the law into my own hands, whatever the consequences are. I don't like the man and I don't trust him, and I shall take jolly good care to get Grace out of reach of his unholy influence as soon as I have the right to do so."

Chapter III

That evening at the Dower House Dr Halkine had a conversation with Miss Grace on the same subject—the marriage which was now practically agreed upon between herself and Harold Enstone.

"Then you have quite made up your mind, Grace," he said, "and you really think that the marriage is in accordance with your—well, perhaps, I ought not to put it quite so prosaically as that, although you and I are so much accustomed to talk that way."

"Oh, yes, I quite see what you mean, uncle," she laughed. "You mean —do I think it in accordance with the eternal fitness of things, which, of course, includes my own affections and inclinations? Yes," she continued, putting her elbows on the table and her chin between her hands and looking at him, as few others were able to do for any length of time, straight in the eyes. "Yes, you may call it an illustration of the law of selection, of the adaptation of the fittest to the fittest under the special circumstances of the case, suitability to environment and all that kind of scientific stuff if you like. In plain English it comes to this—that Harold loves me, and I —well—yes I think I love him."

The last sentence was not spoken as a girl really in love would have uttered the words. There was just a suspicion of restraint, a little hesitation between the words, which might not have struck an ordinary person in their true meaning, but which Dr Halkine grasped at once.

"Then, Grace," he said, leaning back in his chair and taking a long meditative pull at his pipe, "I may take it, I presume, that you have really made up your mind that you can marry this young man, and, as the story books say, ' live happily ever after'!"

"I think so, uncle," she replied. "At least, of course, so far as one can foresee these things, and yet, you know, it is very curious. He is almost absolutely the opposite to everything that you ever taught me to look upon as —what shall I say?—well, the best in man."

"That is a very singular remark, Grace," said the doctor, sending a cloud of smoke curling up towards the ceiling. "Really, it is one of the most curious remarks that a young lady in your present position could very well make. What am I to understand by it? Surely you are not beginning to see spots on the sun already?"

"Oh, no, no," she laughed; "that isn't a bit what I mean. What I ought to have said is this: You have always trained and educated me to think that the highest qualities of man are the mental and intellectual and that, however good and strong and manly a man might be, he was, after all, only a higher kind of animal unless he possessed exceptional mental and intellectual powers. Now, of course, as you know, Harold is everything that a man, as man, ought to be—at anyrate, I think so. But although he is clever and well-educated as Society reckons education, it would be absurd to say that he could compare for a moment with either Sir Godfrey or yourself."

"Or yourself, for instance," added the doctor, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "That, Grace, I think, is a matter which you really ought to think seriously about," he went on, keeping his eyes upon hers and speaking in a tone which was familiar enough to her, but which it would not have done Harold Enstone very much good to hear. "You know that you are not merely an ordinary girl who can make a brilliant marriage like this just because you are beautiful, well educated and fairly well off. Your education has been very different to that of the ordinary society beauty and—to put it plainly—it has given you powers which they have, possibly, never dreamed of."

"Is that really so, uncle?" she said, getting up from her seat and beginning to walk up and down the room with her hands clasped behind her. Frankly, I hope it isn't so, because since, well, since that afternoon in the park when Harold told me that he loved me, and wanted me, and I looked at him—"

"Yes, you looked at him," said the doctor, "and what then? You looked him straight in the eyes, I suppose, and then?"

"That," she laughed, with a quick flush, "is not a question that you ought to ask, and I certainly sha'n't answer it. What I mean is this," she went on more seriously. "Ever since then I have had an uncomfortable haunting suspicion that I have got some sort of power, as you say, that I use it unconsciously to—well, make him love me."

"My dear Grace," he laughed, "if that is all you are going to say you need not have taken the trouble. It is merely the power that every beautiful girl has to make a man love her, provided always that she exercises it over the right man. There is no mystery about that, except the eternal mystery of what people call love, which has never been explained, and which no sensible person wants to explain."

"Yes," she replied, "but there is something else. You may be able to explain it, but I can't—something that is a complete mystery to me."

"Ah!" he said, "well now, perhaps, we are coming to the most interesting part of the problem. Of course, I will solve the puzzle for you if I can, but what is it?"

"It is a very difficult thing," she replied, flushing again, "for a girl to explain to any man if he is her uncle, even such an uncle as you have been to me—in fact the only sort of father I ever knew."

"Yes," he said so gravely that his tone rather surprised her. "Yes, I quite understand that is difficult; it must be, and by way of helping you out a little I should suggest that you should detach yourself entirely from the personal question and put it into the ordinary language that we are accustomed to talk in."

"I quite see what you mean," she said, pulling herself up straight and giving her head a quick little shake as though she would shake a certain set of thoughts out of it. "It is this way: When a girl is really in love with, a man, I mean in love with him in the ordinary, commonplace sense of the term, she is supposed to be in love with him always—not only when she is awake, but when she is crossing the borderland which lies between the world of realities and the world of dreams. In other words, she thinks of him when she is going to sleep.

"Now, if that is really true love, I am afraid I am not properly in love with Harold. I think of him sometimes in an impersonal sort of way after we have been for a long walk, or riding together, or after we have been dining at the Manor. But after that he fades completely out of my existence, and when I meet him again the next day I have a curious sense of making a new acquaintance. Yet the moment that we are alone together everything is just as it was the day before. I mean that we are in every way just as much lovers as ever. Then, when we are apart it seems to go again, and I am, mentally speaking, unattached until I meet him again. Now that doesn't seem right, does it?"

"That is very easily understood, my dear Grace," replied the doctor, lighting a fresh pipe. "You have been educated quite differently to other girls. Thanks to my selfishness and your devotion you have lived a life of comparative isolation from Society. You have travelled with me through the wild outlands of the earth, and what other girls have learned from books you have learned in the presence of Mother Nature herself. On the other hand, you know something of social conventions, partly from books and partly from experience, and you have also learned how much or how little worth they are. On the whole, then, I think it is not very surprising that you should find yourself falling in love in a somewhat unconventional way. Then, you know, there is another thing which I don't think you have quite grasped. The average girl naturally falls in love in the average way, as a rule, with the average man."

"Do you mean Harold?" she interrupted, stopping in front of him.

"Oh, no," he replied, looking up at her with a laugh. "Harold Enstone is by no means an ordinary man; he is like yourself. He has taken the best of his education where you got it. Like you, he has seen ' the eternities and the immensities,' face to face. He has learned to understand that eloquent silence which is the speech of Nature. To him, as to you, towns and cities are simply overcrowded human hives. He, like you, would be lonelier in a London theatre or a society leader's At Home than he would be on an island in the Pacific or in the uplands of Thibet, although, of course, he has not so far attained to the higher knowledge that you have."

"Ah, yes," she stopped again. "What is that higher knowledge? Perhaps that may be the secret of this strange love of mine—the love which really only seems to live when I am near him. What is it?"

"Shall I tell you the Great Secret, Grace?" he said, rising and beginning to walk up and down the room. "But no, perhaps, I had better not, for, after all, you might not like to know it."

"After that, of course, you will have to tell it me, uncle," she laughed, not altogether mirthfully. "You said that in the very way to make me want to know. Now, what is it? If you don't tell me I shall go to bed miserable and probably get up with the resolve to break off everything with Harold, because I shall think that I only love him in a philosophical and therefore unnatural sort of way."

"That, my dear Grace," he replied, "would be a very great misfortune both for you and for him. It really would, because you are so perfectly suited to each other in every way. Therefore I will tell you. But remember," he went on, putting his hands on her shoulders and fixing her eyes with that strange, magnetic glance which Harold Enstone disliked so much, "remember that what I am going to tell you now is for you alone. It must never be repeated, not even to him when you are married. You have, as I have said, the same power over him that every beautiful woman has over the man who believes her to be the most adorable being in the world; but you have something else, something that you have inherited from your mother. You have the power of keeping his love, of making him mentally your abject slave, and yet, at the same time, detaching yourself absolutely from him; of looking upon him as something apart from your own existence, and, therefore, you can do as you will with his love. You can chain him in fetters of silk and gold, and yet remain entirely free yourself. That is, of course, if you choose to do so, and," he went on, speaking very slowly, drawing her a little nearer to him, "you—will—choose —Grace—to—do—that—whenever—it —may—be—necessary. You will marry him, and I think —yes—I believe—you will be happy with him; but never forget in the midst of all your happiness that you retain that power in reserve, and if circumstances should ever demand it, you must and shall remember to use it."

"But why?" she said, looking back at him and feeling as though it were impossible to take her eyes away from his, "why should I have such a power as that and why should I ever want to use it with him?"

"That," he replied, still keeping her gaze enchained, "is a question which only the Fates can answer. I have only told you what I know. But remember this, too—that having told you that you possess this power I desire you to use it when and how it may be necessary to do so. Now you had better go to bed—but remember—remember!"

He stooped forward and kissed her on the forehead. He stroked her hair back with his hand and then drew it down quickly over her eyes. They closed, and then, as he brushed her hair back again, they opened. She turned away and walked mechanically towards the door. He opened it for her, and as she passed slowly upstairs he went down to the kitchen and sent the girl who acted as her maid up to her.

When he got back to the dining-room he lit another pipe, threw himself back into the big arm-chair and said to himself between the puffs,—

"Well, looked at from the lower plane, I suppose ' it would not be considered an entirely legal, or even a strictly honourable transaction, but still there are other things to consider, and, after all, the interests of science are higher than any individual human interests. It can be done, and there is no reason why she should not help me to do it. She will be happy and so will he, for a time, perhaps for life, if they will only do what they are wanted to do.

"As for Sir Godfrey, he is a very good fellow, a learned man in his own sphere, but an ignoramus from our point of view, and happily or unhappily, again according to the point of view, he is afflicted with that very convenient disease—divided personality. Really it would seem as though the Fates had worked to bring me into contact with such a man, a man who, properly managed, could make me a potential master of two or three millions. What would be impossible then? Nothing except the reversal of the elementary rules of Nature, and even those might be controlled some day.

"Yes, it is just a matter of money. Strange that we who have done so much and solved so many secrets should still, by some queer contradiction in the order of things, be forced to depend upon the money that may have been made by the most sordid trading or the commonest or meanest swindling. Yet we must have it, and, therefore, if only my first experiment in divided personality is a success, I will have it."

Chapter IV

The next day the engagement between Grace and Harold was a formally accomplished fact, and the occasion was duly celebrated by a dinner at the Manor, to which all the best people in the countryside were invited.

There was, naturally, a considerable amount of heart-searching and disappointment, which in some cases amounted to disgust, among the many marriageable daughters and their mothers at seeing the greatest prize in the Northern matrimonial market carried off so swiftly by the daughter of a stranger who, however distinguished he might be in the world of science, was, nevertheless, in their estimation, far below county family rank. Still, there was no denying the fact that the beauty and indescribable charm of Grace Romanes placed her far above any of the other young ladies who might have aspired to be the future mistress of Enstone Manor and the millions which Sir Godfrey's heir would inherit.

Some of these young ladies and their mammas—especially the mammas —had tried to dislike her, and failed. Others, rashly daring, had even tried to snub her, and these had failed more disastrously still. Wherefore, the County, as represented by its territorial and financial aristocracy, made up its mind to accept the inevitable and to look as pleased as it could.

As was only natural under the circumstances the dinner was a great success. Sir Godfrey for once came out of his shell. He ceased to be the retired student who passed most of his life among books, and revealed another character which Society had scarcely suspected—that of the universal student, the widely-travelled man who, so to speak, had been everywhere and done everything.

Harold played a modest but excellent second to him. Grace was delightful and charmed even those who would have given most to be in her place. As for the professor he, as Harold put it afterwards, "just let himself go," and simply dazzled even the keen Northern intellects by the brilliancy of his conversation. In fact,

when the guests thought over the evening's doings the next morning it seemed to many of them as though they had been passing some hours on the borderland of a strange world.

One of the guests at the dinner was a Mr Bonham Denyer, a well-built and decidedly good-looking man, about forty to forty-five, clean-shaven, square-headed and slightly hawk-nosed, with steel blue eyes, which were rather too small for his face, and well-cut lips, which would have been all the better for being a trifle fuller.

He was staying at the Dower House with the professor who had introduced him to Sir Godfrey as an old friend and college chum, now the head of the London firm of solicitors which managed all his legal and financial business for him during his travels. Mr Bonham Denyer was also in a sense the legal guardian and trustee of Miss Grace, as her mother had left him the management of her little fortune.

Such an introduction, of course, ensured a hearty welcome from Sir Godfrey and Harold, and as the lawyer's manner was quite irreproachable and his conversation interesting beyond the common, the acquaintance had quickly ripened into something like intimacy.

When they had taken leave of their host the little party from the Dower House went home, and when Grace had said good-night and gone to bed, after receiving another of those strange caresses from her uncle, the two men went into the professor's den, and although it was getting well on towards midnight, Halkine got out the spirit stand, a syphon of soda and a box of cigars, and they settled themselves in two big arm-chairs on either side of the fireplace as though they were at the beginning rather than the end of a country evening.

"Help yourself, my dear Denyer. There is whisky and brandy, and I think you will find the tobacco as good as usual."

"Thanks," replied the lawyer, mixing himself a whisky-and- soda and picking out a nice long, well-moulded, yellow-speckled cigar.

The professor did the same, and when Mr Denyer had lit his cigar he sat down and leaned back, and after a few meditative puffs looked across at his host and said slowly,—

"Then, I presume, Halkine, from what you said this afternoon, that you have absolutely made up your mind to carry this thing through?"

"Absolutely," he replied, taking a sip of his whisky-and-soda. Don't you see, Denyer, that it is literally the chance of a lifetime for a man like myself. Here is everything ready to our hands; a man worth millions, two or three certain, perhaps more; an adopted son and heir, who has been obliging enough to fall madly in love with Grace—and Grace, well—quite prepared to believe that she's in love with him and so to marry him."

"By the way," interrupted Mr Denyer,?' I presume you have no intention of indicating the true nature of your relationship with Miss Grace either before or after marriage?"

"Oh, no," replied the professor, quickly. "There isn't the slightest necessity for that. Besides, look at the curious impression it would create and the difficulty of explaining matters to her. Oh, no, much better as it is. Why do you ask?"

"Only because it just struck me that such relationships are traceable, you know, and if there were any hitch in our contemplated proceedings, and you

incurred the hostility of this young millionaire—as he will be in due course—and he set himself to find things out, it would be still more difficult then. However, if you have made up your mind there's an end of it." Then, after a little pause, he went on more slowly, "You want my help now. To put it plainly—you have .got to have it and my silence as well, and I have come down to give it you. What are the conditions?"

"Will five thousand paid out of the estate, as soon as I get control of it, be enough?"

"No!" said the other, decidedly. "My figure is ten thousand; but if you like you may pay in two instalments. One as soon as you get control of the property and the second, say, in twelve months' time, provided that we are equally successful in getting the young heir out of the way as well. After all, he is only an alien and a usurper. I don't think we need consider him very much. And as for your niece, it will not be difficult to console her for her loss."

"What an infernal scoundrel you are, Denyer!" said the professor, quietly, almost contemplatively. "When I commit a crime—as, of course, Society would call this operation—I do it from purely unselfish motives. Personally, I don't profit to the extent of a sovereign. I do it simply in the interests of science, and because those interests, as you know, are absolutely supreme, and because they cannot be served in any other way. But you! You do it just for money—mere money! Have you ever really thought what a contemptible thing it is to commit crime for money?"

"My dear fellow," laughed the lawyer, without the slightest appearance of offence, "you really must pardon me if I decline to follow you into any of your metaphysical tangles. To be quite frank with you—what your science is to you money is to me. I am quite prepared to make it honestly—as Society would put it—and to a certain extent I do. At the same time, when I get a good opportunity of making it, well—we will say, otherwise —I don't see why I should not avail myself of it. Wherefore the question for me here is not your motives, nor has it anything to do with the interests of science. It is just whether or not you are prepared to come to my terms!"

"It is a great deal of money and it might be put to very much better uses," said the professor, with a sigh of perfectly genuine regret. For, strange as it may seem, what he had just said was the absolute truth. "Still, there will be plenty left, so I don't think we need quarrel over that. You can make out your bond, or whatever you may call it, and I will sign it in the morning. Then, I think, we must get to work."

"Quite so," said Mr Denyer. "I entirely agree with you; but before finally committing myself to what may, after all, be a rather risky piece of work, I think you ought, in common justice, to tell me exactly what the said work is going to be. I don't suppose you have any objection to do that?"

"Not the slightest, my dear Denyer," replied the professor. "On the contrary, I think it will be distinctly advantageous that you should know the circumstances fully."

He took a sip of his whisky-and-soda, one or two pulls at his cigar and went on—leaning back in his chair and fixing his eyes upon the lawyer's,—

"Without going into any tedious technicalities, which might need a good deal of explanation, I may as well get to the point at once and tell you a fact which I think you will take without question, on the strength of such reputation as I have.

"I have discovered that Sir Godfrey is suffering, quite unknown to himself or his ordinary medical adviser, from one of the most obscure diseases that is known either to medical or mental science. Briefly, it may be described as divided personality. By that I mean a form of almost unknown insanity, the principal symptom of which is the possibility of dividing, by certain known means, the personality of the subject into two entirely different and even absolutely antagonistic parts.

"I need hardly tell you that in every human being there are what are called in ordinary language good and evil qualities. Instincts which make for what our moralists call the right and others for what they call their wrong."

"Yes, yes, I follow you so far," said the lawyer, taking another sip at his glass. "No one ought to know that better than a man of my trade. But, all the same, you are getting me a bit out of my depth. Are you going to tell me that it is possible to, as it were, divide a man into two and set the good against the bad and vice versa? A sort of Jekyll and Hyde business."

"Oh, dear no!" said the professor. "It is a much more serious business than that. When a person who understands this particular disease meets with a subject afflicted with it, it is quite possible for him to so treat the malady that, without any black magic of the Jekyll and Hyde sort, he can render either side of the subject's mental being—the good or the bad, as necessity may demand—totally unconscious of the doings of the other half. You follow me, I hope?"

"Follow you!" exclaimed Denyer, getting up from his. chair and putting his back to the fireplace. "I should think I do! Just now you called me an infernal scoundrel. I'll be hanged if I know what to call you. I know that I am not everything that a moralist might wish me to be; but I tell you candidly that there is something so diabolical about that idea that—well, I must say that I don't quite like it. Of course, I presume that I am to gather from what you said that somehow, by these infernal arts of yours, you have discovered that Sir Godfrey is suffering from such a disease as this. You are going to divide his nature into two and make the evil work against the good for your own ends, and—yes, I'll confess, for my own as well. And then—why, good Lord! you might as well make a man his own murderer! And there you sit talking about all these atrocious possibilities as quietly as I should hear the confession of a criminal whose defence I had to get up! To be quite frank, Halkine, there is something uncanny about this that I don't altogether like. Now, am I right in what I have just said?"

"Perfectly right, my dear fellow," said the professor, laughing and turning his luminous eyes up at him. "You have, as I might say in medical language, diagnosed the case to perfection. I mean Sir Godfrey^ case. I have studied him now closely for some months and am perfectly certain of my own diagnosis. With just a little assistance I will, mentally and morally speaking, cut that man in two. One half shall go to sleep and forget. The other half, which to the world will look just like the whole man, will do exactly as I want it to do. In fact," he went on, his voice rising slightly, "I could make him—I mean that half of him—do anything. I could make it degrade what the world knows of Sir Godfrey Enstone, county

magnate and millionaire, to the lowest level of the criminal you ever helped or prosecuted. I could drive him—yes, even to murder."

"Or self-murder which, under the circumstances, might perhaps be more convenient," said the lawyer, leaning back in his chair again and putting the tips of his fingers together. "Is that what you are driving at, Halkine?"

"It might be necessary," said the professor, "and it would certainly be possible."

"Would it really?" said Denyer, with something very like a sneer in his voice. "Well, you called me a scoundrel just now, but I'm afraid I cannot retort that it is a case of arcades ambo. I don't know what crimes you have committed already; but if all you have said is true—and from what I know of you I haven't the slightest doubt that it is—you are not a criminal. You are something more. Something that the language of criminology hasn't any word to describe. You can remain apparently 1 innocent yourself while you are making others criminals and self-murderers. Well, as I said, the vocabulary of crime hasn't any word that would fit you."

"I quite agree with you," said the professor, smiling at the very obvious expression of fear which had come over his accomplice's face while he was speaking. But you see, my dear fellow, although it is rather difficult for me to explain it to you, in the higher realms of science these things don't count. Science, like Nature, considers ends, not means, and where those ends are to be attained there is neither right nor wrong. When Mother Earth relieved herself the other day of an internal strain by the eruption of Martinique, she didn't consider the trifle of the thirty or forty thousand lives which were lost in the process. Her end was simply the restoration of the balance of volcanic force. The people died because they happened to be there—that was all. She would have done just the same in an unpeopled desert, and since Science is the handmaid, the interpreter of Nature, her methods must be the same.

"In the present case I, as a servant of Science, must act upon the same principles, and Sir Godfrey Enstone happens to be in such an unfortunate position as the inhabitants of Martinique were. Science—that is to say, Nature—will take her course."

"And that, Halkine," said Denyer, helping himself to another whisky-and- soda, "means in plain English that you are going to use this infernal science, or whatever it is, of yours, to make this unfortunate man 'commit a fraud, as it were, on himself and his adopted son. And further, if necessary, make him—well, dispose of himself, when he becomes superfluous. And that you call science!"

"Precisely," said the professor, still in the same impassive tone. "While he is necessary he will remain; when he is unnecessary he will probably disappear. But you needn't trouble yourself about that. I have asked him to come and have a little bachelor supper with us tomorrow night, and then you shall watch the beginning of the comedy which I propose to play. Of course, if it happens to end in tragedy, that will only be because it is necessary."

"Halkine," said the other, straightening himself up, "we have been friends for a long time. I am about as dishonest and unscrupulous as disappointment and necessity ever made a man; but you—you are not dishonest, because you are not human enough; you are not unscrupulous, because you haven't any scruples. I do

not know what you are. In fact, I am not altogether sure that you are entirely human."

"I am not entirely sure of that myself," replied the professor, with another smile. "And now, I think, as they say in the East, we will just take one last peg and go to bed."

Chapter V

The next morning among her letters Grace found an invitation from her aunt, the professor's elder sister, to go to London and do some shopping. When Grace's engagement to Harold had been formally announced this lady had been asked by her brother to come and keep house for him until the wedding was over. This fell in exactly with the arrangements of the party, all the more so because Harold was going up to town to look after some shooting gear, and so they went up together by the mid-day train. Grace was to stop a week in town and then bring her aunt back to take up her new position at the Dower House.

The night of the supper passed off very pleasantly, and no one who could have seen the three men smoking and chatting in such seemingly cordial friendship over their wine could have guessed that they were anything but the closest friends. Certainly the last possible supposition would have been that the perpetration of one of the most diabolically subtle crimes the mind of man had ever devised would have begun before Professor Halkine's guest left the house.

Although Sir Godfrey did not, of course, see any sinister meaning in the circumstances, he might have noticed that is hosts smoked pipes while he had a box of peculiarly fragrant cigars at his elbow, and further, that Halkine had devoted a small decanter of very delicately flavoured wine, something like Tokay, to his special use, saying that it was the last drop he had left for the present. He and Mr Denyer contented themselves with ordinary port.

This, of course, Sir Godfrey took good-naturedly as a friendly compliment, little dreaming what the consequences of his acceptance were to be.

Towards eleven o'clock he began to experience a curious exhilaration of mind and an equally singular increase of physical vigour. He felt as though a weight of twenty years had dropped from his shoulders. The elasticity of youth seemed to be returning to his limbs, and his thoughts, quickly thronging as they were, appeared to be, even for him—clear and logical thinker as he was—most unwontedly clear-cut and luminous.

"This is certainly most wonderful wine of yours, Halkine, I must say," he said, as he responded to an invitation to fill his glass again. "What did you say it was? Oh, yes, some rare Bohemian vintage. Well, it is very kind of you to let me have your last bottle. Upon my word, it almost makes one believe in the possibility of the elixir of life. Hanged if I don't feel twenty years younger! I believe I could climb the Golden Pinnacle again, and it is over fifteen years since I was fit to do that. And these cigars too, deliciously fragrant they are."

"Yes," replied the professor. "It is, as you say, quite a wonderful wine. I am very sorry that I have come to the end of it. But I am told there will be another lot ready for export in a few months; so you needn't have any scruples about finishing that I assure you there isn't a headache in a dozen of it. It is very remarkable how it really does make one feel a lot younger. I suppose it must have some curious physical effect on the brain centres. It's a very pleasant delusion, at anyrate. I have drunk it for years and never found any evil results, so that, after all, it is an innocent enjoyment, especially for people who have led lives like ours and are getting into the arm-chair stage of travel. For my own part, I know of no greater enjoyment—except perhaps the tracking down of one of Nature's secrets—than to go on my wanderings again in an arm- chair with a pipe and a sketch, map. For instance, I spent the half of last night among the mountains of the Eastern Frontier of Thibet. That ground is pretty well known to you, isn't it, Sir Godfrey?"

"Yes, I think I may say it is," he replied. "I had one or two little adventures there which form quite interesting memories."

"Well, as it is comparatively early yet, Sir Godfrey," said Mr Denyer, in a gentle, persuasive tone, "and as I, a hopeless stay-at- home, don't often find myself in company with such great travellers as you are, won't you share some of those pleasant memories with us? I am sure you must have had some very strange experiences in all your wanderings."

Mr Denyer was, as he had confessed, neither a moral nor an honest man, but he had a sort of moral veneer which served him as well with the world as the real article would have done, and he was distinctly shocked at the startling result of this request.

Sir Godfrey's thin, parchment-skin cheeks were flushed as they had not been for years, and his usually mild and meditative eyes were shining with a hard, steely light, like the eyes of a man who is looking death very nearly in the face. Before he was half way through with the telling of his first recollection the startled lawyer recognised that Halkine had only told him the literal truth during his exposition of the strange disease of personality from which he said Sir Godfrey was suffering.

Whatever drug the professor had put into the wine and the cigars it had certainly had the effect of dividing Sir Godfrey's nature with amazing sharpness. The courtly gentleman and the refined scholar had disappeared, and the adventurous wanderer, ruthless and unscrupulous in his fight for life and fortune against overwhelming odds, had taken his place. His very speech had changed, and he used phrases of picturesque coarseness and unrestrained ribaldry which sounded strange indeed from the lips of the polished master of Enstone Manor.

From adventures of one kind he gradually descended to others of the least creditable sort. In short, all the worst that he had done in his life came out, told with a frank gusto of brutal satisfaction which completely shocked the superficially respectable lawyer.

It was, indeed, such a miracle as Mephistopheles himself might have delighted to work, and while he was revelling in the description of episodes upon which he had often looked back with shame and disgust, he drank glass after glass of the poisoned wine and smoked the seductively fragrant cigars incessantly.

And yet, strange to say, he showed no signs of ordinary intoxication. His speech was as clear and his sentences as logically framed and consecutive as they had ever been. In short, the only effect that the deadly draughts had taken had been to make him, as it were, morally instead of physically drunk —to paralyse the whole of the better part of his nature and to excite all that was base and common in it to intense activity.

It was nearly two o'clock before the party broke up, and when Sir Godfrey rose to go the professor went out into the hall with him to help him on with his coat. In doing so he committed one of those apparently slight mistakes which have so often wrecked the careers of the greatest of criminals.

There were still about a dozen cigars in the box and two or three glasses of wine in the decanter. The moment that they were out of the room Mr Denyer took a round two-ounce bottle out of his pocket, uncorked it and filled it with wine. He corked it and put it back, and helped himself to a couple of cigars.

"There is no telling when these might come in useful," he said to himself, as he sat down again. "It is quite on the cards that friend Halkine may overstep the law practically as well as theoretically. In that case these would furnish very valuable evidence, especially if he is inclined to play the fool about that money, and when a fellow goes mad, as he is on science and all that sort of thing, there is no telling what he will do."

When Sir Godfrey came in with his overcoat on to say good-night the professor took the remaining cigars in a handful out of the box and said, —

"Now, Sir Godfrey, there's just another glass of wine for a night-cap. I should not advise you to mix anything with it or I would offer you a brandy-and- soda. You might as well put these weeds in your pocket. I have got plenty more."

"My dear fellow, it would be absolute sacrilege to put anything down on the top of such nectar as this," replied Sir Godfrey, taking the full glass which Halkine offered him. "No, you can depend upon that. But you say you are going to be good enough to walk up to the Manor with me? Well, if you like to turn in I'll have the pleasure of watching you have a brandy- and-soda. Meanwhile, I must thank you for an almighty pleasant evening. By Gad! it is just like being back in the old times. Most extraordinary!

"All the same I am not sorry that Master Harold wasn't here to hear some of these queer yarns I have been telling you. I don't think they would have done his young morals much good. Still, things were different in those old days, weren't they? I expect you could spin us a pretty tough-laid yarn yourself, if you tried. Well, well, when you get in some more of that wine I'll get you to let me have some of it, if you can. Good- night, Denyer. Hope you won't dream about too many of those traveller's tales I have been telling you. It wouldn't be too good for a respectable member of Society and father of a family like yourself. Well, so-long."

As soon as they got outside into the field-path which led from the Dower House to the Manor, the professor's manner altered entirely. He ceased to be the genial, respectable host and became, as it were, the mental director, it might almost be said the tyrant, of the man whom his science had for the time being placed completely at his mercy. He began to talk in a masterful tone, which was in strange contrast with the quiet, refined voice that he used in his daily intercourse with the world, and he confined himself strictly to one subject—business.

Sir Godfrey appeared to take it all quite as a matter of course. He agreed witli everything he said, and did not take the slightest notice of his singularly changed manner. \

When they reached the side door of the Manor, which admitted directly to the rooms which Sir Godfrey reserved for himself, he opened it with his latch-key, turned on the electric light, and the professor following him to the library, he turned and said,—

"Have a drink, Halkine; there is the spirit stand, and you will find some soda and a cigarette. I shall follow your advice. That wine of yours has made me feel so good that I guess I won't spoil the sensation with anything else."

Halkine helped himself very sparingly. If ever he wanted a clear head and steady hand he wanted them now, for this was the crucial hour of the experiment which was to prove whether his theory as to the disease of personality was correct or not.

He sat down opposite his host at the corner of the table and went on talking about his niece's marriage and arrangements for settlements and so on, and gradually and subtly led up to the question of Sir Godfrey's will.

"Oh, that will be all right!" he interrupted, almost roughly. "I made the will some years ago. The estate is unentailed. I have left everything to Harold, with the exception of a few legacies to servants, and one or two bequests to scientific research. So you see, Grace will be quite safe.

Don't you worry about the settlements, old man; they'll be all right."

"No, I don't propose to," said Halkine, still in his cold, masterful tone, keeping his eyes fixed on Sir Godfrey's; "but I do not think I could accept such a will on her behalf as entirely satisfactory. You see I am her guardian. She owes practically everything to me, and although I don't suppose such a thing probable for a moment, still, you know, it is possible for man and wife, however much they may love each other to begin with, to come to loggerheads afterwards. So I propose that you shall execute another will in place of that one."

"But why on earth should I do that?" exclaimed Sir Godfrey, in a curiously wavering tone, trying in vain to move his gaze from those pitiless and compelling eyes.

"Because I think it the right and proper thing to do, Sir Godfrey," was the reply. "Just wait a moment. I'll show you what I mean."

He got up, fetched the blotting-pad and a sheet of foolscap from the writing-table. He put these on to the other table by Sir Godfrey's right hand, and then he did a very extraordinary thing, which, strangely enough, did not strike Sir Godfrey as being at all out of the common.

There was a light Japanese folding-screen standing beside the door. He brought this up to the table and stood it up flat against the edge in such a way that one of the leaves stood between Sir Godfrey's body and his right arm as he sat at the corner of the table. In other words, it was so placed that, while Sir Godfrey's right hand and arm were lying on the table, he was not able to see them without looking round the edge of the screen.

Halkine then went round behind his chair, placed the paper and the blotting-pad in position, took out his stylographic pen, uncovered the nib and put it into Sir Godfrey's hand. Then he went round the screen again and sat down in front of him, and as soon as he got his eyes enchained again, he began,—

"Now, Sir Godfrey, on the subject of this will. What I venture to propose that you should do is this: You and I, although we have not known each other personally for very long, are still old friends and fellow-workers in the most sacred of all causes. Therefore, I think you can trust me, if you can trust anyone."

"Oh, yes," replied Sir Godfrey, in the same wavering voice. There is no question to that, of course. Now, what is it that you propose?"

"Simply this," he replied slowly and very distinctly: "That you should, as soon as convenient, draw up instructions to your solicitors to prepare a new will."

He paused for a few moments and the hand behind the screen began to write.

When the faint scratching ceased he went on again—

"And I propose by this will you should leave your real and personal estate to your adopted son, Harold Enstone, on condition of his marrying Miss Grace Romanes."

Here the scratching began again, keeping pace with Halkine's slowly- spoken words.

„And that you appoint your friend, Jenner Halkine, as sole trustee of your whole estate, with power to carry out your wishes, as indicated in writing to me, for the furtherance of research in those special branches of science to which you have devoted so many years of your life.

"These instructions are in case your adopted son, Harold Dacre Enstone, fails, from any cause under his own control, to marry Miss Grace Romanes, or shall be prevented from doing so by death, accident or disease.

"In that case the sum of one thousand pounds shall be paid annually to the trustee for life, and the residue of the estate shall be applied at his discretion to the purposes of study, education and original researches in such branches of science as he may select in accordance with the aforementioned instructions.

"In the event of the marriage between Harold Dacre Enstone and Grace Romanes taking place, the money conveyed to her by the marriage settlements shall be at her absolute disposal.

"Harold Dacre Enstone shall enjoy the revenues of the estate to the extent of twenty thousand pounds a year, with possession of two houses in London and the country, grouse—moors, salmon-streams, yachts, etc. The balance of the revenues of the estate shall be held in trust by Dr Jenner Halkine and used at his discretion in accordance with the testator's instructions. He shall have power to appoint two other trustees of approved eminence in the scientific world to cooperate with him, and the legal adviser to such trustee or trustees shall be Bonham Denyer, Esquire, of Middle Temple Lane, London. You will, of course, sign these instructions and have them put in proper form by him and your own solicitor as soon as possible."

The pen went on scratching regularly until the slowly-spoken speech came to an end. Then there were a few more rapid, decisive scratchings and it stopped.

Halkine got up and went round the screen, took the pen out of Sir Godfrey's hand and looked over the paper.

The unconscious hand had written down the instructions word for word in the small handwriting so familiar to all Sir Godfrey's many correspondents, and at the end was his signature, as usual, in bold contrast to the writing. He put the paper and blotting-pad aside, removed the screen, and said in a totally altered voice, as though nothing extraordinary had taken place,—

"And now, Sir Godfrey, we have had a very interesting chat, but I really think it is about time for bed. I will look round later on in the morning, when we have both had a sleep, and finish our little discussion."

They shook hands and Sir Godfrey went out to open the side door. Halkine folded up the paper, put it into his pocket and followed him.

Chapter VI

Later on the same morning the professor and Mr Denyer met at breakfast, and almost the first thing that the latter said, after the servant had closed the door, was,—

"Well, and how did the great experiment go off?"

"Perfectly," replied Halkine. "Look at that." He took the folded sheet of paper out of the breast-pocket of his coat and went on,—

"I suppose it is the only example on record of a man's signature forged by himself. Sir Godfrey Enstone wrote that in the small hours of this morning and signed it without having the slightest nbtion of what it was and what he was doing, which I think is a fairly conclusive proof that my theory as to the disease of divided personality is pretty correct."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Mr Denyer, with something like a gasp in his voice, after he had run his eye over the written page. "Of course, there is not the slightest doubt about it being Sir Godfrey Enstone's writing and his signature. Every handwriting expert in England would swear to it, and yet you mean to tell me that he did that without knowing! Look here, Halkine, I don't want to flatter you, but you are beginning to make me a little bit afraid of you. "Here, last night, you gave our unfortunate friend some diabolical drug which literally turned his character inside out. After that you go away with him and get him to write instructions for a will which, without wishing to be offensive in any way, I may say he would never have made if he had been in his proper senses. No, no. I have been, I admit, associated with certain transactions which would not quite stand the clear light that beats on the Bench—and the Dock, but, really, this is getting a little bit too much out of the way. It is a complication of crime which, I am bound to confess, I can hardly follow. For instance, how do I know that some fine day you may not find it in your head to work this infernal magic, or whatever it is, on me? The fact is, to put it quite plainly, it seems to me that you wield rather more power than it is safe for any one man to have in his hands," he continued, unconsciously repeating exactly what Harold Enstone had said to Sir Godfrey some few days before.

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, smiling as he chipped his egg with scrupulous deliberation, "I think you are disquieting yourself in vain. There is not the slightest danger of that so long as you and I pull together, as we have agreed to do. I, like yourself, have occasionally found it necessary to do things which are not exactly in accord with the conventions of Society. But one thing I have never done, and that is—betray the trust of anyone who has worked with me.

"Of course, if you were to betray me," he went on, as he took the top of the egg off, "it might be necessary to revise the position; but I am sure there cannot be the slightest danger of that."

Mr Denyer looked up and caught a flash of the luminous eyes, which might have meant anything from a friendly warning to a threat. His eyelids dropped, and he went on with his own egg.

"Of course," he said, shifting a little bit in his seat, "there cannot be any question of that; only, you see, Halkine, I have never been brought into connection with miracles of this sort before, and upon my word, it does seem a miracle. In fact, if anybody else had shown me that, under the circumstances, I should have said that it was a forgery."

"Skilful knights of the pen, my dear Denyer," replied Halkine, as he set his coffee cup down, "can, as you know, imitate a man's signature with almost faultless accuracy; but no forger that .ever lived could have written this letter in Sir Godfrey's usual handwriting and also signed it with any chance of deceiving anyone who had ever seen a letter of his.

"Now, we are going to lunch with him today, and I want you to remember that the whole of this business was conducted over here last night, and that I went with Sir Godfrey in order to help him carry out his intentions while the ideas were still clear in his mind."

"Yes, I understand," said the lawyer. "It is all wonderfully reasoned out, I must say. Where do you mean to stop, Halkine?"

"There can be no end," replied the professor, almost solemnly, "for those who honestly devote themselves to the service of Science."

"He is mad," was Mr Denyer's mental comment. But still he Jwent to lunch at the Manor and played his part admirably.

He noticed that Sir Godfrey appeared a little astonished when Halkine brought up the subject of the instructions of the will, and asked him to read over again what he had written the night before. After a few moments' conversation, during which he vainly tried to take his gaze away from the eyes of the man who was now his master, his doubts seemed to vanish, and he took the paper of instructions and sat down there and then at his writing-table and wrote to his solicitor at Alnwick, asking him to prepare the will in accordance with the instructions, and, when it was ready, to come over and dine and sleep at the Manor so that it might be duly signed and executed.

Mr Arthur Barthgate, head of Barthgate Bros. & Son, one of the oldest established firms of family solicitors in the North Country, marvelled not a little when he read the said instructions. Still, there was no doubt that they had been written and signed by Sir Godfrey's own hand, and men who had lived lives like his, and made their money in despite of all obstacles, were prone to make curious wills. After all, too, the provision for his adopted son was not only just but generous. All that troubled him was the trusteeship of Dr Jenner Halkine. Of course, he knew him by reputation as one of the most distinguished scientists in Europe, and he knew of his peculiar intimacy with Sir Godfrey; but that did not make his vague suspicions any the less uncomfortable.

"I should like to know something more about that fellow," he said to himself, after he had given his confidential clerk instructions to draw up the will. "He is

enormously clever, by all accounts; but I don't like clever people being made trustees in a will which involves big estates and money running to nearly three millions. These geniuses ought never to have the control of money. They almost invariably play the fool with it. However, Sir Godfrey's instructions are clear enough and they must be obeyed. After all, his money and his estates are his own, and Master Harold Dacre Enstone may think himself a very lucky young fellow."

A couple of days later Mr Barthgate met Dr Halkine at the Manor. He disliked him at first glance; suspected him of all sorts of things during the first hour of their acquaintance, and at the end of the second, which was spent over luncheon, he had come to the conclusion that he was one of the most charmingly intellectual and, at the same time, most unbusiness-like men of genius that he had ever met.

In Mr Denyer he found a colleague who was entirely to his liking—a thorough man of the world, sharp, shrewd and well-read, yet, withal, kindly- hearted and possessing the widest and most generous views of life.

Wherefore, on the whole, he felt that the disposition of Sir Godfrey's fortune was quite properly provided for. The only thing that puzzled and somewhat annoyed him was the singular change which seemed to have taken place in Sir Godfrey's manner and general lines of thought since he last met him. He did not seem to be quite the same man. It almost appeared that he had reverted to some former period of his life, and treated things generally in a rough-and- ready sort of way, which at times almost shocked the custodian of the family secrets.

"You don't appear to be quite yourself just now, Sir Godfrey," he said the next morning after breakfast, while he was waiting for the brougham to convey him with the will signed and witnessed in duplicate in his pocket to the station. "I hope you haven't been overworking yourself over those scientific theories of yours. To tell you the truth, last night you struck me as being a little feverish. Why not run up to town and see Alderson?"

"My dear Barthgate," replied Sir Godfrey, in a tone which he thought suspiciously boisterous, "that's all rot—I mean nonsense. I never felt better in my life—in fact, never so well for twenty years past, and besides, Halkine's a doctor and a perfect genius at that. Alderson's a clever fellow, but the professor could buy him at one end of this avenue and sell him at the other and make money on him as far as medical science goes."

"What on earth is the matter with Sir Godfrey?" said Mr Barthgate very seriously to himself, as he drove away. "He really seems entirely changed. His language is quite different, and as for that last remark of his—well, really, it was almost vulgar, and the idea of Sir Godfrey Enstone being vulgar is quite impossible—at least, it would have been a short time ago. I hope he isn't threatened with that curious affection of temperament which so often overtakes men who have too much genius and too little variety of occupation."

Nearly a fortnight passed and the personality of Sir Godfrey slowly but steadily deteriorated under the ruthless treatment of Professor Halkine. Yet, unknown to the man who had already committed forgery by proxy and was now deliberately planning a murder without parallel in the history of crime, there were certain lucid intervals during which he seemed to escape from the evil influence, and his better nature was able, partially, if not entirely, to reassert itself. Fortunately, as it was afterwards proved for the interests of justice, he employed most of those periods of

returning sanity just as such a man might be expected to do—in writing a diary in which he analysed his symptoms as far as possible and drew almost every deduction but the right one from them. Perhaps the most extraordinay feature of these strange intervals was the fact that they appeared to have inspired him with a fear or distrust of his friend the professor, which happily prevented him from letting him know anything about the incident of the diary. If he had done so it is practically certain that Halkine would have used his evil influence to get possession of it.

As soon as he heard that Grace and Harold were coming back from London, which they did after a stay of about three weeks, the professor at once stopped what he called his "treatment," and the result was that, although Harold saw a distinct change in Sir Godfrey, it was not sufficiently striking to excite either uneasiness or suspicion. He simply put it down to overwork and too keen devotion to his somewhat uncanny studies. It really only appeared to him as a sort of mental depression, which the excitement and festivities of the now approaching wedding would certainly dispel.

A month later the wedding took place and went off much as similar weddings do. Mr Bonham Denyer, who had returned to town a few days after the will had been executed, was, of course, invited, and brought with him a very pretty diamond and emerald bangle as his offering to the bride.

When all was over and Harold—happiest of men—had taken his beautiful wife away for a six weeks' run through the Italian Lakes and the South of France, Halkine and his friend found themselves once more together at the Dower House discussing the events of the day over their pipes and whisky- and-soda.

"And now, I suppose, Halkine," said the lawyer, "this is the end of Act ii. and the beginning of Act III. of the tragedy."

"Yes," replied the professor, quite impersonally. Everything has gone off perfectly well so far, and now I think the time for stronger measures has arrived."

"Good Lord, man!" exclaimed the lawyer, "you talk about a contemplated murder with as little concern as though it were legal execution. Have you absolutely no heart, no bowels of compassion for this man who has been your friend and neighbour for all these months and your intellectual friend for years and years before?"

"It is not a question of friendship or compassion or anything of that sort, my dear fellow," said Halkine, looking with his luminous eyes far away into space beyond him. "It is merely a matter of necessity. In other words, Sir Godfrey, with whom I have every personal sympathy, is an obstacle in the way. Progress and Science cannot wait on the welfare of individuals, and, therefore, he must be removed. Were it necessary I would lay down my own life with equal readiness in the same cause. Therefore, you can hardly expect me to have many scruples in such a case as this."

Mr Denyer's private impression, which was possibly a correct one, was that his friend and accomplice was a little mad on this particular subject. He kept his opinion to himself, knowing that the first instalment of the ten thousand pounds could not be his until Sir Godfrey's will had been duly proved.

So, to use the professor's cold-blooded phrase, the treatment began again, far more vigorously than before; the poison that had for the time being lain latent in

Sir Godfrey's blood was roused to force and activity. Before many days had passed his life was simply an alternation between the wild ecstasies of haschisch dreams and the awful periods of depression which followed them. It was in vain that his own doctor and the specialist from London, strenuously assisted by his friend and neighbour, strove to abate the evil. No matter what precautions were taken to keep all drugs out of his reach the symptoms continued to grow worse, until at the end of the month it was decided to telegraph for Harold and his wife to return.

The telegram reached them at Como, and they hurried back at once, but on the morning of the day on which they were due to arrive at the Manor the nurse in attendance on Sir Godfrey—who slept in the dressing-room adjoining his bedroom—on rising as usual at six o'clock to have his medicine ready as soon as he woke, found, to her horror, that he was lying in bed drenched with blood, with a razor clenched in his right hand, and the carotid artery and several of the large veins of the neck cut clean through.

Chapter VII

The funeral of Sir Godfrey was over and the will had been read. Neither Harold Enstone nor his wife had shown the slightest surprise at its extraordinary provisions. Both accepted the changed conditions with perfect acquiescence, not a little to the absolute surprise of Dr Halkine and his accomplice.

All that Harold said when Mr Barthgate had finished reading the will was this,—

"I presume, Mr Barthgate, that this house and everything in it for the time being belongs to me?"

"Unquestionably," replied the lawyer. "You have fulfilled the first condition, and, therefore, during your life all the—well, to put it into legal phraseology, the messuages, tenements and estates are your absolute property to deal with as you please. The trust which Sir Godfrey imposed upon Dr Halkine has reference only to monies and securities actually realisable."

"Thank you," said Harold, with a look across the room at the professor. "In that case, as my legal representative and adviser, I ask you to take precautions to prevent anything—even a scrap of paper, leaving this house until I have made a thorough examination of my late guardian's papers."

"Certainly, Mr Enstone," replied the lawyer. "Your wishes shall be obeyed, and I will instruct my clerk, if you like, to seal up all receptacles in which Sir Godfrey might have placed any papers."

"I must admit that that is a wise precaution of yours, my dear Harold," said Dr Halkine; "but I hope you will allow me, after your examination is over, to have access to the manuscripts which Sir Godfrey and I have been preparing for several months on a certain subject of very deep interest to the scientific world in general."

"I can make no promises," said Harold, rather stiffly, "until I have gone through everything. When I have done that I shall be happy to hand over to you anything which you say is of interest to the scientific world. I don't think I can say anything more than that at present."

Not a little to the professor's astonishment Harold, while he was saying this, returned the gaze of those wonderful eyes of his unflinchingly. Grace, too, was looking at him, and there was a light in her eyes that he had never seen there before.

In the solitude of his study that night he discovered the reason for this. The magic of wedlock had done its work. His influence over his daughter, hitherto supreme and unquestionable, was either greatly diminished or entirely destroyed. For his own purposes he had made her believe herself sufficiently in love with Harold Enstone to marry him. But there were deeper depths in the mysteries of the marriage union than even his philosophy had ever sounded. The artificial had become the real, and what had been only love by suggestion was now the love of the perfect union—a union whose strength, as he then recognised, now defied all his evil arts to break.

"I am much obliged to you," he said a little awkwardly, looking from one to the other. "You will find the results of a very considerable amount of work which I should not like to lose. As a matter of fact, I have already arranged with the Contemporary and two or three Continental reviews for publication. It is a matter of deepest regret to me that my friend and colleague died almost at the time when his name was about to become world-famed. It is a thousand pities, for, without knowing it himself, he was one of the greatest scholars and thinkers of his time."

Harold acknowledged the tribute to his other father with an inclination of his head, and the business of the hour proceeded.

"I wonder how the deuce that fellow got the idea of having everything sealed up," said Halkine to Mr Denyer, as they walked back to the Dower House.

. "Perhaps his wife suggested it to him. From what I have seen of Mr Harold Dacre Enstone I should hardly think he has originality enough to think that out himself. Whereas your daughter—"

"My niece, if you please, for the present," interrupted Halkine, sharply. "I have reasons for that, and it doesn't do to use phrases in private which may be used by accident in public. What do you mean?"

"I mean that, as a pretty close student of human nature—as a man of my profession has to be—I have noticed during the last few hours a very considerable change both in your niece and her husband. He has a great deal more initiative than he had; more decision, more penetration. She— well, before her marriage, you know you could, as it were,$turn her round your finger. Somehow, I don't think you could do it now."

"That remains to be proved," said the professor, shortly.

"I think, my dear Halkine, you will find if I have any skill in such matters that you, with all your uncanny skill and deep learning, have managed to run up against something like a brick wall of your own building, which you will find a great deal too hard for your head."

"What do you mean?" asked Halkine.

"Simply this: when you arranged this marriage between • your ' niece ' and Sir Godfrey's heir you left out one factor in your calculations, and that is the absolute and far-reaching change which marriage produces in the personalities of the man and the woman. There is no doubt, of course, that young Enstone was deeply and desperately in love with Miss Grace, however artificial her feeling may have been

for him. Now, I think you can see that love has won the day. Instead of her subjecting him, as you intended, his love has conquered her. As, I believe, the prayer-book says: ' They twain are one.

"I must say it was a curious impression for such a student of human nature as you are to make, and I am half inclined to think that you are right, Denyer," replied Halkine, very quietly, after he had taken a dozen strides in silence. "It only, after all, goes to show how desperately complicated this new science of personality really is. Well, if you are right, I suppose I have made a bad mistake."

"I must admit that I am half afraid it is, and—well, if it is, may I ask what it is that you propose to do?" continued Mr Denyer. "I mean with regard to the paying of the first instalment."

"Oh, you need not have any fear about that," Halkine interrupted somewhat testily. "That will be all right, onlyrofeourse, you must see for yourself that it is quite impossible for me to draw such a large sum as that immediately. It will need a considerable amount of skilful arrangement, my dear fellow," said he bluntly, almost rudely.

"The careful arrangement is your business. Getting the money is mine. To be quite candid with you, I want it. Two or three of my ventures have gone rather badly lately, and I am short. In fact, I must have at least five thousand within a week."

"You can't possibly have it out of the estate, Denyer, so it's no use talking about it. You must see for yourself that the thing is impossible. You know the terms of the will as well as I do. The money is to be used at my discretion for the furtherance of study and research in certain branches of science. How on earth can I realise five thousand pounds within a week after Sir Godfrey's burial? You must see that the thing is absurd. Of course, you shall have your money, but there must be something like a decent interval."

"Um—m—Yes—I suppose you are right. But, you know, I really do want some ready cash as soon as I can have it. Can you do anything yourself? I mean in the way of an advance?"

"I think I could let you have a couple of thousands within the week, if that would help you over the stile," said Halkine.

It was nearly all the ready money he could command at the time, but he felt that, whatever happened, he could not afford to make an enemy of his accomplice at such a juncture as this. Afterwards, when, as he still believed he could do it, he reasserted his power over Grace, everything would be easy. But for the time being his only course was to temporise even at such a sacrifice.

"Very well," replied Mr Denyer. "If you can manage that I think I can tide over for the present. Only I really must have the money."

"You shall have it, my dear fellow," replied Halkine, almost cheerfully the moment after. "And that within a couple of days or so."

Mr Barthgate dined at the Manor with Harold and his wife, and accepted a pressing invitation to spend the night there.

"The fact is, Mr Barthgate," said Harold, when Grace had left the table and the butler had put out the decanters and retired, "the fact is that, as I was saying just now, I do not believe that that will was—well, what shall I say? properly made. I am perfectly certain that my father—as I have always called him and considered

him since I was a boy—could never have put in such an absurd condition as that trusteeship without—well, what do you call it?"

"I presume," said Mr Barthgate, taking a sip at his port, "that you allude to what we call in law undue influence."

"Exactly," said Harold, as he lit his cigar. "That is just what I mean. Of course, as you know just as well as I do, Sir Godfrey was a trifle eccentric where scientific matters were concerned. I could quite understand a rich man like him making very considerable bequests to recognised scientific institutions, and I should be the very last to object to that sort of thing. I owe everything to him. He has been better than a great many fathers might have been to me and has left me a rich man for life.

"If he had left a million in that way I should not have grumbled. But what I can't understand is that he should have left the disposal of what I suppose amounts to something like a couple of millions and the interest on them to this man Halkine. He is Grace's uncle, certainly, but I have never liked the man. I don't know whether you have ever noticed his eyes, but there is a sort of hypnotic power or something of that sort in them that I don't think a man ought to have."

"Yes," replied Mr Barthgate, slowly. "I have noticed them. I have noticed also that on the few occasions on which we have met he has done his best to, as they call it in the stories, fix my gaze. I candidly admit that I share your—we may say, distrust of him, and I have always looked the other way. Still," he went on, looking contemplatively at the smoke curling from the end of his cigar, "as your legal adviser I ought to tell you that of all things in law undue influence upon a testator in the making of a will is the most difficult to prove.

"It is, of course, quite possible that those wonderful eyes of his did influence Sir Godfrey to make that extraordinary will. But there is the fact that the instructions which were given to me were written in his own handwriting and signed with his usual signature. I am afraid there is no getting away from that. We may call it eccentricity or anything that we like, but the courts are occupied every day with the eccentricities of testators. And I need hardly remind you that the law recognises absolutely the right of a man to do what he will with his own, provided always that he is sane, and that he executes his will in proper form.

"Now I really cannot see that there is any proof that Sir Godfrey was not absolutely sane when he gave me those instructions written by his own hand and when he executed the will in my presence. In short, I am afraid, my dear Mr Enstone, if you are contemplating anything like a contest of the will, I am bound to advise you that you haven't a leg to stand upon. I had better tell you that now than later. Whatever my private opinion of the matter may be, it is my duty to save you from the worry and expense of a lawsuit which, I am afraid, could only have one end."

"Yes," replied Harold, leaning back in his chair and taking up his wine- glass. "Of course, you are perfectly right. All the same I am certain that he did not write out those instructions of his own free will and accord, as they say.

"It's a most extraordinary thing, Mr Barthgate," he went on rather awkwardly, after a little pause, "but since I have been married to Grace I seem to have acquired a curious kind of—well, I hardly know what to call it. It's a kind of insight, almost inspiration, one may say, that I certainly never had before. For

instance, as 1 said, I never liked this Dr Halkine. It was like the old rhyme about Dr Fell. I could not tell why. Now, although I have not the slightest proof, I feel practically certain that he has been playing a double game all along, and that he, and not Sir Godfrey, is the author of these instructions, And," he went on, leaning forward and putting his elbows on the table, "what is more extraordinary still, Grace, who before we were married never had an evil thought of him, believes exactly as I do. Now what do you make of that?"

"Everything and yet nothing," replied the lawyer, with a smile and slight shrug of his shoulders. "Everything from what you might call the point of view of moral conviction, but as to the legal view absolutely nothing."

"You see, my dear Mr Enstone, the courts do not go upon convictions. I mean that kind of conviction. They want evidence, fact, proof. Of that you haven't a shred. I don't say that something cannot be discovered when you go through Sir Godfrey's papers."

"Happy thought," said Harold, emptying his glass and getting up. Let us go into the library and go through his writing-desk. I had rather I had you with me when I did it. Grace can come too, because it is quite as much her business as it is mine."

"I am entirely at your service," said Mr Barthgate, rising, "for the rest of the night, if you like. I am the last man in the world to hold out anything like false hopes, but I may say quite candidly that I do sincerely trust that we may find something tangible to go upon, for, morally speaking, I am just as certain as you are that this Dr Halkine, with all due deference to your wife's uncle, is not exactly what he ought to be. He is a man, as anyone can see, of extraordinary abilities, perhaps too great abilities. And then those eyes of his! As you say, I don't like them. In fact, quite between ourselves, I may say that, during a little conversation that I had with Sir Nevil Alderson and Dr Russell Thorpe, Sir Nevil distinctly raised the question as to whether he was not one of a good many instances known to medical science of genius run mad."

"Hra," said Harold, as they went towards the door, "criminal madness, I expect, if that's the case."

Chapter VIII

Grace gave them coffee in the drawing-room, and Harold meanwhile repeated his conversation with Mr Barthgate in a somewhat condensed form while they were drinking it.

"It certainly doesn't seem a very dutiful sort of thing to say about one's uncle and a man who really has been as good as a father could have been to me," said Grace, when he had finished; "but it's no use trying to be dishonest with oneself, or," she went on with a smile at the solicitor, "with one's lawyer. I think I am right there, am I not, Mr Barthgate?"

"My dear Mrs Enstone," he said, leaning forward on the settee, putting his elbows on his knees, and the tips of his fingers together, "of course, you know the

old saying that the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client. I think there is only one greater fool, and that is the patient of the man who is his own doctor."

"Exactly," she said. "And that is something like I feel with regard to this will and my uncle. I have an instinctive feeling, as I have told Harold, that things are not all right. And, to be quite frank, I think just as he does about those instructions."

She stopped suddenly, got up from her chair, walked across the room to the fireplace, looked at her own beautiful reflection in the glass for a few moments, then turned back and said,—

"Mr Barthgate, have you ever heard—wait now—Yes, it's coming back to me now. What is it? I remember discussing it with my uncle two or three years ago in Paris after he had been making some of his experiments with Dr Charcot at the Salpetriere. Yes, that's it: divided personality. Have you ever heard of that?"

"My dear Mrs Enstone," replied the lawyer, with a little uplifting of his eyelids, "I am afraid I must plead ignorance. I am neither a scientist nor a medical man, and such a term as that is known only to them."

"Just as I was saying," interrupted Harold, "and that is where I believe all the difficulty is going to come in. That is where the professor will trip us up, if he does it anywhere."

"I am afraid, Mr Enstone, you are getting a little beyond my depth. You see we lawyers have to confine ourselves to hard facts. Nothing else is admitted in evidence, and so—I speak, of course, professionally— we don't find anything else worth studying. In plain English, I really don't know what you are talking about, and I may as well say so sooner as later."

"It's just as well that you don't want to," laughed Harold, "because, although I know what you mean, I certainly would not explain it to you. Indeed, I never had any idea of the subject at all until I had the felicity of becoming the other half of Miss Grace Romanes."

"Don't talk nonsense, Harold," she said, with a delightfully unsuccessful attempt to be severe. "All things considered, I must say I think this is a rather too serious subject for frivolities of speech."

"I am duly corrected and conscious of my fault," he laughed again, "and now suppose we take Mr Barthgate's advice and proceed from theory to fact. Of course," he went on, turning to the solicitor, "you will do me the favour of being present when I open Sir Godfrey's writing-table?"

"With pleasure," he replied, opening the door for Grace.

A minute search through the drawers of the writing-table and those of an old Chippendale bureau, disclosed nothing! more than neatly-arranged files of letters, MS. books full of scientific memoranda and accounts relating to the estate.

"Nothing there that we want at present," said Harold, when the search was over. "But I have just thought of something else. Excuse me a moment."

He unlocked the door and went out, and in about five minutes he came back with a square sealed envelope in his hand.

"I think this is what we have been looking for," he said. "I just remembered then that Sir Godfrey used to do a good deal of his work in the small hours of the morning in his bedroom. There is a little safe there let into the wall and covered with a panel. He told me how to open this, and, curiously enough, when all this happened I forgot about it altogether. If I had got back in time I have no doubt he

would have told me about it. If there are any private instructions they are here. And, dear," he went on, putting his hand into the pocket of his dinner-jacket, and turning towards his wife, "I have found something else that may be of use to you."

He took his hand out and she saw that it was full of lustrous pearls and glittering diamonds. He spread it out on the table, and it took the form of a necklace composed of five rows of exactly matched strung pearls with a big diamond between each.

"Fifty thousand pounds' worth, if it's a shilling," murmured Mr Barthgate, his eyes dilating as he looked upon the wonderful ornament. "Sir Godfrey was a great connoisseur in jewels. People say that he had the finest collection in the North of England."

"Yes," said Harold, taking up the necklace, "I know that during our travels he was always buying pearls and diamonds and rubies whenever he could get them, but I did not know that he had got this. Come here, Grace, and let us see how it looks in its proper place."

"Is that—" she exclaimed with a little catch in her voice and taking a step back from him—"is that for me? No, Harold—it is altogether too lovely."

"The very reason why it should be for you," he said, going to her and putting the strings of splendid gems over her willingly bowed head. There, too lovely? Nonsense! It's exactly in its right place, isn't it, Mr Barthgate?"

"It would be impossible for them to be seen to better advantage," replied the solicitor, with something almost akin to an adoration that was divided between the splendour of the gems and the loveliness of their wearer.

"And now let us see what there is in this," said Harold, breaking the seal of the envelope. He took a small book bound in limp parchment out of it, and read on the first page in Sir Godfrey's handwriting:—

"Notes of my strange experiences from 10th July to—"

He turned to the next page and ran his eye over it and then the next and the next. The others saw his eyelids lift and fall and a shade of grey steal under the bronze of his skin.

"What is the matter, Harold?" said Grace, anxiously. "Is it anything serious?"

"Yes," he replied slowly. "Something that may be very serious, I'm afraid. It is apparently a diary that my father kept during the last days of his life. It is—"

"Oh, then, of course," she interrupted, "it is something that can only be intended for you. Shall I go if you want to read it?"

"Oh, no," he replied, a little awkwardly as she thought. There's no such hurry as that. I'll have another look at it after you have gone to bed. And now suppose we have some coffee and afterwards you sing us something?"

During the rest of the evening Grace noticed that her husband was decidedly constrained and preoccupied. She guessed that his thoughts were really between the pages of the book in his pocket and so about ten she said goodnight and went upstairs.

"We'll go and have our whisky and smoke in the library, Mr Barthgate, if you don't mind," he said to the solicitor. "I want to have a talk with you about this diary."

"With pleasure," replied the other, as he followed him out of the drawing- room.

When they got into the library Harold locked the door and began rather abruptly,—

"There's the stand and the soda, Mr Barthgate, help yourself and sit down. Yes, you may mix me one too if you don't mind."

When the solicitor was seated Harold put his hands in his pockets and said, beginning to walk up and down the room,—

"You remember, of course, Mr Barthgate, what I said just now about the will and that extraordinary illness which my father had before his absolutely inexplicable suicide, land you'll remember also—but never mind, that will do afterwards. I have a very strong idea that this diary will throw a good deal of light upon what seemed dark to me in more senses than one. I am going to ask you to go over it with me and give me your opinion and your advice upon it."

"With pleasure," replied the solicitor, lighting his cigar and leaning back in his arm-chair. "Now, suppose you read slowly and I'll devote myself to the thinking part."

"Perhaps that would be the best way," replied Harold, sitting down at the table and taking the diary out of his pocket. He opened it and began to read without further comment.

"10th July.

"Man, know thyself—vain, if seeming wise, advice! Impossible even for those who, like myself, have devoted so many years of patient labour to the study of Nature and man. Yet I thought I had made some little progress as my reward, and here I am—confronted in my own being, in my own self, with an insoluble puzzle. But have I really one self or two? or is it possible that I am afflicted with some obscure mental disease, that, perhaps, I am going—no, I must not write or even think of that, for that way darkness lies. I think I'll have a talk with H. No, I won't. There's been something queer about him since that supper. He has not been at all the same, or is it my mental vision that has changed? At any rate, I daresay he would only laugh at me, as he did, I think, today when I forgot about the will. That was a very curious thing, for example. Of course, I wrote the instructions and signed the will only the other day, and yet sometimes I seem to have done it weeks or months or years ago. It's all very odd. When Harold is settled I must have a rest and a run abroad. At present I had better take some more of H.'s tonic and go to bed. I hope I sha'n't have any more of those queer dreams I have been having lately."

"I must say I don't like the tone of that at all," said Mr Barthgate, as Harold ceased reading.

"How on earth can he have forgotten a will that he had only executed —let me see, yes, two days before?"

"You'll like what comes after still less," said Harold in a hard tone. "The next entry is four days later. Listen."

"14th July.

"Awake again—or what is it? Have I been asleep since I wrote that last entry and is this only a dream in the sleep? No, that won't do. A diary is not such stuff as dreams are made of. Besides, I was awake this morning when H. brought me some more of his filthy physic. Remember, too, I forgot to take it. Fizz instead. Must have done me good. Perhaps woke me up and that's why I am writing. If H. can't

stop those infernal dreams—for I am certain those are dreams—even if they are within dreams, as some dreamer of a poet dreamt once about his own dreams—Damn the dreams. I'll have another doctor. I'll try the stuff once more, and if that doesn't do I'll tell Halkine. No, I won't—send Alderson—"

"Oh, that's terrible, my dear Harold," exclaimed the solicitor, sitting upright—"terrible! Your father could never have written like that even if he had been intoxicated."

"Or mad," interrupted Harold, "or, at anyrate, going mad. Look at the language! Look at that almost imbecile repetition of ' dreams,' and ' dreaming,' and my father, you know, was a man who was particularly choice in his language. But there's worse to come. The next is dated the 18th. Listen:—

"Dreams in heaven; dreams in hell. Wake on earth when Harold comes."

"That," said Harold, "is all of that one and it is written in a scrawl that I can hardly read. Now the next, which is dated a week later, just after we came home, is written in his old hand and perfectly clear and sane:—

"Thank Heaven! that mysterious attack of mine is over at last. God grant I shall never have another. It seems incredible to me that I should have written such nonsense as those last two entries. I have half a mind to burn the thing, but I think I will keep it as a curiosity in mental pathology. It has certainly nonplussed Halkine, at least as far as diagnosis goes. He actually had the assurance to accuse me of taking drugs, haschisch and that sort of thing. Never took such a thing in my life, except opium for cholera. Still, whatever it was, I must confess that he has pulled me round very quickly, and precious glad I am. What on earth would have happened if Harold and Grace had come back and found me in the condition I must have been in when I wrote that rubbish! Well, whatever it was I hope there's an end of it now. But I shall have to be careful. I think, as Halkine says, I have been overdoing it for a good long time now, and as soon as Harold and Grace are one flesh, as the prayer-book says, I will be off to the Selkirks and the Rockies for a couple of months or so, and try Mother Nature's own cure. I can easily be back for Christmas."

"Ah, that's better," said Mr Barthgate, taking a sip at his whisky-and- soda. "I should say that, mentally speaking, Sir Godfrey was perfectly well when he wrote that. What a thousand pities it was that he didn't go."

"Yes," replied Harold, between his clenched teeth. Then he went on, "Now the next entry is on the evening of our wedding day:—

"Well, they are married and off. God bless them and give them everything they deserve and desire, and now for the Far West."

He paused for a few moments, looking closely at the page with straining eyes out of which he tried hard to keep the almost irrepressible tears. Then he looked up and said in a low, half-choked voice,—

"There are three others dated at about a week's interval. Very like the first ones, each one more terribly sad than the others. I won't read them. You can look at them yourself afterwards. They all seem to point to some dread necessity, some terrible deed he seems to feel himself forced to do in spite of himself. This is the last one, so far as I can make it out:—

"Awake again—How long sleep last time—How long next! I think all dreams now. Edge of pit last night at last—Flames at feet, but didn't burn. White and writhe

like sea snakes—Shapes in front —seem to know them sometimes—Know nothing now. Dead think or soon. H. stuff wrong. Can't help not make dreams—All dreams night day —light dark—All dark now—Die I—"

Harold's voice broke completely at the last word. He dropped the book on the table and drank off his whisky-and-soda in choking §[ulps. Then he got up and strode up and down the room in silence for two or three minutes while Mr Barthgate took up the diary and looked over the few fateful pages.

"Well, what do you think of that?" said Harold almost savagely, as he stopped abruptly in front of the fireplace and faced him.

"Really, my dear Enstone," he began hesitatingly. "It is so sad, so terrible, so utterly mysterious that, until I have had a little time to think over it, I really hardly know what to say."

"There's nothing mysterious about it to me," said Harold, between his teeth. "It's as plain as the sun in the heavens. Can't you see, Mr Barthgate, that those few sentences contain the story of as cruel, as vile a murder as the wit of man ever devised?"

Chapter IX

"Murder, my dear Harold," exclaimed the lawyer, sitting up with a jerk and dropping his cigar on his legs. "Of course you are quite serious, but that is a very terrible word to use. And then, if there was a murder there must have been a murderer. Now, who on earth can have any reason to murder Sir Godfrey?"

"Listen for a moment," replied Harold, slowly, "and I think I can make it clear to you. The first of those entries shows my father in what I may call the stage of suspicion. He knows that there is something wrong with him. His memory is playing unaccountable tricks. He even forgets one of the most important acts of his life a few hours after he does it. He speaks of a certain supper. I would give a thousand pounds to know exactly what he had at it. The next three entries mark a swift decline into what I can only, with all due respect to his memory, call madness. Then you will have noticed that madness is relieved by fewer and fewer gleams of reason. Then comes a complete change. The next shows him as sane as ever he was. That was written just after we came home. Then comes the last piteous serious ending with a ghastly nightmare of words which could only have been written by the hand of a maniac on the verge of self- destruction. The day after that was written my father was found dead in bed, self-destroyed. It was his own hand that killed him, I admit, but it was guided by another, and that was Jenner Halkine's."

"It could hardly have been anyone else," said the lawyer, meditatively, "because I am perfectly certain from my knowledge of him that Sir Godfrey never was addicted to the drug habit, and that being so no one in this part of the country at anyrate could possibly have contrived and executed such a—well, I may say, such an infernal plot against the life of an innocent man and a friend. But mind you, Harold," he went on, assuming something of his legal tone and manner, "I do not

wish to inspire you with any false hopes. If he has done it he has laid his plans with such devilish skill that proof of his guilt, I mean legal proof, is at present totally out of the question."

"What," exclaimed Harold, angrily, "in face of the facts of his death and this diary? Why, surely there isn't a judge or jury with a grain of sense that would not see it just as clearly as I do."

"Possibly, my dear sir," replied Mr Barthgate. "It is quite possible, perhaps probable, that they would see it—but not from your point of view. Moral conviction, however strong, goes for absolutely nothing in a court of law, and no amount of it would stand for a moment against the hard fact that Sir Godfrey did write those instructions and execute that will. Again the use of hypnotic influence, or whatever it is, is not recognised in English courts as it is in France as an offence, unless it can be proved that it is used to procure unlawful ends, and that I need hardly say is quite impossible in the present unhappy case."

"And do you mean to tell me that Halkine, as trustee, will be able to get probate on that will—a will obtained by fraud as it must have been?"

"Legally speaking," replied the other, "I cannot see the slightest reason why he should not, and if you will take my advice, which I give not only as a lawyer, but as your friend, you will keep your suspicions and your convictions to yourself and join him in applying for probate."

"What? Help a scoundrel, a murderer, like Halkine to get hold of the spoils of his villainy? You must be joking, my dear sir," said Harold, ending the sentence with a harsh laugh.

"I never was more serious in my life, Harold," said Mr Barthgate, in a tone as grave as his words. "Please remember that, granting our suspicions are correct, we may have an enemy of no common sort to fight, no ordinary criminal, but a man of both learning and genius, and one, too, who is apparently possessed of extraordinary powers of which we can only guess the nature. With such an adversary the very worst possible policy would be to show hostility before you have some tangible reason for it, and to draw the sword before you are really ready to strike. At present remember you have not even a sword to draw."

The old lawyer's cold logic, coupled with the calm, judicial tone in which he spoke, acted something like a douche on Harold's heated temper. He saw the wisdom of such a course, the absolute folly of any other for the present, the moment that he got cool. He took two or three more turns up and down the room. Then he stopped at the table, mixed himself another whisky- and-soda, and said quietly and yet with a note of stern determination in his voice,—

"Yes, I see what you mean. You are right. I'd rather have repeating rifles with him at a hundred yards, but that won't do here, so I suppose we shall have to fight him with his own weapons as far as we can—and that's not very far, I'm afraid at present. Help yourself to a nightcap and we'll go to bed and sleep on it. By the way, what about Grace? I suppose she'll have to know sooner or later."

"And therefore she had better know sooner," replied Mr Barthgate, after a little pause. "Of course it is by no means a pleasant thing to do, but, though she is Halkine's niece, she is also your wife. It will be a great shock to her, no doubt, but if I am any judge of character she would rather have your confidence now than find out the truth for herself, as one day or other she must do."

"You are right again," said Harold, putting down his empty glass. "I will show her the diary tomorrow. As somebody or other once said, I will go and seek counsel in dreams, and I'm afraid they won't be very pleasant ones—if I have any."

But when he got upstairs he found his wife robed in a flowing tea-gown of rich dull red silk, trimmed at the neck and wrists with filmy black lace, sitting reading in a deep arm-chair, in a cosy, exquisitely furnished room, half boudoir, half dressing-room, which was divided from their bedroom by a heavily curtained archway.

"What, not in bed yet? Do you know it is nearly twelve, dear?" he said, as she laid down the book she was reading, rose and came to meet him.

"I know, dear," she replied, as his arm went round her shoulders, "what do you think I have been reading?—Ribot's Diseases of Personality!"

Her eyes sought his as she spoke, and for a few moments each looked into the other's soul in silence. They were communing in that new language which love had taught him since "they twain were one flesh."

"Then you understand already," he whispered at length; bending down and laying his lips gently on hers.

"Yes," she replied, as she returned his kiss, "I understood as soon as I heard what the doctors said. I think I could almost guess what there is in that diary. It is something very terrible, is it not, Harold?"

"Yes, very. So terrible, indeed, that I am almost afraid to show it to you—and yet you will have to know what there is in it before very long, painful as it must be to you, dearest."

"I have suffered that pain already, dear," she answered softly, "for I have suspected all that you have, more clearly perhaps, for I—before we were married, of course—was very close to him, so close, that I might have been his daughter instead of only his niece. I have some of his power, some of his insight or second sight, or whatever it is. Yes, I could see, but I could not be quite sure. Something always made me doubt at the last— perhaps he did."

"But how could that be, darling?" he asked, incredulously; "he has not been near you for six weeks until a few days ago?"

"Distance does not matter very much in such things, I'm afraid," she replied a little sadly. "When sympathy has once been established between the stronger and the weaker, the link will stretch, but it seldom breaks."

"But, good Heavens, Grace," he exclaimed, as a sudden fear stole into his soul, "you are not going to tell me that that bond between you and this man whom—I may as well say it at once since you understand—I firmly believe to be my father's murderer, still exists?"

She slipped out of his arms and went a few paces away from him. Standing with her little red-slippered feet nearly buried in the long fur of the hearthrug, and the soft glow of the shaded electric light falling on her glorious hair and the splendid gems he had just given her, she clasped her hands behind her and faced him, a vision of such perfect, almost unearthly loveliness that his eyes dilated with new wonder, and his pulses leapt with joy that she was his, wholly his. But was she truly, wholly his? That was the horrible doubt that her very loveliness made the more horrible.

"Harold," she said, in a soft clear voice, whose music was almost pain to him, "I do not think that such a bond as existed between my uncle and myself can ever be wholly broken, save by death."

"Then, if there is justice to be had on earth, he shall—"

"Stop, Harold, stop. For God's sake don't say that yet," she interrupted, with a little cry of pain. "Remember, we do not know, we only suspect. But when we do know, if ever, your wife will be for justice and for you," she went on with a harder ring in her voice.

"Thank God, and you, darling, for that!" he said, taking a step towards her with his hands outstretched. She recoiled another step, saying with a note of appeal in her voice,—

"No, Harold, please, not now. Wait till I have told you what I have been staying up to tell you—something that I ought to have told you— and yet—no, I didn't tell you because I wouldn't."

"What on earth do you mean, Grace?" he asked in amazement, the chill grasp of fear taking hold of his heart again.

"You will understand when I tell you, dear," she replied softly and sadly. "It is a very terrible thing for a wife to tell a husband who loves her —but I can tell you now and I will, for you must know it before you give me your confidence about your father's diary."

"Then tell me, tell me at once, for Heaven's sake," he said hoarsely, "however—however—bad it is, if anything could be bad of— you."

"It is not bad, Harold," she replied quietly, yet with a quick flush which brought one of something like shame to his own; "and yet," she went on, looking down at the glittering buckle on her red slipper, "in one sense it is bad because it is—I ought to rather^it was not natural. No, don't say anything now, dear. Let me tell it my own way; it will be over sooner."

Then with her eyes looking sadly and yet steadily into his, she went on in a tone which struck him as strangely impersonal and unlike her own, —

"I can hardly expect you to believe me, Harold, but it is still the truth that if it had not been for that mysterious bond between my uncle and myself, which I now hate as much as you do, you and I would never have been husband and wife."

"What, you and I, Grace—are you going to tell me—

"I am going to tell you," she went on, scarcely heeding his interruption, "that before we were married I did not love you, I had never loved any man. I did not know what that kind of love was like, and—and I never believed that I should. It is you that have taught me the real love, Harold, but it was my uncle who taught me the sham which you took for the reality. I did not know then that it was not real, that it was only a phantom love, which he had conjured up and projected into my heart, as it. were, as I can see now, for his own evil purposes. Yet when I was with you, when I felt your arms round me and your kisses on my lips, I did love you—and that when we were apart it all went away. I had no dreams of you waking or sleeping as other girls have of their lovers. You seemed to be someone else, only an acquaintance, perhaps a friend, but nothing more, until I met you again, and then the strange sham love came back and cheated both you and me."

"Sham love—cheat—nonsense, impossible, Grace!" he broke in passionately. "I would as soon believe falsehood of an angel from heaven as of you."

"It was not my falsehood, dear—God forbid!" she said gently; "it was his, but it was falsehood all the same. I did not bring you the true love of a true woman, and so you were cheated into believing that I had given you what I had not to give. That is all. Can you forgive me, Harold?"

The next instant she was in his arms again, smiling and unresisting.

"Forgive you, darling? What is there to forgive to such sweet innocence as yours? Sham or no sham, that strange love gave you to me, and if Jenner Halkine were not what I believed him to be, I could bless him for it— fraud or not. But you have not said everything, dearest. You have one more question to answer."

"I know what it is, dear," she said so softly that her voice was almost a whisper. "You are going to ask me if I love you now—love you with the real love that a wife should give to her husband with everything else that she has to give. Yes I do, for when we were married something new, something that I had never dreamed of before, came into my life and seemed to transfigure it. All the world about me was different. My uncle with his terrible influence went farther and farther away, and you, dear, came nearer and nearer. You know what that was, Harold, don't you? It was the true love. It must have been, for only real love can change the world like that for a woman. Are you satisfied, dear?"

His answer was not spoken in words. He crushed her up in his arms, and as his lips met his soul said it to hers, and so the first threatening cloud drifted away from the heaven of their perfect happiness.

Chapter X

They did not go through the contents of Sir Godfrey's diary that night. They were both too happy in their immediate present to think of anything but the new happiness that each had revealed! to the other, and so they wisely left the things of tomorrow to wait on the coming of tomorrow. But when Grace had read the few pregnant and piteous sentences and interpreted them in the light of her own knowledge and with the aid of her strange, inherited power, she was, if possible, even more firmly convinced of the guilt of the man, whom she happily believed to be only her uncle, than Harold himself was.

At the same time she heartily endorsed Mr Barthgate's opinion that, for the time being at least, it was absolutely necessary for Harold to keep both his hatred and his suspicions of the professor completely out of sight. No good, and possibly great harm, would be done by even allowing him to guess that his conduct was in any way suspected, and so, although it was by far the hardest of the many hard tasks that Harold Enstone had set himself to, he crushed down his desperate desire to take the law into his own hands, and, as he put it, consented to play the hypocrite for the first, and, as he devoutly hoped, the last, time in his life.

It must be confessed, as Grace laughingly told him one night after a dinner at which the professor and Mr Denyer, now almost his other self, were guests, that he played the part excellently; but that was due to the versatility of his education and to the iron will with which a youth of adventure and peril had endowed him.

He treated Jenner Halkine on exactly the same footing as before Sir Godfrey's death. He had never been on really cordial terms with him and, of course, this fact made his task and the keen-witted doctor's deception all the easier. He entered with great apparent interest into his various schemes for giving effect to "his dead friend's" wishes, and gave every assistance in his power to expedite the process of debate.

But when the will was proved and Halkine entered upon his trusteeship there came to Enstone Manor one fine morning about a fortnight after the probate a long blue envelope, the contents of which caused Harold to fling the paper down on the breakfast table and jump to his feet with an oath for which he promptly begged his startled wife's pardon.

"What on earth is the matter, Harold dear?" she said, turning pale, for she had never heard a word from his lips that could offend a woman's ear.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, Grace," he replied, colouring to his eyes. "I ought to be kicked, swearing before a woman; but I think you'll admit that this is about enough to make a fellow forget himself. Would you believe it, that scoundrel Halkine—I really refuse to think of him any longer as any connection to you—has gone and realised a million out of the estate investments on his sole authority and without even consulting Barthgate or myself."

"A million?" said Grace, with a little gasp as she began to realise what evil such a man as her uncle could work with such a huge sum of money at his command. "A million? That's a tremendous amount, isn't it? But has he the right to do that by himself?"

"I'm afraid he took very good care to make that all right before he sent my poor father to his suicide's grave," replied Harold, bitterly. "Still, for all that, I'm off up to town as soon as I can get a train, and have it out with him in some way if it's only for the satisfaction of doing it. He's evidently thrown off the mask now and I may as well do the same. Why, the rascal hasn't even a single one of his schemes ready to spend a penny upon honestly. So now, dear, go and get packed up and tell Jackson to put my usual things together and we'll catch the mid-day train from Newcastle. I'll see about the carriage and send Simmons to the post-office with a wire to Mrs Porter, no, I think we'll go to Brown's, as the old governor always did when he paid a flying visit like this."

"Are you really serious, Harold?" she asked, rising from the table, for they had just finished breakfast when the ill-omened letter arrived.

"Never more so, dear," he replied, with a little forward movement of the chin which told her unmistakably that he "meant business."

"Very well, then," she said quietly, yet wondering what sort of consequence such a journey might have, "if you are I will come with you. Perhaps I may be of some use."

They dined in the dignified and quietly luxurious peace of Brown's hotel —last survival of the ancient hostelries of London which many a generation of county people have made their other home—and as soon as they had finished breakfast the next morning, Harold took a hansom and drove to Bedford Mansions, which was Professor Halkine's town address. He found him sitting over the fruit and sweetmeats at the end of a late Oriental breakfast. There was another man at the table with him, and Harold, by some swift intuition instantly recognised that he

was in the presence of no ordinary earth- dweller. Never in all his wanderings had he stood face to face with such a personality as this.

As they both rose from the table, Halkine held out his hand and said in his most genial voice,—

"Ah, good morning, Mr Enstone. You have given us a pleasant surprise. We were just talking about you. Allow me to have the honour to present you to my colleague and now co-trustee, Dr Izah-Ramal, whose name, I am sure, cannot be unfamiliar to you. My friend, this is the Mr Enstone, son and heir of our lamented friend and brother, Godfrey Enstone."

Harold's muscles were quivering under the great effort of will that alone prevented him striking the smooth-spoken liar and murderer to the floor, but he managed just to touch his hand and say "Good morning" civilly. Then he turned and his eyes met those of Izah-Ramal. He saw a face that was at once the most beautiful and the most pitilessly impassive he had ever seen. There was something unearthly in its beauty, something almost devilish in its utter lack of human expression. The skin was a clear, pale olive, the features were of the purest type of the ancient Egyptian aristocracy. It seemed, indeed, to Harold's wondering eyes that he might have stepped straight out of one of the wall paintings at Luxor or Karnac. His hair which fell almost to his shoulders was pure white, yet thick and soft as silk. His brows were still black, and under them shone a pair of eyes so intensely and brilliantly blue that, unless their owner so willed, it was difficult to look into them for more than a few moments together.

Such was Izah-Ramal, reader of thoughts and searcher of souls, the outcast adept of the holy mysteries, who had broken the most awful vows a mortal can take for the sake of a golden-haired, dark-eyed, English girl of twenty. To the world in general he was better known as Professor of English Languages and Literature in the University of London and the most brilliant Oriental scholar in Europe.

There is no need to record the conversation that occupied the best part of the next hour. Suffice it to say that from the moment Izah-Ramal began to speak on the subject of his friend's vast projects for the advancement of true science and the inestimable benefit Sir Godfrey had conferred upon humanity by enabling him to carry out, his anger began to melt away and the real object of his visit seemed to recede into the background. Even his conviction as to Halkine's guilt gradually became fainter. He was also bound to admit the fact that he was able to secure as co-trustee not only a man of absolutely blameless reputation, but also one of the most distinguished scholars in the world, went a very long way towards discounting the probability of fraudulent intention. The magnificent plans that were outlined so distinctly by them completely dazzled him, and he ended by feeling himself almost wholly in sympathy with the very proceedings that he had come to denounce as an insolent fraud.

And yet, when he had left the flat and was walking slowly westward, lost in puzzling thought, with every step he took the spell that had been cast over him became weaker and weaker, and his original view of Halkine and all his works came out stronger and stronger. When he met Grace at lunch he was one of the angriest and most bewildered men in London. Of course he told her exactly what had happened, and when he had done she said in a voice which betrayed not a little concern,—

"I am sorry to hear about Dr Ramal, Harold—very sorry. He is really something very different to what he appears to the world, something infinitely more powerful and dangerous than a mere scholar and scientist."

"What in the name of goodness do you mean, dear?" asked her husband, a trifle alarmed by the seriousness of her tone. "Do you know anything about this man?" k

"Too much to give you very much hope of success against my uncle, I'm afraid, dear," she replied gravely. "This Doctor, or as he should be called, Lama, Izah-Ramal, is, or was, one of the Thibetan adepts. Of course, you must have learnt something about them on your travels, and you know the extraordinary powers with which they are credited. Well, my uncle told me several times that all this is actually true of Izah-Ramal. I have myself seen him do, apparently just for amusement, the most incomprehensible things—tying a knot in a loop of string, for instance, and turning a closed bag inside out without opening it. Once he told me the whole course of my thoughts for twelve hours without a mistake. I hate the man, if he really is an ordinary man, and I am afraid I fear him even more than hate him. Whatever you do, Harold, for Heaven's sake don't let him come near me, or I dare not guess what the consequences might be."

"You can be pretty certain of that, dear," he said a trifle grimly. "I've heard of these fellows in their own country, and I know for a fact that they do some of them possess powers that we have no notion of, and," he went on with a laugh, "you may rest quite assured that I don't want anyone coming around reading my wife's inmost thoughts when I don't even know them myself."

"I don't think many of them are hidden from you, dear," she smiled in reply, but quite seriously. "I should absolutely dread meeting this man, especially now that he has allied himself with my uncle in this terrible piece of work."

"I'll take very good care you don't," he said with confidence that was greater than his knowledge. "But now, can you tell me what the actual connection between these two worthies is?"

"As far as I know it begun when he was twenty-five or so. He went as naturalist with an expedition which attempted to get into the Forbidden City. Every man was killed except my uncle, and he was spared because Izah- Ramal, who was then very high up in the cult, took a fancy to him, or saw some possibilities in him, and claimed him as his disciple. He remained in the monastery with him for three years, and then they both got away. How or why I don't know. That is all my uncle ever told me, and I never could get him to say another word on the subject."

They went out shopping in the afternoon, and just as their victoria pulled up in front of Jay's they heard a familiar voice say,—

"Good afternoon! I heard from Halkine this morning that you were in town, and I was going to do myself the pleasure of calling upon you."

They looked up, and there stood Mr Bonham Denyer, faultlessly dressed in the most recent of male modes, and looking the very incarnation of prosperous respectability. Harold helped his wife out, and they shook hands. As they moved towards the shop door Mr Denyer murmured, just loud enough for him to hear,—

"Will you have a couple of hours to spare before you go back to Enstone? I am very anxious to have a chat with you on a subject which concerns you very deeply."

Harold caught a note of real earnestness in his voice, and as he looked up quickly he saw a look of earnestness, almost of anxiety, on the lawyer's face, that convinced him that he really had something of importance to say. Before he replied he turned to his wife and said laughingly,—

"I don't suppose you want me to come and do penance at the shrine of St Mode, so, if you don't mind, while you are seeing things and trying on, I'll take a turn with Mr Denyer and come back for you in half an hour."

"I think you had better make it a couple of hours, dear," she smiled in reply. "I have two dresses to try on and ever so much else to do."

"Then in that case," he said, turning to Denyer, "we may as well take the carriage and drive down to the 'Travellers,' and have a smoke and a chat there."

"I shall be delighted," replied the lawyer, raising his hat again and bowing as Grace went into the shop.

In ten minutes they were seated in a secluded corner of the almost deserted smoking-room, for it was now late August and clubland was almost a wilderness. When they got their cigars going, and the waiter had put half a bottle of the famous "Travellers" port and a couple of glasses before them, Harold turned to his guest and said,—

"Now, Mr Denyer, I am entirely at your service. You can speak as freely here as you could in your own office. There is no one within earshot, and those two or three old stagers are either all fast asleep or very soon will be."

"Exactly," replied the lawyer, in a low but perfectly distinct tone, such as he and his kind assume by instinct when they approach confidential matters. "To save time and get to the point at once, I will begin by saying that I want to talk to you about a matter which concerns you and your fortunes, and something more even than them very closely."

"Then you can only refer to my late father's death and that extraordinary wilt he made," said Harold, putting down his glass and looking him straight in the eyes.

"Yes, that is it," replied Mr Denyer, returning his look for a moment, and then dropping his eyelids.

"To begin with I am going to ask you to give me your word that nothing I shall say shall go beyond this room, even to your wife, without my consent."

"Certainly," answered Harold, after a moment's thought. His instinct told him that Halkine's friend and partner, perhaps his accomplice, would not speak like that without pretty good reason, and so he determined to take the risk. "Yes," he continued, "you have my word on that. And now, what is it you have to tell me?"

Chapter XI

"To be perfectly plain with you, Mr Enstone," replied the lawyer, after a little pause, and with visible embarrassment, "I want to make a bargain with you and a confession to you; but I may say at once that the one is contingent on the other."

"Then suppose we take the bargain first, Mr Denyer," said Harold coldly, and with a thrill of hope running over his nerves, "and let me say before you begin that

if you are in a position, as I somehow have an idea you are, to throw light upon the mystery of Sir Godfrey's death, and you can satisfy me that you had no active hand in it, I will pay anything in reason for proofs that will stand legal tests, and hold my tongue about the confession as you call it. What is the figure?"

"Permit me to first explain my position, Mr Enstone," he replied, passing his handkerchief over his forehead. "You will not fully understand the circumstances unless I do."

Harold nodded, and he went on,—

"It is a painful thing for a man to have to say of himself, but the truth is that, like a good many other men who have had a hard and unequal fight with adverse fortune, I have been, as I may put it, driven off the lines. In other words, it is the old story, Mr Enstone, the old old story. Unhappy speculations, losses, debts, and then worse. That is how I came into Jenner Halkine's power, and that, too, is why, in obedience to some whim of his crooked intellect—for the man is as mad as a hatter where what he calls the interests of science are concerned—he forced me to give him my passive, only passive, mark you, assistance in the extraordinary, the almost incomprehensible, crime by which he compassed your late father's death."

"Ah! then he did it, did he?" said Harold, between his teeth, forgetting his disgust at the man in his eagerness to learn what he had to say. "Prove that, and name your price."

"I can," he replied, wiping his brow again, "and if you accept my proposal, I will do so within a week. Halkine's original price for my, er —countenance, which was very necessary to him after the fact, was five thousand as soon as he came into his trusteeship, and a salary of a thousand a year for life as legal adviser to the trust, as well as the return of certain documents even more important to me than the money. Now, as you must know, he has drawn the preposterous sum of a million sterling out of the estate. What does that mean? The development of science? Not a bit of it, Mr Enstone. To my mind it means bolt—disappearance of himself and that uncanny friend of his with your father's million—that's what it means."

"And I presume that it also means," interrupted Harold, with a note of contempt in his voice, "that you have come to me because he has refused to give you what you consider to be an adequate share of the said million?" "In a sense, yes," replied the other, awkwardly.

"I firmly believe that he intends to vanish and leave me in the lurch, perhaps after having sent the documents I spoke of to the Home Office, so as to secure my retirement for some years from active life, for I am now satisfied, Mr Enstone, that that man has absolutely no human feelings where the interests of science are concerned. I asked for a twentieth part of his plunder, for it was nothing else, and the return of the documents. He laughed at me and said he could not think of robbing his mistress Science to such an extent for the sake of a lawyer who had been fool enough to get himself into trouble. Of course, I did not show my hand. He little knows that the tables are turned now, and that he is in my power."

"Then from that I presume I may gather," replied Enstone, looking keenly at him, "that your power over him consists in your ability to prove him guilty of—well, we will say, of managing the circumstances which led to my father's suicide. Of course, if you can do that, and at the same time satisfy me that you had no

active part in it, it is merely a question of terms between us. Now, to begin with, what can you do?"

"I can prove," replied the lawyer, after a little pause, "first, that Halkine began to get Sir Godfrey under the influence of drugs at a little supper that we had at the Dower House the evening after Miss Grace Romanes had gone to London."

"Ah, yes," Harold interrupted, with some show of eagerness. "Yes, I have heard about that supper. In fact, I was so much interested that I told Mr Barthgate that I would give a thousand pounds to know what my father had at it."

"I will tell "you," said the lawyer, quietly, "and to show you that I am not trifling with you, I will do that much for nothing. The supper itself was harmless, for we all three had it; but afterwards Sir Godfrey had a small decanter of rare old wine and a box of cigars specially reserved for him. I need scarcely add that both wine and cigars were drugged. Their effect on Sir Godfrey was perfectly marvellous. His personality was totally changed, and very much for the worse."

"But how can this be proved, Mr Denyer," Harold interrupted with impatience. "I mean proof that would satisfy a judge and jury?"

"I took the precaution of securing a sample of the wine and a couple of the cigars. I thought they might come in useful some day. If we conclude an arrangement they will be at your service for analysis. Further, I may tell you, that Halkine went back to the Manor with Sir Godfrey that night, and the next morning at breakfast showed me Sir Godfrey's instructions for his will, written and signed by his own hand. It was certainly not a forgery. How Halkine obtained it I haven't the remotest notion, though it is certain that he possesses some hypnotic sort of power far beyond the average.

"After that, during your absence, he kept Sir Godfrey continuously under the influence of drugs. I was careful to secure samples of the so-called medicines that he was giving him to counteract the bad dreams and fits of nervous depression that he was suffering from. Finally, when Sir Godfrey got so bad that both his own doctor and Sir Nevil Alderson were called in, he continued what he called his 'treatment' by substituting medicines for what they prescribed.

"That is the explanation of the mystery which so puzzled the other two men. They thought that Sir Godfrey was a confirmed victim of the drug habit and had drugs hidden away which he could take without their knowing it. They trusted to Halkine, who was in constant attendance, to stop it, while all the while he was giving him drugs of his own compounding. I had samples of those medicines also."

"Good God!" exclaimed Harold, with an expression of mingled horror and disgust. "What an abominable crime, a thousand times worse than ordinary murder! And you—you who pose before the world as a respectable man —you a husband and a father—knew that this unspeakable villainy was going on under your eyes and never spoke a word or moved a finger to stop it, to save the life of a man who had never harmed you, whose bread you had eaten! Well, I suppose there is no use in telling you just what I think of you. What is your price for these samples, as you call them, and your evidence, for, of course, we must have that?"

Mr Denyer's plump and usually rosy countenance changed to a sallow pallor at the word evidence.

"It would be most dangerous for me to give evidence," he said rather faintly. "You see, the moment that he saw my hand in this, Halkine would at once send

the documents I spoke of to the Home Office, and that would mean, candidly speaking, a prosecution for me, which, I am afraid, might result in penal servitude."

"That, Mr Denyer," replied Harold, coldly, "is absolutely no concern of mine, and, frankly, I cannot pretend to sympathise with you. In fact, as a lawyer, you must know that if I do purchase your assistance, I shall myself be compounding a felony. At the same time, such offences as I presume you are hinting at are treated with such absurd leniency nowadays, that at the very utmost you would not get more than five years, which your good behaviour would, no doubt, bring down to three and a half. Of that, however, you must make up your mind to take your chance. For my part, I absolutely refuse to move another step in the matter unless you are prepared to write out what they call, I believe, a proof of your evidence, and verify it by the usual affidavit. If you do that, I will give you ten thousand down on the day that Halkine is sentenced. If you can get safely out of the country with that before the law lays hold of you, well and good. If you are caught and sent to penal servitude, I will undertake to pay your wife, or anyone you may appoint, a thousand a year for the term of your imprisonment. How will that suit you?"

"It is a generous offer, Mr Enstone," replied the lawyer, "but at the same time the risk on my part is very great. Could you not make it twenty thousand down on Halkine's conviction, and let me take my chance?"

"No, sir," replied Harold, stiffly; "I never make two bargains. Those are my terms. You will take them or leave them according to your own judgment. And now," he went on, rising, "I must be getting back. I shall expect your answer at Brown's hotel by eight o'clock tonight."

"No, no, Mr Enstone," exclaimed the lawyer, also getting up, "there is no need for that; you can have it now. I accept, provided, of course, that you give me through your solicitors a proper indemnity in consideration of the assistance I am to give you in bringing the real criminal to justice. When I have that I will hand over the wine and cigars and medicines and the proof of my evidence properly sworn to."

"Very well," said Enstone, without turning round. "I will see Lawson & Lawson this afternoon."

"A cool hand that Mr Enstone," muttered Mr Denyer to himself as he sat down again to have another cigar and finish the decanter of port. He's as hard as iron too. I'm rather sorry for myself, but I'll hang Halkine if I can. It isn't safe that a man like that should be allowed to run loose. I wonder if he'd have paid up if he'd known. Not he. He and that uncanny friend of his would have mesmerised me or something between them and then put me quietly out of the way. No, I think I've done wisely, even if I have to retire from the world for a few years. At anyrate I shall start again with ten or twelve thousand and a clean slate."

When he left the club he saw a tall spare Hindu, clad in the usual tight-fitting white linen trousers and tightly buttoned frock-coat, walk slowly past the entrance. The white-turbaned head turned and a pair of coal black eyes shot one swift glance at him. Mr Denyer saw the man, but did not notice the glance. There were plenty of Orientals in London just then and he was so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he took no notice of this particular one.

He would have had something else to think about if he had known that he had shadowed him from the moment he left his chambers, that he had watched the meeting outside Jay's and had followed him and Enstone in a hansom to the club. He would have thought still less of his bargain if he could have listened to the; brief conversation which took place about half an hour afterwards in Halkine's flat in Bedford Mansions when Ram Dass, disciple and devoted henchman of Dr Izah-Ramal, had made his report.

"You have done well, Ram Dass," said the Doctor, "and he who deserves well shall receive much. Now go, and tomorrow at midnight bring me here what more you can learn of the movements of these two sahibs; but disguise yourself well, for neither must think he has seen you before."

"The wisest of the wise and the protector of the poor shall be obeyed. He is my father and my mother, and his will is the law of his slave," replied the Hindu with a low salaam.

"That means treachery, Halkine," the Doctor continued as Ram Dass vanished noiselessly. "That unbelieving dog who has eaten your bread and salt will betray you to what these pig-eating Kafirs call their justice."

"I don't see how he can," said Halkine, a little uneasily. I can have him arrested for felony in a week, and I shall do so. He can give nothing but his evidence, his oath against mine, and there's not very much doubt which would be believed. Beside, there is absolutely no proof. All the medical evidence will go to show that Sir Godfrey gave way to the drug habit, and that he committed suicide under the influence of narcotism. That was the verdict at the inquest and there is not an atom of proof in existence to upset it."

"Do not be too sure, my friend," replied the other gently, "remember that the hand of treason is stealthy and that its eyes see in dark places. I think it would have been better to have paid this man, at least with promises, until Ram Dass could have settled his account for him. That would be better than making an exposure and a scandal in the law courts."

"Yes, Izah, now that this has happened, I think you are right, and if the scoundrel really does mean to betray me—he has the means of doing so —well, it is not too late yet for Ram Dass to arrange for a mysterious disappearance. Certainly it will never do to allow a worthless life like that to stand in the way of such splendid schemes as ours."

Chapter XII

A deep, breathless hush had fallen over the crowded court. The leading counsel for the Crown had exercised his right of last reply and had just sat down. Jenner Halkine stood in the dock looking over the sea of heads and faces below him with eyes from which, for the time being, dazed astonishment, not unmingled with fear, had stolen their almost magic power.

Only about a fortnight had passed since he had been arrested without warning as he was leaving his flat after lunch to pay a visit to his friend the adept. He had

been put into a cab and taken to Bow Street. He had been allowed to see no one save his solicitor, and he, it need hardly be said, was not Mr Bonham Denyer, who was just then living with Harold Enstone in a state of semi- confinement, which he accepted because it also meant protection, in the Enstone town house in Eaton Square.

The police-court proceedings had been ominously brief, and had resulted in the inevitable committal, and within ten days he was standing in the dock at the Old Bailey to answer a charge which had taxed all t e ingenuity of the Treasury solicitors and their counsel to formulate anything like correctly. A thousand times he had regretted that he had not instantly taken the pitiless advice of Izah-Ramal and allowed Ram Dass to do his worst on the traitor who had betrayed him, perhaps to the scaffold, certainly to the prison.

The unexpected completeness of the case against him, the existence of Sir Godfrey's diary, the clear proofs of poison furnished by the analysis of the cigars and the wine, which his victim had so much enjoyed at that fatal supper, and of the medicines which, as Sir Nevil Alderson and the family doctor had stated under oath, could not but produce exactly the opposite effect to that which they had prescribed, and finally the examination of Sir Godfrey's remains, exhumed at Harold's request, by order of the Home Secretary—all these made up a damning mass of proof which made conviction of some sort inevitable—and now what would it be? The quick death of the scaffold or the living death of the prison?

He sat back in his chair in the dock, folded his arms and stared with blank eyes across the well of the court at the judge, who was running rapidly through his notes prior to giving his summing up.

A little murmuring sigh and a rustle of garments broke the silence with a note of relief, as the judge finished his rapid survey of the evidence and leant forward on his desk with his long quill pen poised characteristically in his right hand. He turned towards the jury and began in cold clear tones which sounded to Halkine something like the voice of Fate itself.

"Well, gentlemen, I think I may say that the case which has just been concluded is, fortunately for the inhabitants of these islands, practically unique in the annals of our courts. For my own part I must frankly confess that I find a certain amount of difficulty in performing my part of the work in hand, which, as I need hardly tell you, is to place the legal aspect of the matter before you as clearly as possible. It is your business and your duty to judge of the facts as they have been placed before you by the witnesses, and commented upon by the learned counsel for the prosecution and defence.

"In all my experience I cannot remember trying a case which was so difficult, because so abstruse, so uncommon, so far removed from the ordinary beaten tracks of crime—always supposing that you find that crime has been committed—as this one.

"To begin with, however, I think it is only right to relieve the possible apprehensions of the prisoner and his friends by telling you at once that in English law the primary charge of murder cannot be sustained."

As he said this the judge looked across at the dock. Halkine's eyes widened a little and grew brighter, and a faint flush came into his thin, sallow cheeks. A sound of numerous rustling again ran over the court, and Harold Enstone, sitting

in the well of the court beside the senior partner of Lawson & Lawson, gritted his teeth and frowned, for he was not one of those who believe in the earthly forgiveness of sin. Then the judge went on, —

"Fortunately, perhaps, for the prisoner, he is not being tried upon such a charge as this in France. The principal allegation against him is that he made use of certain hypnotic, mesmeric, or other occult powers, of which he is supposed to be possessed, to induce the late Sir Godfrey Enstone to take and continue taking, certain noxious drugs, and further, that he periodically kept him under the influence of these drugs, increasing or decreasing the severity of the treatment as circumstances demanded, until in the end the unfortunate gentleman, driven into mental torment and insanity, committed the fatal act which ended his life.

"Now, gentlemen, as I have said, if that were proved against the prisoner in a French court, he would be, and I must say I think justly, held guilty of murder, and would probably suffer the extreme penalty of the law. The French penal code recognises the use of such powers for unlawful ends as a felony, and if such use results in the death of the victim, the felony becomes the crime of murder. The English law, whether wisely or not, does not recognise these powers at all, and, therefore, I must ask you to dismiss all the allegations as to their use by the accused from your mind."

The judge paused again as though to give the jury time to get hold of what he had been saying. The gentlemen in the box looked at each other in something like bewilderment. Halkine caught the eye of Izah-Ramal and took comfort from his glance, and the audience settled itself into an attitude of complacent expectancy. Then the judge began again, making movements of admonition with the feather of his quill towards the jury box.

"Having done that you will turn your attention to the actual facts of the case as they have been brought out in evidence, and with regard to this part of the case I am glad to be able to say that the law is perfectly clear, save on one point which I will deal with later on. I will put the matter into a concrete form by referring to a very famous case which I have no doubt will be familiar to all of you. It was the case of a married woman who was charged with murdering her husband by the administration of a certain poison. She was sentenced to death, but the death sentence was subsequently commuted to penal servitude for life. I am sorry to say that a very widespread agitation, as ill-advised as it was ill-informed, was got up with the object of securing the convict's absolute release. It was said with some show of reason that if she murdered her husband she ought to have been hung, and if she did not do so she ought to have been set free. It did not seem to strike any of these good people that there was another course. The evidence in the case was most carefully revised by the most competent tribunal that could be assembled. This tribunal found that the facts clearly showed that she had administered poison with intent to kill; but it was not clear that the poison she administered was the actual cause of death. She was therefore given the benefit of the doubt, and the sentence she received was the invariable sentence inflicted for a crime second only to actual murder.

"That, gentlemen, is practically the question which you have to decide in the present case. Did the accused administer these noxious drugs to the deceased in order to bring him so completely under his personal control that, at his

suggestion, he should make an entirely unjust and preposterous will, and did he, in the second place, continue the administration of these drugs until he had driven his unhappy victim into such a condition of mental and moral ruin and collapse that the very suggestion of the word suicide or the idea of it, the giving of a knife or a pistol or a razor, would so act upon a mind temporarily insane as to make the final and fatal act practically inevitable?

"Now as to the facts. It is to some extent unfortunate that the only direct evidence we have had comes from a distinctly tainted source—in fact, from a man who was to all intents and purposes the ally and the accomplice of the accused; a man who, knowing what was going on, was willing to hold his tongue and defeat the ends of justice for a pecuniary bribe; a man, too, who will himself have to answer charges of a serious nature before very long. If, therefore, you find that the prisoner did commit the acts of which he is accused you must still bear in mind the fact that the evidence of the witness Denyer was given, not in the interest of justice, but for the sake of personal revenge and perhaps of personal profit.

"If this man's evidence stood by itself I should ask you to look upon it, as I should do myself, with the gravest suspicion; but it so happens that it is very strongly corroborated by the facts disclosed by the Government analysis, by the medical evidence, and also, strangely enough, by the hand of the dead man himself. Lastly, the post-mortem examination has revealed the fact that the deceased was at the time of his death suffering so acutely from narcotic poisoning that if the treatment had been continued many days longer he would certainly have died from the effects.

"Now, gentlemen," the judge continued, waving his quill more energetically towards the box, "this brings me to the difficult point of the case. If that had happened the charge must have been one of murder and, in the event of the prisoner being found guilty, he would assuredly have been hung. But this unfortunate gentleman took his own life—of that fact there is no doubt—and, therefore, the point to which I am going to ask you to give your closest and most earnest attention is the answer to this question:—

"It has been proved beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt that the mental and bodily health of the deceased was wrecked by the influence of drugs, whether self-administered or not, and according as you believe or disbelieve the evidence that has been put before you, you will find the prisoner guilty or not guilty of the charge of administering those drugs. But now comes the second and more difficult question which you have to answer. Would the deceased have committed the act which terminated his life had he been in his right senses and in his usual health? If you say yes to that question the case for the prosecution practically falls to the ground, since it is not an offence in English law for a duly qualified physician, such as the accused is, to administer even such drugs to a patient unless an evil intent can be proved. But if you answer the question in the negative, then the case assumes a very serious aspect, since it is quite beyond belief that a man of the high professional and scientific attainments of the accused could possibly have administered these drugs without a full knowledge of what their effect would be. If, therefore, you find that he caused the deceased to take these drugs unknown to himself you must also find that he did so with the intention of driving him into insanity and causing him to commit suicide at his suggestion, and in that case

you will find the prisoner guilty of the most serious offence known to the law save one. You will now be good enough to consider your verdict, and in doing so I must ask you to dismiss the question of the will entirely from your mind, save in so far as it is connected with the main charge. With the validity or otherwise of the will this court has absolutely nothing to do."

The jury filed out of the box and retired to the little room in which so many human fates have been decided. Halkine had already given up all hope. His defence had been necessarily a very weak one in spite of the great ability of his counsel. The analysis of the cigars and wine and medicine, Sir Godfrey's diary and the result of the post-mortem had forced the judge, in spite of his admirable impartiality, to sum up dead against him. He had left these possibilities entirely out of his calculations—in fact, he had not even considered them as such.

In about twenty minutes the jurymen began to come back, the buzz of conversation in the court ceased and the audience settled itself to listen to the words of Fate. Halkine's eyes wandered over the Box as they took their places, some of them looked at him furtively and half shyly, and he knew what that meant. Then his glance sought that of Izah-Ramal, and the brilliant blue eyes under the dark brows flashed back a signal which he read as meaning,—

"You are doomed—yet hope!"

When the jury were in their places the Clerk of Arraigns rose and asked the usual question:—

"Gentlemen, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are," replied the foreman.

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty of the charge of administering noxious drugs with intent to do bodily harm?"

"We find him guilty," came the ominous reply.

"Do you find that the late Sir Godfrey Enstone committed suicide while under the influence of these drugs, and that his suicide was the result of their effects?"

"We are fully agreed upon that point also," was the decisive answer.

"Then that amounts to a verdict of guilty on both counts?"

The foreman bowed and sat down.

"Let the prisoner stand up," now came in clear, hard tones from the judge's lips, and again the ominous pen-feather began to move this time towards the dock. Halkine stood up and faced his fate, grey-white, but firm-lipped, steady-eyed and composed.

"Jenner Halkine," the judge began, "after a patient and careful trial you have been convicted, and, I must say, most justly convicted, of a crime unparalleled in its diabolical ingenuity and its pitiless cruelty. Morally, though I am sorry to say not legally, you are guilty of something worse than murder. Fortunately for you, but unfortunately for the interests of justice, the hitherto unheard-of crime of procuring self-murder is not known in English law, otherwise the sentence which I am about to pass upon you would be the richly deserved one of death. It has been clearly proved that you possess talents of a very high order, great learning and possibly certain powers which are given to few mortals. You have used them, in the light of full knowledge, to commit, as you thought, with safety to yourself, the crime which I am glad to say has no parallel in the history of wrong-doing. Leniency in such a case as yours would be an insult to justice. I cannot send you

to the scaffold, but it is my duty to protect society against such a miscreant as you have proved yourself to be; therefore it is my duty to pass one of the heaviest sentences that the law allows, and that is that you be kept in penal servitude for the term of your natural life."

The judge gathered his papers together, Jenner Halkine took a last look at the world he was leaving, a warder touched him on the shoulder and he turned away to the top of the steps leading to the tomb of the prison, and while the clerk was calling out the next case most of the audience rose to go to lunch and talk over the most famous case of the year.

Chapter XIII

Penal servitude for life!

Banishment absolute and perpetual from the busy world of men with all its possibilities of joy and sorrow, success and failure, great daring and high enterprise, its glory and its shame, its light and its darkness, its life and its death—all, in short, that makes existence endurable, all that nerves the man who has succeeded to work for yet greater successes, all that encourages the man who has failed to try yet again and again for the prize which, by one chance or another, has so far eluded his grasp.

But this was the negation of everything. It was life without the living —and death without the dying.

Penal servitude for life!

What did it mean, even to the most ordinary of mortals? Imagine a man standing on the green border of a desert without any other horizon than the ever-moving line upon which the ocean of sand and the cloudless sky seem to meet. The man is doomed to leave the green border behind him and to take his way across the desert towards that line which he knows full well he will never reach. Some day his strength will give out and his footsteps fail. He will stumble on a mile or two further and then he will lurch forward and drop, and where he drops he will die, and the desert scavengers will pick his bones clean and the sun will dry them till they melt into powder, and no man shall know the place where he last lay down to rest.

That is a physical likeness of penal servitude for life. But the moral wilderness is wider and more desolate than any Sahara or Gobi on earth. It has no limits and no resting-places, sleeping and waking its dreary horrors, its insatiable hunger and its unquenchable thirst are for ever present. The journey across it may be twenty or thirty or forty years long; but every step of it has to be traversed at a measured speed which may neither be quickened nor slackened. Every act of every hour is regulated by a power outside the pilgrim's will. To look back is remorse, to look forward is despair.

There are only two forms of release to be hoped for, death or hopeless disease; but should the disease be mental it means only the exchange of one prison for

another—the convict prison for the criminal lunatic asylum, a physical paradise and a mental hell, out of which only one door opens—the grave and gate of death.

The ordinary criminal of mediocre intellect is usually crushed into stupor during the first few weeks of his solitary probation by the tremendous weight of the doom that has fallen upon him, but to a man like Jenner Halkine, with vast stores of learning at his command and a vivid and vulturous imagination to prey upon them until memory became a torment and a curse, no such merciful stupor of despair could come—a despair—keener a thousand times than the sullen surrender of the average criminal animal to a force that is too strong for him.

It was as though the wanderer over the desert of sand and rock were to try and keep himself alive by eating his own flesh. The intellect preyed upon itself. It devoured the memories of the past, while its handmaiden, Imagination, painted in blinding colours the hideous differences between the past and the present. The process, perhaps consoling, and even entertaining at first, would go on month after month and year after year through the dull squalid courses of labour and the few half-hours of leisure still more hateful to such a man.

Then at length the all-devouring Intellect would turn upon itself, and when the process once began there could only be one of two ends— insanity or imbecility. There was no other hope save a possible chance of suicide—the same death to which he had sent his friend and his host. Even this he thought of with a shudder, although he had watched Sir Godfrey go down the path that he had marked out for him to his death without a quiver of a nerve. But his own self-murder in a felon's cell appeared a very different thing indeed. For him in very truth the mills of God had begun to grind. They grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.

Jenner Halkine had known this old Spanish saying by heart for a good many years, and he had taken it only as an eloquent condensation of the universal law of Fate. Now, sitting in his lonely little cell, looking out over the featureless desert which spread before him, and backward over the luxuriant jungle of mental and physical delights which had once been his happy hunting- grounds, the words had quite a different meaning for him, and the memory gf them was an added burden which he never could lay aside until the merciful hand of Death was laid upon him—even then, if there was any truth in the lore that he had learnt from the lips of Izah-Ramal, such a release would only be an ending and a beginning, a death and a rebirth in which the sins of the fathers would be visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation—and perhaps to the fortieth.

It so happened that in another cell in the same gallery of the prison only a few yards away Mr Bonham Denyer was also serving his nine months' probation preparatory to the five years' penal servitude to which he had been sentenced for the fraudulent practices disclosed by the documents which Halkine had sent to the Home Office as soon as he became certain of his treachery.

They had met and recognised each other in the exercise-yard and had exchanged glances more eloquent than the words which they were forbidden to speak.

The sight of his accomplice and betrayer had acted like a tonic on Dr Halkine. He was puzzled and annoyed by the cheerful almost jaunty air which the ex-solicitor wore in such strange contrast with his prison dress. He did not know that he was being paid at the rate of about three thousand a year for the degradation

which had already ceased to affect him, and for the light labour and easy, healthful conditions of what is called, by a polite legal fiction, penal servitude. For him there was no limitless desert to cross, only a narrow strip, on the other side of which he would enter free of debt and danger and with several thousand pounds in his pocket.

But if he could have seen what Halkine's eyes saw as they looked down so persistently at the narrow flagged pathway over which they took their dreary hour's tramp morning and afternoon, day after day, week after week, month after month. If he could have seen that, as Halkine longed with a fierce desire to make him see it, every waking hour of his sentence would have been filled, not with complacent reflections upon his coming prosperity, but with a haunting horror that would never have left him by day, and would have made his dreams hideous by night, for what Halkine saw was the sombre figure of Ram Dass waiting, as it were, outside the prison doors till they should open to let Bonham Denyer come forth once more into the world of men—and then, even while he was rejoicing in his new-found freedom, the stealthy shape would dog his every footstep, the brilliant black eyes would watch his every movement, the softly treading feet would follow him in all his goings and comings until the hour and the opportunity came and the roomal of the strangler would be cast about his neck and his life would go out in a few quick, choking sobs.

There is no antidote to despair like the hope of revenge; and from his first meeting with his betrayer in the prison-yard Halkine began to live a new life. He began to learn that there was hope even for the°hopeless, and in contemplation of the ghastly doom which he had prepared for the man, to whom he owed his own fate, his spirits rose and with them his powers gradually came back to him.

One morning when his probation was nearly approaching its end he felt his mental forces so far restored that he determined, even at the risk of punishment, to make a trial of them. The half-past five bell rang and he turned out of his hammock, dressed, rolled up his blankets, and stowed the hammock with the mechanical quickness and precision that the discipline of his durance had taught him. Then he set out his polished tin utensils ready to receive the tasteless breakfast which only hunger made him eat, and stood to attention waiting the opening of his cell door.

Presently he heard the jingling of keys along the corridor and the rattling of the locks as the spring bolts were shot back. As the now familiar sounds came nearer and nearer he braced himself for the effort he was about to make. The key rattled into the lock of his door, it swung back and the warder looked in.

"That's right," he said kindly as he ran an approving eye over the tidy cell, "always keep yourself smart and up to time and it'll make things a lot easier for you afterwards. Get your things ready now and sweep out. Hey, there, what are you looking at me like that for? Look the other way I tell you. I won't have it; its against—against—against—"

His voice faltered away into a whisper, Halkine's eyes had caught his. They seemed to grow bigger and bigger, to come nearer and nearer until they came together, and all he could see was one great luminous eye staring through his into the depths of his soul. Then he heard a far-away voice, gentle and low, but very distinct saying,—

"Yes, I know what you were going to say, against the regulations— well, never mind about regulations just now, I want to talk to you."

"You know that prisoners mustn't—" the warder began feebly and then stopped.

"Not allowed to talk," repeated the voice; "yes, but you will allow me to talk, won't you? and you will oblige me by shutting that door 1"

The last words came quick and sharp and had a ring of authority in them. The eye came closer, and something like a huge hand moved swiftly to and fro before his own eyes. He turned mechanically and shut the door.

"That's right," said the voice, "thank you. I'm glad you understand me. I will not keep you, because that might lead to unpleasantness for both of us. Now, what is your name and who are you?"

"Robert Jackson, warder of the second class," replied the man, looking up and speaking like a automaton.

"You are no such thing," replied the voice, sharply. "Your name is Robert Jackson, but remember you are my body-servant—Jenner Halkine's body-servant, and as such bound to obey his orders. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," replied the warder in a dull, impersonal sort of voice.

"Very well," replied the voice, sharply. "Now tear a page out of your notebook and give me your pencil. Make haste or they'll be wondering what you're doing here all this time."

Warder Jackson took out his notebook and his pencil and committed a very serious breach of the regulations—a breach which would have certainly got him disrated and probably dismissed with a bonus of three months' imprisonment—with the fumbling, wooden motions of a man half asleep. Halkine took the paper and pencil from him and said,—

"N6w open the door and go about your work; but don't forget that you are Jenner Halkine's servant."

"No, sir, 1 won't forget," he murmured, touching his cap mechanically. Then the eye disappeared, a cool hand touched his forehead, and the next moment he woke to see the prisoner standing to attention at the other end of the cell. He opened the door and went out, feeling a little dazed and with a slight pain at the back of his head.

While he was eating his solitary breakfast that morning Halkine wrote in his neat, clear hand on the leaf from the notebook the following letter: —

"BONHAM DENVER (traitor),—For the sake of money you have condemned me to a living death. You have destroyed all the hopes and aspirations and ambitions of a life that might have been of inestimable service to humanity. For this you yourself shall die. When the prison door opens for you, as you hope they shall never open for me, Ram Dass will be standing beside them waiting for you. You may not see him, but he will be there. Other eyes, too, will watch you, other powers which you know nothing of will encompass you till the hour of vengeance comes and then you will die. You shall think of this every hour of every day, and in your dreams the avenger shall stand beside your bed. For you the day of release shall bring no hope, but dread. You shall not live to enjoy the price of your treachery. This is your sentence of death. You have yet years to live under the shadow, and they shall be years of fear

and torment to you—and of hope to me. Your suffering shall be my delight. It may drive you mad, but I hope it won't, for I wish you to taste every horror of the slowly-approaching doom that shall infallibly be yours."

At dinner-time the closely-folded slip of paper reached Mr Bonham Denyer by the obedient hands of Warder Jackson, and when Halkine met the man who was now his victim in the exercise-yard that afternoon he saw at a glance that his vengeance had already begun to work. The air of cheerful patience and resignation was gone; the head was bowed and the steps had lost all their spring. The rosy face had gone grey in a few hours, and his eyes that had looked out straight and steady in the morning were now shifty and furtive, looking slantingly this way and that as though they were already seeking the spectre that was to come nearer day by day until it took actual human form and the upraised arm of vengeance fell.

"I am avenged already?" said Halkine to himself, as he returned to his cell after hunting his victim with his eyes during the whole exercise hour. "Sentence of certain death with four and a half years of prison life to think about it? Even I can't say that I envy him."

Chapter XIV

Although he rejoiced greatly in the possession of his refound powers and although the drab monotony of his prison life was almost transfigured by the glowing speculation in which he indulged as to the possible use to which he could put them, Jenner Halkine was far too prudent to make indiscreet use of them. For the present, therefore, he contented himself with keeping Warder Jackson, who happened to be a peculiarly sensitive subject, more or less completely under his control.

By this means he secured many luxuries and privileges which are not mentioned in His Majesty's prison regulations. The miserable diet was supplemented by such portable delicacies as potted meats, jam, sardines and anchovies, with now and then a half pint of wine or brandy, and, perhaps best of all, a newspaper.

It was in one of these that he read an account of the action which Harold Enstone had taken to set aside the will and abolish his own trusteeship. He had never read anything more anxiously in his life than he read that half column, inch by inch, as opportunity offered, but when he had got hold of all the facts he smiled as he hid the paper away until he could return it to his henchman, and said to himself,—

"That is all very good. The million is ours, and Izah will keep faith to me even to death—and who knows, but that between us we may some day find a way to open this living tomb."

What he had actually learnt was that Harold's action had been successful so far as the actual estate and personal property was concerned. His own trusteeship and that of Izah-Ramal had been declared null and void on the ground of improper

influence, and the Court had given everything back to Harold as Sir Godfrey's sole, lawful heir. But over the million that had already been drawn out of the estate the Court had no power.

It is one of the peculiarities of English law that while it can punish the thief it cannot compel him to disgorge his plunder. No further penalty could be inflicted on a man already sentenced to penal servitude for life, and so Harold Enstone had to submit to the loss of the million with what grace he could, and Izah-Ramal guarded it safely, and watched interest being piled upon interest, until the day that he hoped for should come.

One day, about a week before Halkine's probation came to an end—he was to be transferred to the great convict prison at Nethermoor, within whose grey granite walls he was to pass the rest of his days—a. serious mischance befell him. Warder Jackson was struck down by typhoid fever, and in his delirium he raved about convicts with awful eyes which saw into his brain and waving hands that blinded him and a voice, that he could not disobey, which commanded him to forsake his duty and do all manner of unlawful things.

It so happened that both the governor and the doctor of the prison were men of considerable enlightenment and intelligence, and when they came to put their heads together they arrived at the conclusion that Warder Jackson's story—which he told in connected form after he recovered his reason—tallied so completely with the strange allegations which had been made at Halkine's trial that, at the very least, the matter was worth careful investigation.

Without saying anything to Halkine the governor had Denyer before him in his private room and told him that if he would speak plainly and honestly about the supposed occult powers of his late accomplice the marks which he would lose for receiving his letter would be restored to him and nothing more would be said of the matter. Naturally Denyer spoke quite freely, and he also took the opportunity of asking leave to petition the Home Office for protection against Dr Izah-Ramal and Ram Dass. The leave was granted, not so much for his sake as for the reason that the authorities were not sorry to have a specific excuse for keeping an eye on Halkine's associates, who. were probably also his confederates, since the vanished million was undoubtedly in their possession.

His story of the strange powers which he had seen Halkine exercise on both Sir Godfrey and his niece before her marriage tallied exactly with Warder Jackson's confession; but when the interview was over the doctor said to the governor,—

"In my opinion this is distinctly a case that it will be well worth while, both for us and the Nethermoor people, to watch carefully, and if possible without exciting this man's suspicions. I know Dr Saunderson at Nethermoor very well, and if you agree I will write him a description of the case as far as I can."

"Yes," replied the governor. "You might as well do that at once, doctor, and while you are at it, I'll pay a little surprise visit to our friend with the wonderful eyes and see if I can make anything of him."

"Take care he doesn't make something that you don't want to be of you, sir," replied the doctor, seriously. "It's only the plain truth that when a man really does possess this mysterious power, whatever it is, there's scarcely any limit to it. For instance, I've seen a man in the Infirmary at the Salpetriere, singing a comic song

while his leg was being amputated without anaesthetics and simply under hypnotic suggestion.

"I quite believe it," said the governor. "I've read descriptions myself of the most extraordinary cases described by the very best authorities. I'll take good care he doesn't fix me with his basilisk gaze, although I hardly think he'd dare to try any tricks on me. A prison with a hypnotised governor would be rather too Gilbertian. What on earth would our respected commissioners think of it?"

The said commissioners would have been just as much astounded as the governor was if they could have accompanied him on his visit to Halkine's cell. It so happened that the chaplain, who, like all prison chaplains, worked rather for the love of his work than for a living, was visiting the distinguished prisoner that afternoon. He was making yet another of the many earnest efforts he had already made to make some impression upon Halkine's callous scepticism, and to bring him to a juster sense of the fate which his misdeeds had brought upon him.

When the governor entered the cell he was amazed to find the Rev. Edward Cartwright standing bolt upright in the corner behind the door, his arms held stiffly down his sides and his eyes staring straight at Halkine who was sitting at the other end of the cell by the little shelf that served for a table, calmly dictating a letter which the chaplain was to write for him to his friend Izah-Ramal.

The reverend gentleman was just repeating in a mechanical, automatic voice the last paragraph of the letter when the governor swung the door to behind him, and exclaimed,—

"Good Heavens, Mr Cartwright! what on earth is the matter? And you, Halkine, why don't you stand up?

In his anger at the breach of discipline he forgot the doctor's caution and stared straight into the luminous, magnetic eyes. In an instant they had gripped his and held them. The chaplain's eyelids drooped, his voice died away in a murmur, and he seemed to go to sleep, standing as rigid as a sleep- walker.

"Because, my dear sir, I prefer to sit down," replied Halkine, in slow, musical, and yet intensely penetrating, tones. "It is you who shall stand. You had better do as you are told," he went on, as the governor made a struggling movement towards him. "You know, if I were to tell you to stand on your head, you'd have to do it."

"Confound you, you scoundrel, I'll—"

"Take care, sir, take care," said the voice again, as the eyes grew darker and bigger and seemed to come closer. "You are a somewhat apoplectic subject, and it would be very awkward if you had a fit in my cell with the door locked. They might think I had killed you, and I wouldn't like to do that. Now listen, I understand from the chaplain that Mr Denyer has made a confession about me, and that there is some idea of punishing me for causing him to break the regulations by reducing my diet and keeping me in solitary confinement.

"You will do nothing of the kind. My probation is nearly up, and I've had about enough of this sort of thing. You will credit me with the full amount of marks, and you will write this evening to the governor at Nethermoor, where I hear I am to be transferred, informing him that my conduct has been as good as my health has been delicate, and that you therefore suggest that I shall be treated with every consideration. If you don't do this, and show me the letter before you post it, I shall keep you under my influence as 1 did Jackson, and compel you to do

something that shall insure your dismissal. Do you promise on your honour as a gentleman?"

The governor struggled hard to say what he wanted to say, but it was no good. Halkine rose and came close to him. He felt his hands grip his temples, and saw the two eyes merge into one, as Warder Jackson and the chaplain had seen them. Then he heard his own voice saying,—

"Yes, I promise on my honour."

"Very well," said the voice, quickly. "Now you may unlock that door. Mr Cartwright," he went on, passing his hand upward over the chaplain's forehead, "come, it's time you woke up. Remember that you also have a letter to write for me. You'd better go and do it, and be careful not to forget anything I have told you."

The chaplain's eyes opened and he replied in a dreamy voice,—

"Oh, no, I shall certainly not forget; I remember it perfectly."

"And when you have written it and posted it, understand that then, and not till then, you are to forget it. Now you may go."

The governor unlocked the door and went out with the chaplain, leaving Halkine sitting by his little shelf and laughing softly.

The two letters were written forthwith, and Mr Cartwright, who was a man of highly nervous temperament, and much more sensitive than the governor, brought them both back to the cell at supper-time in their stamped, directed envelopes. They were both very strange communications, but the one to Dr Izah- Ramal, although more than twice the length of the other, was to the ordinary eye totally unintelligible, The chaplain had written it mechanically, just as he had learnt it from Halkine's lips. If he could have read it when his faculties were under his own control, he would have seen that it was quite the most amazing letter that a chaplain of one of His Majesty's prisons could possibly have written. The master-prisoner approved them both, and the chaplain took them to the nearest post-office outside the prison and despatched them.

"It's amazing, and if we didn't know that such things are possible, it would be absolutely incredible. Of course, it's perfectly easy now to see what the judge was really thinking about when he told the jury that English law took no account of this occult or superhuman power, or whatever it is. If it had done, of course, this fellow would have been hung long ago, as I think he ought to have been under any circumstances. Now, you see, we have two living proofs that Halkine really does possess this power, just as Charcot and Ribot and a dozen others in France, Germany and Italy have it. The only difference is that they used it for good, while this fellow used it for evil."

"That's all very well, doctor," said the governor, who had asked him and the chaplain to come to his house and smoke a pipe after supper and talk over the strange doings of the day, "that's all very well,; but granted everything that you say, there remains the fact that I have written and posted a perfectly ridiculous letter—I mean, of course, ridiculous from the official point of view—to the governor of Nethermoor—a letter which I can't contradict now without giving everything away; and what is almost infinitely worse than that, Mr Cartwright, than whom, as you know, His Majesty has no more earnest or loyal servant, has, under this infernal influence, or whatever it is, committed such a grievous breach of the

King's regulations that nothing could save him, or myself either for the matter of that, from instant dismissal and possibly imprisonment.

"Good Heavens," he continued, rising from his chair with a jerk, "just imagine what would have happened if we had had one of the directors or the visiting magistrates in the prison this afternoon. Phew!—I daren't even think of it!"

"Nor I," said the chaplain, raising his light blue eyes and looking across the table at the governor.

"Really, it is too amazing and, in another sense, quite too ludicrous for —well, we will say an official report."

"Heavens alive," exclaimed the governor, "put that in an official report? No, sir, not for anything! And now, doctor, you know more about this sort of thing than we do—what is your advice?"

The doctor took two or three pulls at his pipe and a sip at his glass of port. He watched the blue wreaths curling up towards the ceiling and melting away in the smoke-laden haze of the room, and then he took his pipe out of his mouth and said,—

"Well, sir, as regards what we may call the breaches of discipline, the harm is done and, therefore, the less said about the affair the better. Personally, I think that this is a part of a scheme of revenge that Halkine has been hatching for weeks, possibly for months, past, and if it all came out there wouldn't be a more pleased prisoner in durance vile than he. As regards his next move, my leave will be coming on just then, and I should like you to give me permission to accompany the jailers with him to Nethermoor. I can explain it very much better to Saunderson over a glass of his North Country toddy than I could by writing. And, meanwhile," he went on, putting his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat and taking out a mask and a pair of dark goggles such as motor drivers wear, "I think it would be as well, in case other accidents might happen, if our friend of the wonderful eyes were, as one might say, put in blinkers."

"Um—a very good idea, indeed, doctor," said the governor; "but I'm afraid the regulations won't allow us to force him to wear them."

"Oh, hang the regulations," said the doctor, impatiently. You'll have to take the law into your own hands this time, sir, and if our patient objects let him complain to the directors, and then let them come and interview him. I shouldn't wonder if we found them sweeping out Halkine's cell five minutes afterwards. At anyrate, as this comes somewhat into my province, if you'll use the physical force, if necessary, I'll take the professional responsibility."

"Very well, doctor," said the governor; "I'm agreeable to that. If there's any trouble about it you and I will share it, and Mr Cartwright here will help us out."

The chaplain nodded and smiled. And so it came about that Jenner Halkine, in spite of many protests, made the journey from London to Nethermoor masked and goggled like the driver of a racing motor car.

Chapter XV

"Well, my dear Arnold, I must confess that this is the most extraordinary case I have ever come across in my experience," said Dr Saunderson, when his colleague from London had given him a detailed history of the strange case of Jenner Halkine, convict and seeming miracle-worker. "The mask and the goggles were a good idea, I must say, bat I'm thinking that we'll have trouble with them for all that. You see, we've no right under the regulations to compel a prisoner to look at the world through coloured glass for the rest of his days, and a highly-educated man like this would be the very one to put a complaint nicely before the directors or the visiting magistrates, and you know what they are. Then you see there's the difficulty about this story of yours. I needn't tell you that I believe every word of it, though I think the governor wants a little more convincing, but how are we going to get a yarn like that through the skulls of county magistrates, even if you could confess that this fellow has made you and the chaplain and the governor at your own place, to say nothing of the warder, break the King's regulations all to pieces?"

"Yes, I am afraid you're right there," replied the other. "Naturally, it wouldn't do to say anything about that. There would be no end of a row if it ever got before the commissioners. No, I'm afraid, now that you've got him here, you will just have to treat him as an ordinary prisoner until he works another of his infernal miracles on somebody, and then, of course, the governor can report the matter regularly and get permission for the goggles. Meanwhile, we'll try them, at anyrate, until our friend makes a formal complaint."

Curiously enough, however, and considerably to Dr Saunderson's surprise, Halkine made no objection whatever to wearing the unsightly mask and spectacles. He had learnt the lessons of his probation well, and his conduct was practically perfect. The other prisoners and the warders were allowed to believe that he was suffering from a disease of the eyes which made any bright light very painful to him, and he did not undeceive them. He kept absolutely to himself, and in a very few weeks he had won recognition as quite the model prisoner of the establishment.

His custodians would, however, have been greatly surprised to learn that, although he was not yet entitled to receive or write letters, he was, nevertheless, in constant communication with the outside world.

One of his principal occupations was gardening and light farm work, for which his intimate knowledge of botany and the science of agriculture made him exceedingly useful, and his eyes, in spite of the goggles, detected certain marks on trees, little arrangements of pebbles and broken twigs, and strange characters drawn on flat stones and cakes of clay that nobody else saw. It never struck anyone either to connect the visit of a mild—mannered Hindoo barrister, who was studying the prison system of England, with prisoner No. 777; and yet somehow he became possessed of a tiny ball of white paper which he unrolled in his cell and which then took the form of half-a-dozen cigarette papers covered with Persian characters. He read them carefully as opportunity offered, and when he had quite mastered their contents he swallowed them one by one.

Thus the autumn grew into the winter of the second year of his imprisonment, and the time approached for the execution of a scheme such as had never before been conceived by a dweller within prison walls. No 777's behaviour had been so

uniformly perfect that the governor, who had always looked with a certain amount of scepticism on the extraordinary story that Dr Arnold had brought with him, began to come to the conclusion that there was probably a good deal of unconscious self-deception mixed up with the matter.

He discussed the matter with Dr Saunderson, who held firmly to his original opinion, and then in an evil moment he decided, with that obstinacy which sometimes characterises the military officer in a civil position, to test the truth or falsehood of the story himself.

It so happened that Halkine suggested an excellent opportunity for doing this. Autumn merges rapidly into winter on the bleak slopes of Nethermoor, and one day, when the first snows had fallen, he received a request for an interview from him.

The next day was the one on which he was accustomed to hear reports and complaints in his office, and when the other cases were disposed of he ordered Halkine to be brought before him. The request that he had to make was a very simple and natural one, and it was made so modestly and respectfully that Colonel Marshall did not find any difficulty in granting it.

He had suffered for years from a slight weakness of the bronchial tubes, said No. 777, and as gardening and farming were now at a standstill, he asked that he might be given indoor employment, even if it were in solitude. Further, the constant action of the coloured rays on his eyes and the absence of natural light were enfeebling his eyesight. Wherefore, if the governor still thought it necessary for him to wear the glasses in public, he would esteem it a great favour if he could be allowed to work in solitude and be relieved of them for a certain number of hours a day.

Now it chanced that the telephonic communication between the governor's house and the prison had got out of order and wanted thorough overhauling, and no one was better qualified to do the work than the almost universally accomplished convict 777. So the governor, in spite of a somewhat strong protest from Dr Saunderson, determined to have his own way and give the job to him.

The same afternoon he was taken to the house under the charge of a warder, as the regulations prescribed, and the goggles were removed. He went about his work on the instrument quietly and deftly, keeping his eyes fixed on what he was doing. Warder Plunkett, his guardian, Was a good officer and an excellent disciplinarian, but he was practically devoid of imagination, and, therefore even more sceptical as to the supposed powers of No. 777 than Colonel Marshall himself was.

The first instrument to be operated upon was the telephone in the governor's bedroom, by means of which he could be roused any time of the night in case of any emergency arising in the prison. This was connected with all the principal galleries and the infirmary as well as with the house which Dr Saunderson occupied some little distance away, on the opposite side of the principal entrance gate.

Halkine took the framework down, examined it and found a little fault in one of the wires which was not properly insulated.

"I think this is the fault with this instrument, sir," he said to the warder, as^he heated a piece of gutta percha over the flame of the spirit lamp. He rolled it out

between his fingers, applied it to the wire, and went on as he replaced the instrument against the wall,—

"Now, will you kindly see if you can ring the doctor up? I think this peg is his connection—yes. Now, if you please. And it would be better if you would keep your eyes steadily fixed on this little circle, that is what is called the diaphragm. It is a little sheet of very thin iron and it vibrates as you speak against it. That is how the electric wires convey the sounds of your voice to the receiver at the other end. Yes—that's it. Look very steadily at it, please, so that you can tell me if it moves. Allow me for a moment. That is not quite in the proper position, I see."

As he shifted the instrument a little he passed his hand two or three times before the warder's eyes. When he saw that they were fixed on the diaphragm, he took out the connecting peg, looked keenly into his eyes for a few moments, made the connection with the governor's offices in the prison, and said, with a snap of authority in his voice,—

"Now, sir, be good enough to ask the governor to come to this room as soon as he is at liberty."

"I thought you said the doctor just now," said Mr Plunkett in a voice curiously unlike his own, and trying hard but unsuccessfully to get his eyes away from that little disc of black iron.

"It doesn't matter which," replied Halkine, with yet a little more authority in his voice. "I only want to try the connection. There, now, you ought to be connected. Kindly ask the governor if he can hear you, but don't take your eyes off the diaphragm. I want you to tell me if it moves."

The warder did as he was told, wondering in a dull kind of way what was happening. The reply came back that the governor was in his office.

"Governor says he's there," said Plunkett, in a dull tone.

"Very well," replied Halkine. "Now tell him that he is wanted here immediately—here in this room."

"But he isn't," said Plunkett, sullenly. "I don't want him and you have no right—"

"Never mind about rights, Mr Plunkett," came the sharp reply. "Be good enough to do as I ask you. Has that diaphragm moved yet?"

"No—sir—no—it hasn't—not as I have seen."

"No? Well, then, perhaps we'd better wait until it does before you call the governor. Just, say, ' All right; we are trying connections, sir.'

The warder repeated the words as a phonograph might have reproduced them and without taking his eyes off the iron disc. Presently the words spoken in the governor's voice,—

"All right, I can hear perfectly," came over the wire.

"Governor says he can hear all right, sir," said the warder, wondering dimly how it was that their positions had been, as it were, reversed.

Halkine walked to the window and looked out. He saw that it had begun to snow heavily.

"That will do, Mr Plunkett," he said. "It's getting near supper-time. I think you'd better conduct me back to the prison."

The officer tried hard, but he could neither get his eyes away from the fatal disc nor move a muscle in his body. He just stood there, leaning slightly forward and

staring with fixed eyes at the instrument. Then Halkine went up to him and measured him with his eye. He was almost exactly the same size as himself, but this he had already arranged so by choosing the day on which he knew that this particular man would be on duty. He stepped to the door and gently locked it. Then he commenced a rapid hunt through the room. He found the governor's razors and shaving tackle and shaved himself clean. This done, he went to Mr Plunkett, put his hands on either side of his temples, turned his head round and stared into his eyes fixedly for two or three minutes. His eyelids fell half over his eyes and stopped there. Then he passed his hands over his limbs and they became supple again.

"Attention!"

The warder, an old soldier, stiffened up, and he went on with a good imitation of the military tone of command:—

"Sergeant Plunkett, you have got the wrong uniform on. Take it off and put this one on instead. Quick, now, boots and everything. I'm surprised that you should appear on parade in such an extraordinary rig. Think yourself lucky if it doesn't cost you your stripes."

The officer obeyed in a wooden sort of way, and at the same time Halkine stripped off his convict garb and threw the things towards him.

In two or three 1 minutes the change was completed, and then Halkine ordered him to sit down, took a pair of scissors from the governor's dressing- table and very carefully clipped off the moustache and chin-beard. Then he melted some more of the gutta percha to a fluid, mixed it with a little powdered resin, smeared it over his upper lip and chin, and with wonderful neatness transplanted the warder's moustache and beard to his own face, leaving him in the scrubby condition of a clipped convict. He put on the peaked cap, looked at himself in the glass and waited until the gutta percha and resin, which were rather too hot to be comfortable, cooled and solidified. When he was quite satisfied with his disguise he turned to the convict-clad warder and said,—

"Now, then, Halkine, the bell will go in a few minutes. It's time we were getting back. Come along."

Mr Plunkett rose mechanically to attention accepting the other name without question. Halkine fastened the mask and goggles on him, unlocked the door and marched him out. He took him back into the prison, saw him safely into his own cell and locked him in. Then he strolled quietly up through the prison- yard, walked out through the gates with a nod to the gate-keeper and in a few minutes more had disappeared amidst the thickly driving snow.

He had timed matters so that a good two hours elapsed before the audacious trick that he had played was discovered. Meanwhile, the early dusk of the northern winter afternoon was deepened by the ever-increasing clouds of snow-flakes, which fell quickly and softly, out of the universal grey mist which covered the heavens. The prison bell was rung, and the telegraph set to work, but any idea of search that night was madness, and so the infuriated governor and the bewildered officials could do nothing more than wire descriptions of the escaped convict to all the surrounding police stations, and wait with what patience they could command till morning.

But when morning came, and the search parties were preparing to set out, a greengrocer's cart came labouring and jolting through the snow to the door of the prison, and in it lay the body of Jenner Halkine, which a shepherd, trying to rescue some of his sheep that had been snowed up in a pen, had found almost covered with snow and frozen stiff by the side of the old Roman road across the moors about five miles east from the prison.

Dr Saunderson examined the body and pronounced life extinct. The usual inquest was held in the afternoon and, in accordance with custom, the fact of death was telegraphed to his sister and his niece, so that they might claim the body and arrange for the funeral, if they chose to do so.

The following day Jenner Halkine's sister, accompanied by his old friend Dr Izah-Ramal, having travelled by the sleeping car train from London, reached the prison with a closed carriage and a hearse containing an empty coffin, which they had procured from the neighbouring town of Nethermoor, went through the formalities necessary to claiming the body, and took it away to the railway station.

Chapter XVI

"What a very lovely woman! Who is she?"

"That, my dear Siemens! Why, do you mean to tell me that you have been back from the wilds of Central Australia all this time without getting to know the beautiful Mrs Enstone, as everyone in London calls her except the people, mostly feminine, who have reasons of their own for wishing that she was not quite so beautiful?"

"What Enstone?" said the first speaker, with a very visible start, as though his companion's words had suddenly re-awakened some long- sleeping memory, as, indeed, they had done, for his thoughts instantly flew back through nearly twenty years.

The exquisitely furnished, softly-lit London drawing-room, comfortably well filled, with some of the smartest men and women in town, men whose names were for the most part as well known in the columns of the newspapers and magazines as they were in the faraway outposts of the empire, and women whose beauty or wealth or wit, and often all three, had made them famous wherever Society is spelt with a big S, suddenly faded away.

A man, gaunt, haggard, with a skin like wrinkled brown leather, clothed in rags, and with eyes burning unnaturally bright with the first madness of hunger and thirst, was standing beside the prostrate body of another man who was lying on the bare, rough, sun-baked sand and rubble in the shade, such as it was, of a scanty patch of wattle scrub at the foot of a grey, round-topped hill which reared itself about a thousand feet above the ghastly solitude of that miserable wilderness which the Australians have aptly called the land of Never-Never.

A horse had just fallen to the ground within a few feet of the dying man, and was lying with glazing eyes and wide open mouth, giving out its life in long, guttural sighs, which rattled and grated deep down in its throat. Near to it stood a

mule, its legs wide apart, and its head hanging down almost between its forelegs. He saw the standing man stoop over the fallen one, take his water bottle, tobacco pouch and a pocket book. He looked at the dying man, then at the water bottle, unscrewed the top, put it to his parched lips and drained the last few precious drops of muddy fluid that it contained.

Then he dropped it beside his comrade and went to the horse. He took what little food there was left in the saddlebags, and a little leather bag holding between two and three pounds of pure gold dust. He slung these on the saddle of his almost fainting mule, passed his arm through the bridle, and, without so much as another look at the man believed to be dead, trudged away with long, dragging strides towards the south-eastward, pulling the staggering mule after him.

He had seen all this in one of those swift flashes of memory which pass through the human brain as rapidly as the electric thrill passes along the wire. His companion only noticed a little pause during which his right hand made a couple of strokes down the two sides of the long silken-haired, black moustache which shaded and disguised the sharply-cut, pitiless lips of the man who, for all he knew, had left his friend and comrade to die in the wilderness more than twenty years before. He had done it just for the sake of the few drops of water and the few mouthfuls of food which, as it happened by one of those strange freaks with which the Fates delight to mock alike the memories and the delights of men, had made for him the difference between a little heap of bleaching bones in the solitudes of the great Australian desert and the man who was standing that evening in the drawing-room of Lady Georgina Pontifex in the big corner house in Grosvenor Place facing Buckingham Palace Gardens—Hedley Siemens, millionaire twenty times over, absolute owner of a patch of desert ground twenty miles square in the midst of which stood that lonely hill on the slope of which Godfrey Enstone had lain down, as he thought, to die.

Now it was humming with life and bustling with industry, honeycombed through and through with drives and shafts and tunnels out of which the rattling trucks and hurrying ships were bringing out the gold-laden ore, half of which, amounting now to many millions of pounds in value, should have been the property of the man who, for all he knew, had died where he had left him.

"Enstone—Enstone," he repeated to his friend, Colonel Forester, lately retired with the V.C. and many medals and minus half his left arm which had been knocked off by a pom-pom shell, as he was pulling a badly wounded and very green subaltern out of a hot corner in one of the little "disasters" of the Boer War. "You don't mean the Northumberland Enstones, do you, Colonel?"

"Oh, yes, I don't know of any others, and, as a matter of fact, the family is extinct. Why do you ask, if it isn't a rude question?"

"Because," said the millionaire slowly, still keeping his eyes, already kindling with an unwonted fire, on the most beautiful face even in that room where every woman was or had been a beauty in her time, "a good many years ago, before I struck it rich, as they say, I was chums with a fellow of that name away in the back-blocks of North Eastern Australia. He died there, poor chap, just when we'd found the Lone Hill."

"Good Lord, what luck!" said the Colonel, taking a pull at his stubbly grey moustache, and turning his bright blue-grey eyes sharply on to the millionaire's

bronzed fixed features, and wondering why he, Hedley Siemens, a man whose uncounted gold might have almost bought the hand of a princess, had lighted up so strangely while he was looking on the fair face and exquisite figure of Grace Enstone.

"And so the poor chap died, as you might say, on the threshold of a treasure house which you had the luck to unlock. Well, well, the old story, I suppose, the one shall be taken and the other left. You made the millions and he left his bones there. By the way, what was his other name? Not Godfrey was it?"

"Yes," said Hedley Siemens, turning sharply round. "Yes, it was— Godfrey Enstone, but that can't be his daughter, because when I knew him his wife had been dead two or three years and he had no children.

It can't be the same man, and, anyhow, as I have told you, he—he died there."

"I wonder if he really did," said Colonel Forester in his soul, "and if he did, how? It wouldn't be the first time that two men have found the making of millions and only one of them has come away."

Then he went on aloud:—

"That's quite right, so far—she's not his daughter, and the Godfrey Enstones I knew never had a child. She is Mrs Enstone, because she married the adopted son of Sir Godfrey, really the son of an old travelling companion of his, a brother explorer somewhere in Central Asia. He died there, and Enstone brought the lad home, gave him his name and made him his heir. His real name was Dacre."

The millionaire suddenly turned his head away. A swift contraction of the eyes, a widening of the nostrils and a twitching of the lips had instantly and irresistibly altered his whole expression. He had good reasons for not wishing the Colonel to see it, so he pulled out his monogramed silk handkerchief and took refuge in a very good imitation of a sneeze.

"Oh—ah, yes, I see. Brought him back from Asia. Then, of course, it can't be the same man. Very likely the poor chap I knew in Never-Never had got hold of a name that didn't belong to him. There are lots like that in Australia now, and in those days there were a good many more. But if you were a friend of this Sir Godfrey's, I suppose you know the lady. Would you mind introducing me if you have a chance?"

Under the circumstances Colonel Forester could not say no, and yet for some unaccountable reason he would rather not have said yes. As far as he knew it was the first time on record that this man, multi-millionaire, a very Napoleon among money-kings, a lion in Society who quietly declined to be lionised, and a frankly avowed cynic as regarded all the relations of the sexes, had actually asked to be introduced to a woman. There were hundreds of women who would have given almost anything to be introduced to him, who would have given themselves to him body and soul for the sake of his millions, and there were others who would scheme not a little as his hostess this evening had done to get the great Australian Gold King for half an hour or so into their reception rooms, and here he was actually asking for an introduction to a woman he had never seen before.

"Oh, yes, of course, I know her," replied the Colonel, not very cordially as Siemens thought, "but if you really want an introduction, which, by the way, is a rather curious thing for you, woman-hater and all that, here comes Lady Pontifex—she'll do the needful for you a great deal better than I could."

A few minutes later Hedley Siemens found himself making the usual conventional inclination before the only woman upon whom his eyes had looked even with interest since the days, now nearly thirty years ago, when, sore hearted and soured through and through by the faithlessness of the pretty, feather-headed doll he had once called wife, he had turned his back on the world, swearing never to face it again unless and until he could do so holding that golden sceptre which makes man master of most earthly things.

He had a ten minutes' chat on most commonplace subjects with Grace and Lady Georgina, and then Harold came up and was introduced. The Gold King shook hands with him and their eyes met for an instant, after which each felt that he knew the other just as well as he wanted to know him. Then Harold turned to his wife and said:—

"I have just had a message from the House, dear, to say that my vote is urgently required to save a struggling Ministry from defeat, so I must go. I'll take the brougham and send it back for you at once, and I suppose you can expect me when you see me. You see, Mr Siemens, that is one of the delights of trying to catch the Speaker's eye. That doesn't sound right, but it's about what it comes to. Well, good evening. I hear you are in London for some time, and so I daresay we shall meet again."

"Certainly, I hope so," said the Gold King, as he nodded and smiled his farewells, and then, as Harold went away, he turned to Grace and began talking to her with a strange subtle charm of manner which would have caused no little surprise to anyone who knew him as the world knew him, and there were few, if any, who knew him otherwise.

About half an hour later he and Colonel Forester, who in a quite respectable and honourable way played the part of social jackal to his lion and did many things for him which he had neither the time nor the inclination to do for himself, made their adieux and drove away in Siemens' brougham to his splendid flat in Hyde Park Court overlooking the Park.

"Now, Forester," he said, throwing himself into a deep armchair and taking out his cigar case, "I want you to tell me the complete story of what you call the Enstone tragedy. Of course I've heard bits of it from the Colonial papers, but I was flying about so fast just then and had so many other things to think about that I really paid very little attention to it, though the name struck me as familiar."

So Colonel Forester, when he had selected a cigar and helped himself to a moderate brandy-and-soda, began at the beginning and gave him the whole history of the strangely involved tragedy down to the death of Jenner Halkine in the snow, the claiming of his body by his sister and Dr Izah-Ramal, and its cremation at Woking in accordance with his often-expressed wishes.

For the first time for many and many long years Hedley Siemens, the man of perfect digestion, iron nerves and unruffled temper, sought the oblivion of sleep in vain. Nearly thirty years ago he had awakened from what was almost a boyish dream of wedded love, and since then he had never looked upon a woman save perhaps to admire her in a physical sense or a something that his unlimited wealth could buy, either as a minister to his pleasures or a necessary aid to his boundless ambitions—and now, with the swiftness of a lightning flash, the unexpected, which might also have been the inevitable, had come to pass. The ice

was broken. The volcanic forces, which had been hidden for so long, had burst into sudden and irresistible action, and, with something like incredulous amazement, he found himself—Hedley Siemens, the soulless money-despot, who had never permitted the life or the honour of man or woman to stand as an obstacle in the way of his schemes— passionately, and, in a sense, even honestly, in love with another man's wife, and that other man was the son of his greatest enemy and the adopted son and heir of the friend and comrade whom he had deserted and left to die in the wilderness of Never-Never.

Was it only an accident, or one of those slow revenges which Time and Fate work out between them? But the revenge might not be all on one side. He was still in the very prime of life, only forty-seven, and with his millions, his perfect physical and mental health, and his strong masculine beauty, so strangely enhanced by the almost feminine softness—was not he a match even for the Fates themselves? and was it not written that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children?

Chapter XVII

The Enstone tragedy was nearly two years old now, and, six months before the first meeting of Grace and Hedley Siemens, a fair-haired, dark-eyed son had been born to the new lord of Enstone Manor, and was thriving apace to the great delight of Harold and his beautiful wife, to whose loveliness the joy and dignity of motherhood had added yet another charm.

In all the world it would have been hard to find a happier man and woman than these two favoured darlings of fortune, who had been first brought together by the evil arts of the extraordinary criminal who, as everybody believed, had only escaped from the life-long infamy and slavery of penal servitude through the purging fires of the crematory furnace. All that was over now, and they were doing their best to forget it, when one day, about a week after Lady Georgina Pontifex's reception, the whole miserable story was vividly brought back to them in the most strange and striking fashion.

On the twentieth of June, when the London season was at its height and everybody who had any pretensions to be thought anybody was in town, the two worlds of Society and Science were startled, amused and interested after their different fashions by the simultaneous appearance in all the leading British and Continental journals of what was generally admitted to be the most extraordinary announcement that had ever appeared in newspaper columns. It was not in the form of an advertisement though in some cases it was probably paid for as such, and it consisted of a detailed setting forth of the aims, object and working of the Institute of Psychic Science, which was described as an international establishment for the study of the higher developments of mental and moral philosophy in all their forms, exact and occult, and its main object was to be the accomplishment of the tremendous task of uniting the schools of Eastern and

Western thought, which, so far, had been separated since their beginnings by an impassable gulf.

Every branch of the vast subject was to be studied purely on its merits and without reference to scientific or religious prejudices. Students of all races and religions were to be welcomed. Neither blood nor caste nor colour were to be allowed to influence a student's career, and the sole title to admission and membership was to be ability and devotion. The strangest fact of all, however, was that no subscriptions were asked for, and no fees were to be charged. On the contrary, students, if they showed special aptitude for the studies in question, and were too poor to forsake their employment and devote themselves only to the work of the Institute, would not only be maintained free of charge, but would even receive salaries sufficient to support them in that ease and comfort and freedom from all the sordid cares and responsibilities of ordinary life, which was considered to be an essential condition for the proper prosecution of their studies.

The Director of the Institute was the Pundit, Dr Izah-Ramal, late Professor and Lecturer in the University of London on Oriental Languages and Science, and from this fact alone it became clear that the million which the genius and the crimes of Jenner Halkine had enabled him to abstract from the fortune of his victim was really about to be devoted to the object described in Sir Godfrey Enstone's self-forged will.

"Well," said Harold to his wife, after he had given her the gist of the strange announcement over the breakfast-table, "there is just this conclusion about it. Whatever one may think of the way in which they got the money, they do seem to be trying to do something with it, and to say the least of it, that's better than levanting out of the country with it and just using it for their private ends. I wonder if the worthy Pundit Doctor will have the cheek to send us cards of invitation to the opening reception and conversazione?"

"But you wouldn't go if he did, Harold, would you?" she said, looking up for the first time from her plate.

"Well, really, I don't see why we shouldn't," he replied. "It's Sir Godfrey's money that's doing it, and, personally, I really don't bear any grudge. That unfortunate uncle of yours was, after all, I think, only an example of great genius run a bit mad, and we must admit that he only did for his goddess Science a great deal less than persecutors have done for the honour of their creeds and yet retained the good opinion of the world. At anyrate, he has paid the last penalty a man can pay for his sins and his mistakes, and there, so far as I'm concerned, is an end of the matter. It was a lot of money, but I don't think we should have been any happier with it. Death closes all accounts, and I can't say that I feel any particular grudge about it."

"That was said just as your own generous self would say it, dear," she said, looking at him with an expression of something like thankfulness in her eyes, "and I daresay you're not far from the truth, for certainly, anyone who had known him as long and as well as I did, would be bound to say that he never used his powers for his own profit. On the contrary, I have known him spend weeks and even months, in which he might have earned any amount of money by lecturing and scientific writing, and gained more fame and distinction besides, in puzzling out some deep problem, and then, perhaps, in the end, find himself where he began.

"I'm very glad to hear you speak like that, dear," she went on after a little pause, "because, after all, you know, he was my mother's brother. But then there is this Dr Ramal. How can we go to his Institute and make friends with him in a sort of way when, for all we know, he may have been a sort of accomplice?"

"The answer to that, my dear Grace," he replied, returning her smile, "is that we don't know, and that, moreover, we don't want to know. There is not a shred of proof of it. This Dr Ramal's antecedents are not only irreproachable but most distinguished, and, certainly, if any evidence of good faith on his part was wanted here it is in the fact that, not only is he not going to make any money out of his Institute, but that he actually undertakes to spend the money very much as I think Sir Godfrey himself would have spent it. In fact, from a great many talks I have had with him, I'm practically certain of it. I don't exactly know how you feel about it, but, personally, I'm quite ready to let bygones be bygones and, as long as he's really honest about the thing, treat him as what he appears to be."

"That's just what I should like to do," she said, "and so if we're invited I suppose we shall go. Of course everybody will be there. It is just the sort of thing that Society with a capital 'S' will go crazed about. They're getting tired of Spiritualism and Theosophy and Christian Science, but this sort of thing with plenty of Oriental mystery mixed up with it will just be the very thing to turn half the frivolous heads in London, and perhaps some of the serious ones as well. For instance, just imagine with what enthusiasm Mrs Rowel- Grover will throw herself into it. I know that since that last scandal forced all respectable people to give up Christian Science, she has been simply pining for a new religion or something of that sort. And Princess Natieff too. You know she has strong leanings towards occultism and mysticism and several other isms."

"Yes," replied Harold, pushing his plate away and getting up from the table. "Mrs Rowel-Grover is a very nice, jolly little woman, perfectly harmless with all her fads, and the Colonel is an excellent sort—quite an angel of patience I should think; but the Princess—do you know I've always had a sort of—well, I don't quite know what to call it—not exactly dislike or suspicion, because I'm not given to prejudices, but a sort of—"

"Yes, dear, so have I," Grace interrupted, with a little laugh. "A kind of vague distrust, a feeling that, although there isn't any reason to think so, she ought to go about marked ' dangerous.' She's beautiful in a diabolic sort of way, brilliant, universally informed, and gets into some of the best houses both here and in the country. Plenty of money too, apparently, and I'm quite certain that Georgina Pontifex would be the very last woman to take up anyone, Princess or not, who wasn't quite without reproach. Oh, by the way," she continued, with a laugh, "what do you think her latest ambition is said to be?"

"Haven't an idea," he said, picking up a cigarette out of his case. "From the gossip I've heard about her at the clubs, she seems compact of ambitions, and, curiously enough, half the men in town rave about her devilish beauty, and her wit, and her general gorgeousness. Yet somehow no one seems to have a really good word to say for her. What is it?"

"Well, Mrs Rowel-Grover, who, of course, apart from her fads and new religions, is a really very shrewd little woman who knows nearly everything and everybody in her own world, told Georgina Pontifex the other day that Cara Natieff had confided

to her that she had found her true affinity at last —and who, among all the impossibilities, do you think it is?"

"Haven't a notion," he replied between the whiffs; "but I shouldn't mind making a sporting bet that it was some other woman's husband."

"Just like the charity of the male animal!" she laughed; "but for once you are wrong. Her affinity, if you please, is no other than his auriferous Majesty, Hedley Siemens, gold king, railway king, steamboat king, poet, artist, scientist, and goodness knows how much else besides—and woman-hater, or, at anyrate, woman-ignorer, into the bargain. The joke of it is that her Highness talks about it in the most delightfully naive manner, and says she really doesn't care who knows it, even the great Hedley himself."

"Do you know, Grace," he replied, after half-a-dozen silent puffs at his cigarette, "there's something about that man I don't like. Another masculine prejudice, I suppose, you will say, but still there it is, and more than that, I somehow have an uncomfortable sort of feeling that I either know him or have seen him before, and for the life of me I can't make out where. It's a funny thing, but there it is. The man has every possible advantage that you could imagine the Fates giving to anyone. He's a millionaire the Lord knows how many times over. He has more real power in his hands than a good many ruling sovereigns. He's still young, as youth goes nowadays, good-looking and marvellously accomplished—and yet, from all I can hear of him, he hasn't a friend in the world that he hasn't bought."

"And, therefore, quite a suitable affinity, I should think, for her diabolical Highness the Princess," laughed Grace, turning away towards the window. "What a pair they would make! And yet, Hal, I can scarcely agree with you. Although, of course, I can scarcely say that I know him, still I must say that he gives me the idea of a man with an immense reserve of power in him. Then, he's so different from the ordinary millionaire, and, whatever you may say about your men at the clubs and in the City, there's no doubt that the women like him."

"And some of them, I suppose, would very much like him to like them, just as that evil-eyed Princess would," he replied a little harshly. Still, as long as you are not one of them, dear, it doesn't much matter. Is there any truth in the rumour that the proud Lady Georgina herself would not object to see him and his millions at her feet?"

"Really, Harold, I cannot allow you to talk about my friends like that; it's only another proof that you men at your clubs are just as bad gossips and tattlers as we women are in our drawing-rooms. I know there is a rumour of that sort, but I don't believe a word of it. Personally, I think Georgina would very much rather make a match between the Princess and his Majesty than marry him herself. And now I must say good morning for the present and go and look after Harold the Second. What are you going to do with yourself till lunch-time?"

"Oh, I'm going to mote down town, as they say in the States. I've got a little meeting on at Winchester House about that new coal mine of ours that's going to make us even more scandalously rich than we are, and then there is that express ocean mail. I had a note last night from Davidson to say that our mutual friend the Gold King wants a hand in that, and I don't exactly like the prospect. He's a bit too clever and too rich to make a satisfactory partner, I think."

"What nonsense!" she said, with smiling reproach. "You know perfectly well you could hold your own with him or anybody else. I've heard about some of your achievements in the City, you know, and I don't think that a man who can pile thousands upon thousands in the disgraceful way that you are doing, when we have much more than enough already, and at the same time get yourself talked about as the ablest of the young Members of the House and a possible Cabinet Minister, has very much to fear from Mr Hedley Siemens. Oh!" and she went on with a quite feminine divergence, "while you are in town do try and find out what people in the City are saying about this Institute of Psychic Science. It's Georgina's At Home day and I'm going. There'll be a lot of people and they'll all be talking about it, so, of course, I want to have something to say too."

"Your ladyship's commands shall, of course, be obeyed," he laughed, and then he went on more seriously, "But won't that be a little bit awkward for you, dear?"

"Certainly not," she replied with a touch of the dignity that he loved so much in her tone; "everybody knows the story, and my real friends think about it as we do. As for the others—well, if we were comparatively poor and of not much consequence they would probably visit the sins of the uncle upon the niece, but we're a great deal too rich for that. Now, good morning, dear, and mind you bring me back a nice big budget of news from your stuffy old City."

Then she kissed him and disappeared to spend a couple of hours of unalloyed pleasure in the society of the new master of the house.

Chapter XVIII

The opening reception and conversazione at the Institute of Psychic Science, the local habitation of which was on a pleasantly-wooded estate sloping southward from Denmark Hill towards Dulwich,was a unique and also a curiously fresh sensation, not only for that section of the great world of London which works so hard to amuse itself, but also for many other excellent people who either were or earnestly pretended to be devoted students, as they thought, of some or all of the subjects included in the very extensive curriculum of the Institute.

The Enstones and all Lady Georgina Pontifex's particular set, including the Princess Natieff and Mr Hedley Siemens, received cards of invitation, and a second batch reached the yet more extensive acquaintances of the Honourable Mrs Rowell-Grover, whose husband, a distinguished Colonel of Engineers, who had won his V.C. and nearly a dozen medals and decorations as well as a distinguished Staff appointment, described the whole scheme as "probably only a piece of pretentious rot," intended to fool women who had too much brains and men who had too little, but who, nevertheless, dutifully accompanied the charming little woman whom he really delighted to call his C.-in-C.

Science, in the persons of many of Dr Ramal's friends and former colleagues, attended, mostly in an attitude of tolerant and large-minded scepticism, and even Theology was represented by several of its more advanced exponents, more sceptical and possibly less tolerant, but still quite ready to be amused if not

instructed. The fact that the Institute asked neither for patronage nor for subscriptions went a long way towards allaying certain suspicions which they might otherwise have had, for even people of the most rigid views or the most exalted morals are inclined to look indulgently upon anything that promises to be interesting and costs nothing.

The remainder of the European and American portions of the guests was made up chiefly of those earnest but heterodox seekers after truth and notoriety who still believed in, or had grown dissatisfied with, the tenets of Theosophy, Christian Science, and kindred forms of spiritual diversion.

But after all it must be confessed that the chief element of the great success which ended the function was the fascinating mingling of the life and colour of the Eastern and Western worlds. The black and grey frock-coated, silk- hatted men and the daintily-costumed women of the West found themselves in company with the grave-faced, deep-eyed, strangely-clad visitors from the distant and mystic Orient. There were Parsees from Bombay and Persia; Brahmin Pundits who might have just stepped out of the scented glooms of Indian temples ; Moolahs and Ullemas from the great Moslem Colleges of Turkey, Persia and Egypt; Bonzes from Japan, and shaven Lamas from the Highlands of Thibet—all gathered together from the uttermost ends of the earth at the bidding of the Pundit, Dr Izah-Ramal, now sole trustee and dispenser of the million which had been so strangely filched from the estate of the self-murdered victim of Jenner Halkine.

It must be admitted that not a few of the English and American guests had been to some extent attracted to the function by the expectation that the distinguished President of the Institute would, in his address, make some allusion to the very exceptional circumstances under which its magnificent endowment had been secured. They were not disappointed. As Colonel Rowell- Grover said afterwards at one of his wife's At Homes, when the subject was being discussed, "The Director completely established his claim to genius by the absolute frankness with which he described the extraordinary series of circumstances which had brought this vast sum of money under his control."

With marvellous skill and tact he represented his late friend and colleague, who had died in a hopeless attempt to escape from the just doom that had befallen him, as one of those enthusiasts whom too much genius had driven mad, and who had even come to consider crime as a virtue if committed in the service of that Science which he believed to be the only means for the earthly salvation of humanity. For this mistaken belief he had paid the penalty of his life—the last and greatest penalty man could pay.

So far, this concluding portion of his Presidential address might have been received in various ways, according to the varied feelings or convictions of the hearers, but all doubts as to the financial honesty and soundness of the Institute were set at rest during the next few minutes, when he stated that ample means of support had been already promised from east and west and north and south, and, rather than any suspicion of complicity should rest upon himself and his colleagues in the enterprise, he had decided to return the million intact to the heir of Sir Godfrey Enstone, who had the day before refused to receive it.

Whether by chance or design on the one side or the other, it happened that after the guests had left the Lecture Hall to take their pleasure and exchange ideas in

the shady southward sloping ground, Mr Hedley Siemens and the Princess Cara Natieff found themselves strolling together just out of ear-shot of Lady Georgina Pontifex and some of her party, who were taking coffee under the shade of the wide-spreading cedars served with deft alacrity by the dusky, dark-eyed, white-turbanned servants of the Institute.

The Gold King knew perfectly well, just as well, in fact, as the Princess did, that she intended to capture him and his millions if she could; and the frankly-avowed project appealed very strongly to the sporting instinct of the man who had done a very big gamble with Destiny, and won—at least so far as the current account was concerned.

Moreover, his strangely comprehensive and complicated nature made it quite possible for him to put aside for the time being the intense passion which he had so suddenly conceived for Grace Enstone, as well as the almost unnatural revenge that it made possible, and to frankly admire, both in the physical and mental senses, this beautiful and brilliant woman in the depths of whose grey eyes the enchanting witchery of youth still shone, and to play with her as he had played with other bright-winged moths who had been attracted to their ruin by the fatal flame of that golden Aladdin's lamp of his.

To him, as he believed, it was a game—such a game as he had often played before under similar circumstances. To her, as he knew quite well, it was a business, and a somewhat desperate one, too, and that made it all the more interesting to him.

"And what do you think of the learned Director, Mr Siemens?" she said, after a rapid and superficial review of the Institute and its aims. "He must be either a most unselfish genius or a very clever man in another sense to have offered to return that million. You are master of many millions yourself, so your opinion ought to be valuable."

"My dear Princess," he replied, looking more steadily than she quite liked into the brightness of the eyes that were turned up towards his, "that is, if you will allow me to call it so, somewhat of a leading question, and if I had the honour of the learned Pundit's acquaintance, I should possibly be rude enough to decline to answer it. As I have not that honour, I think I can say quite dispassionately that no man would have been such an idiot as to offer to give back a solid million to which he has an undoubted right unless he were either also an enthusiast for whom money has no meaning or—"

"A fool?" she queried, interrupting him quickly, "and I hardly think Dr Ramal is that."

"You are quite right," he replied, "at least so far as I can see. Some very clever men are fools, but geniuses never are, and I think, from what I know of his career and his very remarkable achievements, that Ramal is a genius."

"Then, perhaps, you also have some belief, or shall I say, a desire? to believe in those strange, almost superhuman, powers which, as he said today, have been attained to by those who have devoted themselves soul and body to the study of the Great Secret?"

"The Great Secret?" he said, stopping in the middle of his stride and looking down at the half-laughing, half-serious face that had been quickly turned towards him. "What is that, or, rather, I should perhaps say— what do you mean by it?"

"Ah!" she said, with such a smile and such a flash of her eyes as almost made him wish that he could grant her her heart's desire and make her such a helpmeet as she might be to such a man as himself. "Ah! yes, that is just such a reservation as one might expect you to make. The Great Secret! Of course, you don't expect me to say such silly things as that for men it is ambition and power and for women love, No, no, that would be too absurd for us. We have lived, if not too long, at least too much for platitudes of that sort, but," she went on, lowering her voice almost to a whisper, "don't you really know what Izah-Ramal means by the Great Secret?"

"It would appear, Princess, that you are in a position to tell me," he laughed softly in reply, "and, therefore, I may as well confess at once that I could not have my present ignorance more delightfully dispelled, granted always that you are willing to do so.'

She put her hands behind her, gave a little upward swish to her trailing skirts, and, as she turned down a dusty little side-path overshadowed by wide- spreading beeches, she said with a half-backward glance as though inviting him to follow her,—

"Yes, I know it because I have been a pupil, as I might almost say, of the learned Doctor's. You see I am half-Pole and half-Russian. My mother had to choose between marrying my father or going to Siberia, and so, as most Russians are Tartars under the skin, I have a mingling of East and West in me, and, therefore, perhaps Izah-Ramal found me somewhat of an apt pupil."

"Of that it would be impossible to have the slightest doubt, Princess," he replied, already half-fascinated by her great physical beauty and that almost diabolical witchery which made her so delightful to people who did not understand her; "but, if I may say so, that brings us no nearer to the Great Secret."

"Well," she replied, looking straight down at the weed-grown path, "I am afraid I can't tell you that—at least not all at once, without Izah- Ramal's permission, but, being a woman, I will answer your question by asking you another. Do you believe that there is any truth in the saying that there is that within the heart of every man and, I should certainly think, every woman also, which if known—"

"Would make his or her dearest friend or lover hate him or her, as the case might be," he interrupted, with a quick glance into her eyes which she had some little difficulty in returning steadily. "Yes, I know the saying—La Rochfoucaud's, wasn't it? Well, yes, that is possibly true, as seen by the inner vision of a philosopher with a twist of cynicism in his intellect; but, of course, in practical, everyday life it would be an absolute impossibility, and a very good thing, too, because, if the philosopher was right and it could clearly be proved—well, there would be an end to Society.

"Every friend would become an enemy and every enemy would know just what you thought of him or her. The world's pretty bad as it is, but it's a little better than the kind of chaos that would result from working a theory like that out into practice. Altogether, I think it is just as well that the human soul remains for ever veiled from the gaze of all human eyes. Seriously, it would be a very terrible thing if that were possible."

"But it is," she said, stopping and laying her little, daintily-gloved hand lightly on his arm. "It is possible now—and that is the answer to your question."

"And the proof?" he said in a tone that showed he was both wondering and suspicious. "Can it be proved?"

"Yes," she replied. "It can, and—if you dare—No, I won't say that. If you would like to try the proof with me this evening, here at the Institute, or any other time you like, I will try and get the Master's permission. And in the darkness," she continued so solemnly that he looked half- startled at her, "in the darkness you shall see that which was never seen in the light. Are you willing, Mr Siemens? Willing that I should look into your soul and you into mine? Will you dare it if I do?"

He took two or three more strides beside her along the path in silence. Then he stopped and said slowly,—

"Yes, Cara Natieff, I will—if you will." "And I will," she said, lifting her eyelids and looking straight into his eyes. "Perhaps I risk more than you, but I will do it. And now, for the sake of the convenances, let us go back to the lawn and have some coffee."

Chapter XIX

At a quarter to ten the next morning, just as the Gold King was finishing a very leisurely breakfast, Mr Saunders, his body-servant and domestic factotum, knocked at the door and came in with a little curiously-folded note on a silver salver. The peculiar twist of the paper caught his eye at once, and his eyelids lifted ever so slightly—a movement that did not escape the observant gaze of Mr Saunders.

"Note, sir," he said softly, as he presented the salver, "brought by a foreign party, Indian I think, sir. Wouldn't leave it with the porter, so he had to send up for me. Would not give it into anybody's hands but mine or yours, sir, and so, as you were having breakfast and not at home to people of that sort, I went down and got it."

"Of course, you would, Saunders," replied his master, picking the note up off the salver, "but what sort of person do you suppose that I am not at home to?"

"Beg pardon, sir, if I've done wrong in not bringing him up," said Mr Saunders, apologetically, "but I didn't quite like the party's appearance. He wears white trousers, two inches too short for him, and a lot too tight for thin legs like his; elastic sides for boots which no one respectable wears nowadays, two sizes too big for him; single-breasted frock-coat, not too new, buttoned up to his neck; no collar, and a white turban with a little brass sort of ornament hanging in front, a square, circular, triangular kind of thing, all mixed up as it might be, sir."

"That doesn't interest me very particularly, Saunders," said the Gold King, lying with the perfect ease that is only born of long practice. "I really don't want to know how the gentleman is dressed; but if he is still waiting you can show him up,"

As he spoke he took up the note and opened it. Mr Saunders, true to the traditions of his kind, watched his master's face very narrowly while he was reading it, but for all he saw he might as well have been looking at the face of a

graven image. Mr Siemens twisted the note up and dropped it beside his plate. He took a cigarette out of his case, lit it and said slowly,—

"My appointment with Mr Davidson is for 10.30, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Saunders.

"Very well, then; you can tell this person to come up, and then telephone to the Mews and have the brougham ready at 10.30."

Saunders murmured another "Yes, sir," made an angular sort of bow and disappeared. As soon as the door had closed Mr Hedley Siemens made a sotto voce remark to himself, which it is not necessary to produce, lit a cigarette, and then held the note and a burning match over his coffee cup. As it was reduced to tinder he let it fall into the cup, poured out a little more coffee and stirred it in. Then he pushed his chair a little way from the table, leant back, and puffed slowly and meditatively until another knock came at the door and Saunders opened it, came in and said,—

"This is the—the person who brought the note, sir."

Then he stepped aside and Ram Dass came into the room, raised his hands to his turban and salaamed.

"That will do, Saunders. You can go and see about the brougham now, and come back in twenty minutes," said Mr Siemens, taking his watch out of his pocket and looking at it for a moment.

"Very good, sir," murmured Saunders, taking a couple of quick glances, one at his master and the other at his visitor, and closing the door quietly behind him.

Ram Dass stood erect and motionless by the door. His eyes looked downward and his hands hung loosely as they had fallen after the salaam. Mr Siemens went on puffing at his cigarette for a few moments longer, took another glance at the morning paper propped up in front of him against the toast-rack, and then said rather abruptly, in Urdu, the lingua-franca of Hindustan,—

"Then I am to understand that what the Princess said to me yesterday was true, or at least approaching the truth?"

"It was true, sahib, quite true," replied Ram Dass, speaking with as little expression as a phonograph ' might have done. "My Master does not send idle messages to such majesties as your most honourable self."

"No, I suppose it would be hardly worth his while or mine," replied the millionaire, flicking the ash off his cigarette, "but as you have waited for an answer—which I could have sent just as quickly by an ordinary messenger—what did he tell you to say to me about the letter?"

"The commands of the Sahib Doctor were to tell the lord of many millions that to those who see with the eyes of faith it is possible to see more in the darkness than in the light, and that the Mem Princess sahib has seen. That is all."

As Ram Dass said this he took a couple of steps aside and stood in front of the door, so that it could not be opened unless he moved. Hedley Siemens dropped his cigarette on to his plate, got up and went to one of the windows overlooking the Park. For two or three minutes he gazed out as though he were looking into vacancy. Then he turned quickly and said,—

"Ram Dass, what is your price? I can make you rich, so rich that you will never have another care between here and Nirvana, and I will do it if you will tell me, yes, if you will tell me what you know that I want to know."

As he spoke he took his right hand out of his pocket and made a swift sign with it. Ram Dass salaamed again and said in his gentle, monotonous voice, —

"My lord is of the elect to whom knowledge has been granted and yet he would ask for more knowledge from his slave? What can I tell him that he does not know already?"

"You can tell me what I asked for, Ram Dass," replied the Gold King, going towards him and looking keenly into his dark, inscrutable eyes, "and you know what I ask for before I say it. Is Jenner Halkine dead? I will give you a thousand pounds for a truthful answer to that."

"It is not for me to tell, my lord sahib. Those who have passed through the gateway of the Temple of Knowledge may die and yet live. To those who know much many things are possible which to others would seem impossible."

"I understand," said Mr Siemens, with a somewhat uneasy laugh. If you won't take my thousand pounds for a straight answer to a straight question I can only conclude that you know a good deal more than you care to say. Very well, Ram Dass, I'm so accustomed to buy the meaner sort of people body and soul that I like to meet a man who can't be bought, though, mind youj, if your Master has a million I have twenty."

Ram Dass raised his head and looking the master of millions straight in the eyes, said as quietly as before,—

"Protector of the poor, gold is of worth in one life only, but knowledge grows from life to life. The pilgrim must leave his gold on the edge of the grave, his knowledge he may take with him. I have enough. I can live. Why should I ask for more?"

If Hedley Siemens had not been the strange combination of dreamer, student and money-maker that he was, if he had only been one of those men who have the faculty of piling thousands on thousands, just as other men have the faculties for accumulating facts, he would have laughed at Ram Dass and increased his offer from a thousand to ten thousand, but he was able to read the inner meaning of his words, so he said,—

"Ram Dass, I am content. Your Master has told me more through your lips than he did in his letter. My answer is that through the darkness I will try to see the light."

"The words of my lord sahib shall be as though they were spoken in the ear of my Master," replied Ram Dass, raising his hands again to his turban and salaaming.

"Very good," replied Mr Siemens. "I shall be there at seven. Tell Dr Ramal—"

He had been looking out of the window as he said this. When he turned round Ram Dass had vanished. He had not heard the door open or shut, but he was gone.

"I thought so," he went on, taking out another cigarette from his case and lighting it. "I suppose that was a sort of final hint that, well, that I am to a certain extent playing with fire, and I may quite possibly burn my fingers. Still, it's worth it. I wonder what it all means, and if her bewitching Highness really is—no, I sha'n't believe it until I see it. Light through darkness! Quite an Eastern way of putting a little mystery. Where did she learn it? What a pity that there is that other one—the only one. If I had never seen her Cara Natieff should have her heart's

desire, and between us, possibly with the assistance of our good friend Izah-Ramal and that very excellent henchman of his who just got through the door without opening it, we should come very near to running the world, if not physically at least mentally.

"It would be a great destiny. I've got the money—so much of it that it's worth nothing, except to buy something else with. I wonder—yes, after all, there is no reason why it shouldn't be quite possible. The Princess is hardly a woman who would allow any ordinary scruples to stand in her way. Ramal has the same ambitions as I have, and if there is any truth in those enigmatical words of Ram Dass about Halkine, and we could all work together, the possibilities would be simply infinite. Enstone would be an obstacle to a certain extent, but not an entirely insuperable one, and if M'a'm'selle la Princesse does not want an absolute monopoly—well, well^ money and magic can do a good deal between them. There's not much that they can't buy or win. Even Grace herself, for, after all, she's only human. So is the other. It will be quite an interesting stance this evening at the Institute. I wonder what kind of light I really shall see through the darkness."

Chapter XX

Hedley Siemens had all the courage of a man who had practically no morals and, therefore, no scruples, either as regards himself or anybody else. As artist and student he had, of course, those emotions without which he could not have been either; but as the successful adventurer, the man of affairs, who had fought his way through the world with no more care for consequences than a tiger would have when charging through the jungle on to its prey, he was as absolutely fearless as he was unscrupulous.

For all that, however, he was forced to confess to himself as he thought over the extraordinary, nay, the unheard of proposition which the Princess had made to him, and which Dr Izah-Ramal had confirmed, that he had been suddenly brought face to face with something which might well make the boldest man hesitate. It was the Unknown, the Intangible, the Mysterious, and, if the Princess had only spoken truly, it might also be the Terrible.

At first he had been inclined to look upon the whole affair as some elaborate piece of jugglery, possibly the result of a conspiracy between Cara Natieff and the Principal of the Institute; but he had also found himself, not a little to his annoyance, wanting to believe that it was so, and this suggested a suspicion, if not of fear, at least of a certain reluctance to face the ordeal that had been proposed, to him. Then, too, the more he thought about it the more clearly he saw the absurdity of such a supposition. It was impossible for him to rank a man like Izah-Ramal, who had over and over again given proof of strange powers for which human language had scarcely any name, with the vulgar impostors of Spiritualism, Theosophy and Christian Science. He had completely proved his utter carelessness of money, and even his servant and humble assistant, Ram Dass, had quietly refused a splendid bribe for the answer to a single question.

And it was equally absurd to suspect the Princess. She had everything that rank, beauty and wealth could give her, saving only, perhaps, the gratification of love and ambition. Yes, perhaps that was the secret and the explanation as well. He knew that her ambitions were boundless and that she would hesitate at nothing to satisfy them. She was just outside the magic circle of Royalty and so it was impossible for her to share a prospective throne with one of the rulers of the nation. True, many women of her rank had contracted left-handed unions with reigning princes and had influenced their counsels to no small degree; but he knew thal^Cara Natieff was not one of these. She would be Caesar's wife or nothing. But there were other Caesars than those who sat on thrones, and he was one of them. No crowned monarch in Europe really wielded the power, absolute and irresponsible, that he did. Was this, perchance, the reason for that strange challenge of hers?

He had to confess to himself that the idea thrilled him. He had, of course, long outgrown the commonplace vanities of his sex; but he would have been more, or less, than human if the thought had not at once pleased and tempted him. Indeed, if it had not been for Grace Enstone and that wild, unholy and yet overmastering passion which her more gentle beauty and tenfold stronger charm had inspired him with, he might well have come to the conclusion that of all the women he had ever met, Cara Natieff, with her wonderful beauty and brilliant genius, was the most fitting helpmeet for such a man as himself.

Still, in spite of all, the idea of this strange adventure in the unknown regions of forbidden knowledge fascinated him even by reason of the hidden terrors that it might reveal to him. Besides, he had accepted Cara Natieff s challenge and given his promise to Izah-Ramal. If she did not fear to look upon that mystery of mysteries—an unveiled human soul—why should he ? And yet he was forced to confess that, when he got into his brougham late that afternoon to drive to the Institute, he found himself in a condition of nervous anticipation which was entirely strange to him.

He was shown into the Director's private sitting-room, and, as he ajfcl the Princess rose to receive him, he fancied that he could detect some subtle and yet unmistakable change in the lovely face which looked up at him. It seemed as though some impalpable and yet impenetrable mask had been removed. He seemed, as it were, to look down deeper into the depths of her eyes, as he had never done before, and there was a new light in them which, as he thought at the moment that he took her hand, might perchance be the reflection of that soul which she had challenged him, as it were, to compare with his own in all its unveiled nakedness. Her expression, too, had assumed an exquisite softness that was quite strange to him—in short, never had Cara Natieff seemed so dangerously desirable in his own eyes as she did then.

"And so, Mr Siemens, you have really decided to keep this strange tryst of ours," she said very sweetly, and with a smile that might have shaken the resolution of an anchorite. "I suppose you have recognised that, if the experiment is carried through, you and I will know each other as no two human beings ever did before. Is not that so, Doctor?" she continued, turning towards him, to Hedley Siemens's immediate relief.

"It is," replied Izah-Ramal in his smooth, even, impersonal tone; "and I think it right to warn you once more that, if you have the strength to carry the experiment through, you will have seen what no eyes save those of the adepts have ever seen. You, Mr Siemens, for instance, cannot have forgotten one lesson which you learnt, doubtless among many others, in the days when, in the Land of Knowledge you sought that which was better than wealth."

"And what was that, Doctor?" interrupted the millionaire, sharply. "It is true that I did learn many lessons there. Which of them are you referring to now?"

"That which teaches that knowledge without strength is worse than passion without judgment. He who knows more than he has the power to use and control may be compared to a madman on a throne; and you are about to learn a portion of that forbidden lore whose possession has ere now meant misery for the strong and madness to the weak. Now, remembering and knowing so much, are you, Princess, and you, Mr Siemens, still prepared to acquire this knowledge and take the consequences of it?"

"For my part—yes," replied the Princess, quietly, although with a just perceptible twitch of her lips. "After what you have said I would give my soul, if I have one in the ordinary sense of the term, to get such knowledge as that."

"And you, Mr Siemens?" the Doctor went on, turning towards him, "are you still of the same mind? Do you, after what I have said, feel that your mental vision can be trusted to look into the depths which may be revealed to you in a human soul—and that, too, the soul of a woman?"

Hedley Siemens looked sharply at the Princess. Her eyes met his with a frank, almost defiant, challenge, as though they would say, "Surely what I dare you will dare."

By some strange process which was quite as little understood by himself as it was by the Princess and, possibly, also by Dr Ramal, the challenge at once produced a complete change of mental front in him. So far the mystic and the artistic portions of his nature had been, as it were, in the forefront of his being; but now they receded instantly, and the man of affairs, the hard- headed, cold-blooded, keen-sighted soldier of fortune, who had never yet known a defeat, took its place.

"I am perfectly prepared to go through with the experiment whatever its results may be," he said in a voice so changed that his hearers involuntarily looked up at each other. "But after what you have said, Dr Ramal, I think it is only fair that I should say something more. You are asking me to believe without inquiry what, from my point of view, may well be the incredible; and I tell you frankly that I will not believe it unless it is supported by just such proofs as I should require before I went into any ordinary commercial scheme."

"But surely that would be impossible," said the Princess, in a somewhat sharper tone, which had a note of reproof in it. "If there is any truth in this, it is a miracle, and miracles are not to be tested by any ordinary rule of thumb methods. Some faith at least must be necessary."

"Pardon, your Highness," interrupted Izah-Ramal, in his quiet, passionless voice. "Here there is no question save only of courage. Belief will not be asked for. It will be compelled, provided always that your courage endures to the end.

However, we will take that for granted. And now, I think, you were going to say something else, Mr Siemens."

While he was speaking the Gold King's lips had tightened and the black eyebrows had come together over his keen, green-blue eyes. He had an intuition that he was being put into a somewhat uncomfortable corner. He possessed that genius for reading men and women which had been the principal factor in the making of his own fortunes. At the same time, with all his great talents and his capacity for acquiring out-of-the-way kinds of knowledge, he was constitutionally incapable of believing anything that could not be proved according to the rules of human science.

"What I was going to say is this," he said, in just such a tone as he would have used in an ordinary business interview, "this experiment is something so completely outside human experience that I really must assert the right to that scepticism which must be exercised by every independent observer. In other words, I cannot and will not bind myself to accept anything that I may see this evening as the truth, no matter how wonderful it may seem, without some proof which appeals to my judgment as conclusive. At the same time," he went on, rather more quickly, thinking that the Princess was about to interrupt him again, "I want to be as honest with you as I know you are with me. So far as you have gone, I take it that Jenner Halkine found you, by one means or another, a million sterling to develop this scheme. Now, I should like to say, before I have seen anything of its working, that I simply want to be convinced that it is really practical, and I take it that the shortest and easiest way of getting that proof is to make the experiment which Princess Natieff has been kind enough to propose to me. Granted that only, and then—well, such ability as I possess and every sovereign that I own is at your service. In other words, I shall be with you heart and soul—and cheque book. Is that good enough?"

Izah-Ramal's eyes looked across at him with a glance which he had some difficulty in meeting steadily and his lips moved until they shaped themselves into a smile that had just a suspicion of mockery in it. Then, as he still kept silence, the Princess said with a note of elation in her voice,—

"I knew that you would say that or something like it, Mr Siemens! I knew you would, and that is why I made the challenge in the first place. I believe, if you don't yet, and I also believe that you will be convinced, and then—fancy, what a glorious prospect there will be before us !—I mean, of course, those of us who devote ourselves to the work of the Institute. We can be masters and mistresses of the world, since we shall be able to control those who govern it without their knowing that we can do so. Just imagine what one might call a Syndicate of Soul Searchers finding out the inmost thoughts of all the statesmen and, perhaps, even the monarchs of the world! Yes, it is a grand idea! We could make a despot do what we thought he ought to do and a Constitutional Minister advise his Sovereign, not according to his own opinions but ours. It would be just as easy to persuade the other Gold Kings of the world to play completely into our hands and to make fools of themselves just when they thought that they were going to achieve their greatest triumphs. Yes, it is a glorious idea! and if you can only find yourself able to believe in it," she went on, with a suspicion of a caress in her voice, "I don't think anyone could see more splendid possibilities in it than you could!"

"My dear Princess," replied Siemens, returning her glance this time quite steadily, "I haven't the slightest doubt about it. Only prove the possibility to me and, to begin with, I will gamble ten millions on the practical working out of the scheme, and that, I think, the Director will consider a sufficiently sound guarantee of my good faith."

"Perfectly," said Dr Ramal, "that shall be a bargain, provided that you remain in the mood to complete it after you have been convinced. There is only one condition that I am obliged to make before we go any farther, but I don't think you will find it a very difficult one."

"Yes, and what is that?" he asked.

"It is that you shall never make any attempt, direct or indirect, to discover the construction or method of working of the apparatus with which the experiment will be made. That, together with the story of its invention, must remain unknown to all, save those who know it now. Any attempt to penetrate that secret would entail the most serious penalty upon anyone who tried."

"My dear Dr Ramal," replied the millionaire with a laugh, which the Princess thought a trifle harsh, "pray don't trouble yourself about that as far as I am concerned. Really, I don't care who invented the apparatus, or how it works, as long as it does work—that is, as long as it enables the operator to, as the Princess put it so forcibly to me, look upon an unveiled human soul, to read the most secret thoughts and passions of a brother or sister human being. All that I want is conviction, and as I have still preserved an entirely open mind on the subject—no, I will say more than that, since I would rather be convinced than not, I think you will admit that you can scarcely have a better subject than myself."

"Then," said the Director, rising,?' if you will come with me you shall be convinced, but, even now, I think it only right to tell you that you should prepare yourself for what may prove to be a very considerable shock—I mean a mental and nervous, as well as what I may call a moral one, and, I need hardly say, Princess," he continued, turning towards her and speaking rather more gravely, "that this may possibly apply to your Highness even more than to Mr Siemens."

"Thanks for the warning, Doctor," she laughed in reply, "but, I am afraid, it will have to be wasted. I am not in the habit of taking risks that I am not prepared to go through with, and, of course, if I am ready to dare the ordeal there can be no question about Mr Siemens."

"Of course there can be no question of that," said the millionaire, going to the door and opening it for her. "What you dare I dare, Princess. In fact, I may say that the prospect of making your more intimate acquaintance is a quite irresistible temptation."

She did not reply in words, but as she passed out of the door she turned and looked him full in the eyes with a glance which told him more than many words could have done.

"Then," laughed Izah-Ramal, softly, "you shall both see—what you shall see. And now, follow me, please."

He led them down a long passage, heavily curtained at both ends, into an apartment which neither of them had ever seen before. It was an eight-sided room about twenty feet in diameter, with no windows or other means of admitting natural light. The walls were draped with dull red and gold-embroidered hangings,

evidently of Oriental workmanship, and the roof was similarly hung in a fashion which gave the whole room the appearance of a splendidly appointed marquee. A cluster of electric lights hung from the centre of the roof and just filled the room with a soft, clear light that made everything distinctly visible without making its source at all conspicuous. There was an oval table in the centre of the room and on it stood a somewhat complicated series of apparatus. At either end was what looked like a highly- elaborated stereoscope with two eye-pieces composed of almost priceless lenses magnifying several thousand times. Between them were connected rows of vacuum tubes, something like those which are used in the production of the X-rays. All these were connected with the stereoscopes and each other by slender, insulated wires, and in front of each pair of lenses was a round mirror, about ten inches in diameter, intensely bright; but shining with a faint blue lustre instead of the silver sheen of ordinary mirrors. There appeared to be other portions of the curiously complicated instrument underneath the table, as other wires led from the mirrors and tubes over the edges and possibly down through the floor.

There was an arm-chair at either end of the table, and when they had taken their places Izah-Ramal said,—

"You will be good enough to put your eyes to the eye-pieces before you —so. Look straight through at the mirror. Now, give me your hands. Let your arms rest on the cushions. Yes, that will do," he went on, as he joined their hands—right to left and left to right. "And now I am going to put the electric light out; not because this is anything like a dark seance, but because you will have ample light to see what you are going to see without it. And now, one word more," he continued, speaking gravely, almost solemnly, "if either of you wishes to end the experiment you can do so at any moment by simply unjoining hands."

He turned off the cluster and touched a little switch on the table. They heard a very soft, purring sound coming apparently from nowhere. The mirrors began to glow with such a light as neither of them had ever seen before, and the next instant they began to experience a totally different form of consciousness, somewhat, as it were, of a separate sense, totally differing from the ordinary senses and yet most strangely illuminating and exalting all of them. Neither spoke, yet each seemed to hear the other's voice, low and distinct, and saying unutterable things. Their eyes were fixed on the glasses, yet they could see each other with more than a physical distinctness. Their faces seemed to grow semi-transparent and to become enormously magnified. Then their brains came into view and they could see them working. The blood circulated and the atoms composing the cells revolved about each other with varying but absolutely rhythmic motion, and presently their revolutions began to have a definite meaning for them, as the motions of a marvellously complicated machine would have a meaning for a skilled engineer.

After a few seconds, as it seemed to him, Hedley Siemens felt the Princess's hands begin to tremble and twitch. Then they were suddenly wrenched away in spite of his effort to retain them—and a low cry, which sounded to him like the voice of a soul in torment, ran through the room,—

"Enough! enough! I believe I have seen into Hell!"

Izah-Ramal instantly switched on the electric light again and Siemens saw the Princess, her face grey-white, her jaw dropped, her eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. She was lying huddled in the chair, her arms hanging down, and her head drooping on to her right shoulder. His first thought of the moment was one of wonder that anything so exquisitely beautiful could have so instantly become so repulsive.

Chapter XXI

"I was afraid that something like this might happen," said Izah-Ramal, with a piercing glance at Hedley Siemens, who had managed even in that brief space to regain command of his features, although he was unable to call the colour back to his face. "Did her Highness try to take her hands from yours?"

"Yes—that is to say, I felt them begin to tremble when we began to see—well, I suppose I needn't tell you what we saw—and —"

"And did you try to hold them longer when she attempted to withdraw them?" continued the Director, who was now standing behind the Princess's chair, supporting her head against the back with one hand, and with the other stroking her face very gently .with a downward motion.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Doctor," replied the Gold King, a little awkwardly, "I did. You see, I was getting interested. It is not every day that a man, sees into the working of a woman's brain and begins to read her soul like a page of the plainest of print."

"No doubt," replied the other, with a grave smile. "That, I suppose, is only ordinary human nature. Still, it was fortunate that her Highness got her hands away from yours as soon as she did."

"Indeed? I suppose you mean that the consequences might have been serious. Of course, I am very sorry that the experiment ended as it did, not only for my own sake but for the Princess's. Ah! I see your treatment is beginning to have a good effect."

"Yes," replied Izah-Ramal. "So far it was only a shock which resulted in a fainting-fit, but I do not wish her, for her own sake, to return to consciousness before she sleeps. Much will depend upon that, but if you had been successful in holding her hands and compelling her to continue the experiment, a few moments more might have wrecked her reason, possibly even have caused her death. Now, you see, her eyes have closed and she is beginning to sleep quietly. That is the only remedy we can hope for."

"Dear me, I had no idea that it was such a serious matter as that!" exclaimed Siemens, getting up from his chair. "Candidly, Doctor, I must admit that I went into this thing with a very considerable amount of scepticism; but I hardly need tell you now that I am quite convinced, as I have not the slightest doubt her Highness will be when she comes to herself again. Really, I had no idea that we were playing with fire of that sort. But what are we going to do with the Princess? Have you anyone who can attend to her?"

"Of course," replied the Doctor, continuing the motion of his hand over his patient's face. "Her Highness can be moved very soon now. If you will be kind enough to press the button beside the door there, just where the curtains part, twice quickly and once in a moment or two, Ram Dass will come. Then we will take her to another room, and his wife, who is as skilful a nurse as there is in England, shall do everything that is necessary for her. I can assure you that her Highness* could not possibly be left in better hands, and, if my treatment has been successful, I shall hope for her own sake that she will awake, thinking nothing more of this experience than if it had been an evil dream."

"And for her sake, and to a certain extent for my own, I most sincerely trust you will be successful," replied Hedley Siemens, with a smile full of meaning, as he put his finger on the button and pressed it as he had been told.

A few minutes later, when Princess Natieff had been safely delivered into the care of the Indian nurse, they were back in the Director's sitting-room.

"And now, sir, having seen what you have seen, and having admitted that you are convinced of the possibility of seeing an unveiled human soul," he said almost sternly to his guest, "I shall ask you whether you are satisfied with what you have seen, or whether you are in a mind to pursue the experiment further?"

"Yes, Doctor," replied the millionaire, meeting his inquiring glance quite steadily, "yes, I am convinced. You know, of course, that I am not only what the world sees me—a mere soulless man of business who cares nothing for anything except the piling of millions on millions. That I am. Money-making is my hobby, my amusement, and, of course, I don't deny that I like the power that money brings; but, as you know too, I am also something of a student of the mysteries of existence, a dreamer of dreams, if you like, wherefore, now that you have convinced the man of affairs that this marvellous piece of mechanism of yours, whatever it may be, really does work miracles, it is only natural that the dreamer, the student, should wish to see more. In short, as far as I am concerned I am ready to begin the experiment again with anyone whom you may select, with yourself even, and carry it through, no matter what the consequences may be. Does that satisfy you of my sincerity?"

"I have never doubted it since you entered the room and took your place at the table," replied the Director; "but even again I must warn you that the consequences may be very serious."

"That I admit, of course," interrupted the other, "but how serious?"

"That," was the reply, "is a question which I cannot answer quite definitely. You must remember that the revelation of one human soul to another is a very serious, nay, a very solemn thing. Remember that it means the opening of that inmost citadel in which the actual self of a human being has for ages* yes, even from the beginning of human evolution until now, remained unseen, apart and alone. During this incomplete experiment with the Princess you only saw the door of that citadel slightly ajar, just as she did in your case. What you might have seen had it been thrown wide open, as it would have been, no man can say, and, therefore, if you choose to continue the experiment, you must be prepared to have the inmost secrets of your own soul laid bare to the gaze of another man. Are you ready to take such a risk as that might be?"

"Most decidedly, if they can be got at," replied the Gold King, "and, under any circumstances, I think I would rather trust them to a man than a woman. Now, who is the man to be—yourself, I presume?"

"No," said Izah-Ramal quietly, yet with a deep meaning in his tone, "it will not be myself. I have no desire at present to add to my knowledge of human nature. If you are determined to continue the experiment, the man who will see into your soul, and into whose soul you will see, will be dead."

"Eh? What is that you say?" interrupted the millionaire, with a very visible start, which he was totally unable to disguise. "Dead, did you say? Surely you can hardly be serious. At anyrate," he went on, with a perceptible hardening of his tone, "I may as well say at once, Doctor, that, although I adhere to all that I have said, I do not propose to be made the subject of any experiments in the supernatural, if that is what you are going to suggest. Anything within the realm of nature I am willing and glad to learn; but I have neither taste nor ambition to trifle with the problems of life and death."

"You would have had no fear of that, my dear sir," replied Izah-Ramal, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone, "if you had allowed me to finish my sentence. The man of whom I was speaking is dead only as regards this world and its outer workings. He died quite publicly a considerable time ago, and he has not the slightest desire to return, I won't say to the flesh, but rather to the former state of his existence. From that you will, of course, naturally and correctly conclude that, should any secrets be discovered in the course of the experiment, they will be in absolutely safe keeping."

"Am I to take it?" said the millionaire, with a little lift of his eyelids, that that is the answer to the question which I asked Ram Dass when he brought me your note?"

"It is," was the quiet reply.

"Then that satisfies me completely. I shall be ready to go through with the experiment whenever it is convenient to yourself, and, well, your colleague, as I suppose we call him."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the other. "I will not suggest this evening, partly because my colleague is not here, and also because I should advise you to take a little time to think over what you have seen and heard today. Of course, I need hardly suggest the absolute privacy of everything that takes place here."

"There is not the slightest reason for that, my dear Doctor. I have seen quite enough to be satisfied that if the next experiment is successful, no one will have a deeper interest in secrecy than I shall have."

"Perfectly," said Izah-Ramal, with a smile of almost womanly gentleness. "It is an excellent thing that we should understand each other so soon and so perfectly. As soon as I am able to complete the arrangements, Ram Dass will come to you.':

Half an hour later Hedley Siemens was driving home in his brougham which had waited for him. He was leaning back in one corner, with his feet on the opposite seat, smoking furiously and biting off more of his rapidly succeeding cigars than he smoked. He was looking straight ahead through the rounded glass, which formed the front of the carriage, at the hedges and houses and swiftly-passing street-lamps which seemed to wink at him like quickly-moving, inquisitive eyes.

When the brougham had passed the long, upward-cUrving lane which leads into a straight, dismal road, flanked by neglected gardens and great, square-built, flat-topped houses, whose glory has long departed, he let down both windows, flung the ragged, bitten half of his last cigar into the road, and began to breath deeply, as a man might do who has just escaped from some stifling chamber into the fresh air.

He had been trying in vain to analyse the crowding thoughts which had arisen out of that wonderful evening's experience, but in spite of his perfect mental discipline and a rare faculty of, as it were, dividing his own personality and criticising himself as he might have done another man, he had had to confess that, for once, his mental faculties had got out of hand.

So, just as though he had been recovering from a stunning blow, or coming back to sanity after a period of delirium, he sat there, silent and motionless, staring about sightlessly in front of him, as the luxurious brougham swayed gently on its cee-springs and rolled smoothly on its rubber tyres down Denmark Hill, past Camberwell Green along the Camberwell New Road and through the unsavoury purlieus of Vauxhall, over the Bridge, round by Victoria Station, and so through Grosvenor Place and Knightsbridge to Hyde Park Corner.

Not a thought seemed to pass through his brain, and not a word came from his lips as the swiftly-changing scenes flitted past his carriage windows. But when he got out into the cool night air at the great arched entrance to the Court he pulled himself together with such a very obvious effort that the splendidly uniformed porter, somewhat mistaking his symptoms, hurried down the steps even more quickly than usual, to greet the most distinguished resident in his domain. When he got to his rooms he dismissed the waiting Saunders with a curtness that wounded that gentleman's gentleman not a little. Then he mixed himself as stiff a peg of brandy-and-soda as ever he had taken in his wildest days and went to bed to dream half-waking dreams of unutterable possibilities.

Chapter XXII

Mr Hedley Siemens, like many other men who have been accustomed to roughing it in the outlands of the earth, taking their rest when they might and going without it when necessary, was not a very early riser. Saunders brought him a cup of coffee and his letters at eight, and at half past he had his bath and got shaved, after which he sat down to a leisurely breakfast. But this particular morning something seemed to take him back to the old conditions. He was broad awake at five o'clock.

He saw some letters which had come in by the evening's post, and which he had not noticed when he came to bed, lying on the writing-table in the middle of his room. He got out of bed and took them back to read. Those which were obviously business communications he tossed aside, for, truth to tell, after his experiences of the night before, he was in little humour for that sort of thing. Then on a square-crested envelope he saw the crest and monogram of Mrs Rowell-Grover.

This he opened and found an At-Home card for four o'clock that afternoon. He ran through the rest of the envelopes without finding anything that his secretary could not attend to.

Then he took up the card again and began one of those soliloquies which men who have spent many of their days in the solitude of the wilderness are wont to indulge in.

"Just fits in," he said to himself, "couldn't have been more convenient. Of course her Highness will have had a card. She is the dear little woman's greatest social attraction, or, at anyrate, the most interesting—doubly interesting for me since she does me the honour of wishing to marry me, and if that infernal machine of Ramal's is to be relied upon, as I suppose it is, she has done me the still greater honour of falling in love with me—she, Cara Natieff, the unapproachable, who has perhaps had more coronets laid at her feet than any other woman in Europe. Well, I suppose it is a great compliment and my masculine vanity ought to feel duly nattered.

"Ah, if it wasn't for Grace! Of course she will be there too. Curse that fellow Dacre; why did he meet her before I did—to say nothing of getting adopted by Sir Godfrey, the man who ought to have died out there in Never-Never? I wonder if he ever told Harold about that little trip of ours, and if he remembers the other affair with his real father? If that could be proved a British jury might take a rather ugly view of it, to say nothing of Godfrey Enstone's half share in the Lone Hill mines, which, of course, Master Harold would come into as his only legal heir!

"That would be a matter of some eight or ten millions hard cash, and even I might find a little difficulty in realising to that extent under compulsion.

"However, there is not much fear of that—unless Jenner Halkine really is alive or has somehow come to life again after getting frozen to death and duly cremated. Suppose he learns the whole story by means of that diabolical contrivance at the Institute? Still, if he made himself unpleasant there would always be the possibility of sending him back to prison, and I don't suppose he would care to risk that. No, I shall be safe enough there, and these people can be of the greatest possible use to me in more ways than one.

"By the way, I wonder what the beautiful Mrs Enstone and Master Harold would say if they knew that Jenner Halkine, convict and poisoner, had come to life again and was running this wonderful Institute, as I daresay he is, with our friend Ramal for a figure-head? Perhaps he might be persuaded to abolish his niece's husband in some decently unobtrusive way. That, at least, would leave the coast clear in a legal sense. When I come to a thorough understanding with our resuscitated convict perhaps that may be worth thinking about. It would do away with a good many unpleasant contingencies. I do hope her Highness will have sufficiently recovered to be there this afternoon. If she is it ought to be quite an interesting meeting.

"And now I think as it's a fine morning a tub and a turn on Guerrero in the Park won't be at all a bad thing."

Mr Saunders was not altogether pleased at being roused at such an unseemly hour, but he knew his master too well not to make his appearance with his usual serene composure. A telephone message was sent to the Mews, and by the time Mr

Hedley Siemens's toilet was completed and he had taken his early coffee his horse was standing before the entrance in charge of a groom.

Guerrero was a splendid black stallion, descended as to three parts of his ancestry from the old Andalusian stock imported into Central and Western South America by the old conquerors of Peru. Like nearly all South American horses he was a pacer, that is to say, he did not trot, but swung along at a fast, easy sort of run which will wear down the best trotting horse in an hour or two. He was his owner's favourite mount when he wanted the exhilaration of rapid movement with perfect ease in the saddle, for the rider of a pacer does not rise in the stirrups, he sits down almost straight legged and just accommodates the swing of his body to that of his horse.

These may appear to be somewhat trivial details, and yet if Mr Hedley Siemens had known the ultimate consequences of his waking so early and taking a fancy for a spin on Guerrero in the Park that particular morning he would rather have put a bullet through the head of his favourite horse than have risked them, so fatally are the smallest and the greatest concerns of human life mixed up together in the tangled web of Destiny.

It so happened that Harold and Grace were also taking an early spin that morning, and just as they turned in through Alexandra Gate they saw Guerrero come swinging along the Row at about eight miles an hour with his rider sitting erect and motionless in the saddle. A light grey coat buttoned only at the neck, was lying back over the saddle fluttering in the air made by the horse's speed.

"What a lovely horse!" exclaimed Grace. "A pacer, too! You don't often see them in the Park—and what a speed! It must be beautifully bred and trained, and—why, Harold"—as Guerrero's rider turned round and raised his soft, broad-brimmed felt hat—"that's his Majesty Hedley Siemens; how beautifully he rides!"

"Damn him! I know him now; I knew I had seen him before."

"Harold, what on earth is the matter with you? You don't often forget your manners like that. But," she went on anxiously, "you have gone quite pale and your face looks just as it did when you were giving evidence against my —I mean Dr Halkine. What is it? Won't you tell me, dear."

He had returned Siemens's salute mechanically, and as the black horse swung round the bend he followed it with his eyes as though he had not heard her question.

The sight of Guerrero and his rider had suddenly taken his thoughts back through nearly fifteen years to a little straggling collection of weather-board walled, tin-roofed shantys, which made up the beginning of what was now a city far away in Arizona. He saw himself, a lad of fourteen, riding up the wide, ragged street fringed with its broken plank side-walks beside the man who lay in the family vault at Enstone, done to death by the infernal arts of Jenner Halkine. A hundred yards away a man was riding towards them on a black mustang, a pacer. A poncho or Spanish cloak hung from his shoulders and a wide-brimmed hat was tilted slightly back from his forehead. He saw Godfrey Enstone's hand go back to his pistol pocket and heard him say in a voice that was hard and sharp in sudden anger,—

"Hal, that's Collier Banfield, the man who had your father killed and left me to die in Never-Never. Get out of the way—quick. There'll be shooting in a moment!"

At the same instant the other man's hand went back to his hip. The two pistols cracked almost simultaneously, but Godfrey Enstone's was just a little quicker. A bullet sang past his ears; then he saw the other man sway in the saddle and roll off.

He remembered that when the wound was dressed it was rather a peculiar one. The bullet had broken the collar bone, passed round the neck, almost miraculously clearing the great blood vessels, and had run down and lodged itself deep into the muscles of the back, whence it was afterwards extracted. Certainly the wound would leave a mark which would not possibly be mistaken as long as Collier Banfield lived.

It all passed in one of those swift flashes of memory which take no account of time or distance. In fact, so brief was it that Grace hardly noticed more than a little hesitation in his reply.

"I beg your pardon, dear, a thousand times," he said, still looking after the flying shape of Guerrero and his rider, "but I am sure you will forgive me when I tell you that I was perfectly right when I said to you the other day that I was certain I had seen Hedley Siemens somewhere before. I am certain of it now, and what's more I know who he really is."

"Who he really is, Harold!" exclaimed Grace, looking sharply at him. Why, what on earth do you mean? Do you mean that he is not really what he represents himself to be?"

They turned their horses in the direction of Hyde Park Corner, and he began his explanation, speaking quietly but with a thrill of angry emotion running through his tone.

"No, Grace, he is not what he pretends to be. To put it quite shortly, Hedley Siemens of today—millionaire, mine king, railyway king, student and all the rest of it, is really Collier Banfield of ten or fifteen years ago, gambler, card-sharper, thief, assassin, and any other old thing that is bad. Do you remember Sir Godfrey telling the story of that narrow shave he had in Australia when the man he thought was his friend and comrade to the death drank his water, stole his gold dust, took his papers and left him to die in the wilderness of hunger and thirst? That man was Collier Banfield, alias Hedley Siemens.

"You know that on what we called the Anniversary, Sir Godfrey and I always put on black ties, and that I do so still? Well, that is the day that my father, I mean that my real one, was knifed in a gambling hell in Yokohama, taken unawares and killed in cold bloodbya cross-bred English-Chinaman.who washung a few years after for another murder or rather half a dozen. He confessed the night before he died that Banfield was the real owner of the place, and that he had bribed him to pick a quarrel with him and knife him, because my father had found out a few rather ugly truths about the establishment, and had threatened to have it closed down by the authorities. So now you see, dear, that I have a double grudge against our millionaire friend."

"How awful, Harold!" said Grace, almost in a whisper; "but how is it that you recognised him—I mean, of course, supposing that you are right —only this morning when you have seen him scores of times before?"

"Because, dear," replied Harold, "it is the first time since that shooting match in Arizona—oh, I forgot I didn't tell you about that, but that will do later on—I mean

that this is the first time I have seen him riding a pacer since our last meeting in Arizona, when Sir Godfrey was a bit too quick for him, and got his bullet in first. That supplied the missing link of memory. Ah! look now, there he comes again. You can't mistake a man who rides like that, and that light coat flying behind him reminded me of the Mexican poncho that he was wearing. I'd lay a thousand pounds to a penny that if I could see that man's shoulders I should find that bullet wound."

"And suppose you are really right," she said in a low tone, as Hedley Siemens, who had already completed the circuit, swung past them again with his hand on the brim of his hat.

"Well," he said slowly, "if we were away West or East or South, I'd shoot him like the dog that he is, but if I give him what he deserves here, I'm afraid the law would proceed to make you a widow, dear—and that in a most unpleasant fashion. That's the worst of these civilised countries. I couldn't bring any crime legally home to him—at least, unless something like a miracle happened, but still, I can find some way of proving that I am right, and there'll be some satisfaction in letting the world know that Hedley Siemens, the gold king as they call him, is identical with Collier Banfield, swindler, card-sharper, and assassin-hirer—and when I have done that we will see what he does. By the way, are you going to Mrs Rowell-Grover's this afternoon?"

"Yes, I certainly intended to do so," she replied, "but he will be sure to be there too, and after what you have told me it would be rather uncomfortable, to say the least of it, and perhaps you wouldn't like me —

"Quite the reverse, dear," he interrupted. "I wouldn't have told any other woman so, but you have always been such a good and perfectly reliable chum that I know you'll help me, and the best way you can do that is to meet him and treat him exactly as though I haven't said a word to you. That's what I am going to do, because, of course, the only way to get anywhere with him is not to let him suspect anything."

Mr Hedley Siemens, blissfully unconscious of the many possibilities of his morning ride in the Park, went to Mrs Rowell-Grover's At-Home in a state of somewhat piquant uncertainty as to whether he would meet the Princess or not, and if so, whether she would retain any definite memory of the experiment which he was now beginning to feel rather glad she had not been able to go through with.

He was not disappointed in either respect. Cara Natieff was one of the first to greet him after he had paid his respects to his hostess, and there was no mistaking the meaning with which she said as they shook hands,—

"I am delighted to meet such a very close acquaintance again so soon."

She spoke in a very low but perfectly distinct tone, and there was a point-blank look of challenge in her wonderful eyes as they met his, which left no possibility of doubt as to her perfect comprehension of the situation.

For his part the millioniare hardly knew for the moment whether to be pleased or the reverse. On the one hand it was distinctly comforting to his masculine vanity to find himself on such uniquely intimate terms with one of the most beautiful and brilliant women in Europe. On the other hand, it was quite impossible for a man of his complicated temperament and vast responsibilities not

to feel somewhat anxious as to the extent and nature of her almost miraculously acquired knowledge.

He had passed the Enstones a few moments before with the usual bow and the stereotyped smile proper to such social functions. He had never seen Grace looking more lovely or quite so distantly desirable. Although she gave no apparent signs of possessing the terrible knowledge which Harold had given her that morning in the Park, his acute and highly-trained perceptions nevertheless detected that something must have happened to alter her mental attitude towards him since their last meeting. The lovely, magnetic eyes looked into his with a glance of acute inquiry and a glint of what he took to be antagonism which he had never seen in them before. Of course he knew of no reason for it, though if he could now have had a few moments' stance with her at the other end of that marvellous instrument in the octagonal room at the Institute, he would have had very good reason to understand the meaning of that altered glance. As it was, he was only able to compare it with the equally and yet differently changed expression in the violet blue eyes of Cara Natiefif, not altogether to the advantage of the latter.

Grace and Lady Georgina Pontifex passed again a moment after the Princess had uttered her significant greeting.

"How very lovely the beautiful Mrs Enstone is looking this afternoon!" she said, almost in a whisper. "Really one cannot wonder that so many of the men in town, even lions of Society, would be so very glad—and I daresay would give so much—to exchange personalities with her husband!"

There was no mistaking either the words or the eloquent glance which accompanied them. He saw instantly that his secret was known to her, that she knew that he loved Grace Enstone with a passion that was as strong as it was unholy. He was not slow to recognise the power which this knowledge gave her, and it was not very long before she made the fact if possible still plainer to him.

Mrs Rowell-Grover's house was one of those old Maida Vale mansions which are all too quickly disappearing before the encroachments of shops and flats. The spacious Georgian drawing-room ran from front to back of the house and opened by wide glass doors on to a little flight of broad, marble steps leading into a big, tree-shaded garden whose apparent extent had been doubled by the genius of Sir Josepji Paxton, and so an At-Home in fine weather also pleasantly partook of the nature of a garden-party. It so happened, whether by design or accident, that, about an hour later, Mr Hedley Siemens found himself once more tête-à-tête with Cara Natieff in a little secluded arbour, to which one of the servants had brought them tea and cakes.

"And now, Princess," he began abruptly, when he felt that they were alone, "since we know each other so well and, as I can see quite plainly, that you know at least one of my secrets—"

"And that you know at least one of mine," she said, with a glint in her eyes and a snap in her voice. "Well, I suppose you are going to ask me, as our American friends would say, what I am going to do about it?"

"Exactly."

"Then it should not take us very long to understand each other," she said softly in German, for greater protection against possible eavesdroppers; "but this is hardly the place for such confidences, is it?"

"I'm afraid not," he replied in the same language. "A certain room in the Institute would be more suitable, would it not?"

As though the very mention of the name had summoned him, Ram Dass appeared at that instant at the door of the summer house, salaamed and presented a little sealed envelope.

"Ah," said Hedley Siemens, as he picked it up from the table, "perhaps this is at once an answer and a suggestion."

Chapter XXIII

The note which Ram Dass had so mysteriously presented ran as follows: —

"The door of the Chamber of Secrets will be open at 10 o'clock tonight."

There was no signature, for none was necessary.

"Very well, Ram Dass, you can tell your Master that I shall be there."

"He's gone," said the Princess, "and yet, somehow, I did not see him go; he just seemed to fade away. There's something uncanny about that man, as, indeed, there seems to be about the whole of this Institute. Don't you think so?"

"Gone, has he," exclaimed her companion, looking up quickly from the note. "Eh!—Oh, yes, I must confess I have thought the same about our friend, Ram Dass. The other day he played the same sort of trick. He came to my room, ushered in by Saunders in the usual way, and when our conversation was over he just disappeared. I was looking out of the window for the moment, and when I turned round he was gone, but I certainly neither heard the door open nor shut. But, after all, that's quite a common sort of mystery in the East. Still, it is nothing that your Highness and myself have had a glimpse of, and which I shall probably go to the end of tonight."

"Ah," she said, looking at him with a glance of intense inquiry, "that means, I presume, that you are going to complete the experiment which I failed in so miserably?"

"Not altogether failed, Princess," he replied, with a smile that was full of meaning for her—"at least you discovered something."

"Yes," she said, with a little snap of her teeth, "two or three somethings, and among them the very thing I did not want to know."

"And yet, since it is the truth, is it not as well that you should know it? These things are not within our own control, you know. If they were one might order them differently."

He looked straight into her eyes as he spoke; the words came slowly as though he were weighing the effect of each one of them. She flushed ever so slightly, and he saw the lace which covered her breast rise and fall with a little flutter.

"And would you order this differently if you could," she asked, leaning a little towards him.

He thought that she never looked quite as beautiful or as desirable in his eyes as she did in that moment, and he answered quietly and with perfect frankness.

"Yes, if I could, and if you wished it and would help me."

"You know that already," she replied, rising. "I suppose, according to the ordinary contentions, I ought to have told a lie instead of saying that, but, of course, between us a lie would be rather worse than a nuisance, it would be so entirely futile. And now, if you will take me back, I think I will say goodbye. I have another call to make this afternoon. Will it be too much to ask that you should tell me something of the result of the experiment?" she went on, as they left the little summer-house. "I am so ashamed of my stupid weakness that I should like to have a chance of braving the ordeal again —no, not with you this time, or, indeed, with any other man, but with a woman, some dear innocent, white-souled creature—like our mutual friend, Grace Enstone, for instance."

The angry light in her eyes and the note of mockery in her voice angered and almost disgusted him for the instant, but the next the possibility that she had suggested came swiftly home to him.

"That should be not altogether impossible," he said, "and who knows what wonders a Soul Searcher might reveal."

"To her perhaps," she laughed a little bitterly; "to me I fear the only revelation would be that of the white flower of spotless womanhood. I don't know that that quotation is quite correct, but under the circumstances I don't think it is very far wrong. Frankly, and without any arrtire penste, I don't think that I should find very much hope for you in the revelations of the Soul Searcher."

"No," he replied, "I don't think you would, and I am not at all sure that I should like you to do so."

"Ah," she said, looking up at him again with a gleam of triumph in her eyes, "then you would wish the unattainable to remain the immaculate. Was it then only a platonic affection that I thought I saw in the Chamber of Secrets, or is the Soul Searcher not infallible after all?"

To her intense disappointment, and his very considerable relief, they turned at this moment out of a little shrubbery on to the lawn, and were joined by Colonel Rowell-Grover and Lady Georgina Pontifex, who, after a rapid glance from one to the other, said,—

"Ah, there you are, Princess; where have you and Mr Siemens been hiding yourselves, I wonder? We have been looking for you all over the place to ask you to come and sing us one of those lovely old Polish songs of yours."

Princess Natieff sang her song and took her leave almost immediately afterwards. Hedley Siemens stopped a little longer in the half confessed hope of having a few words with Grace. He found her with her husband and her hostess on the lawn, and as he joined them Mrs Rowell-Grover shook her fan at him, and said laughingly,—

"Yes, Mr Siemens, come here, please; I have a little bone to pick with you."

"I am sorry to hear that," he said, as he raised his hat. May I ask in what I have had the misfortune to offend the most charming of hostesses ?"

"Oh, it isn't quite as bad as that," she said. "I only want you to plead guilty to monopolising the Princess's very charming society for a rather unconscionable

time. We have hardly seen anything of her until Lady Georgina discovered you and brought her in to sing."

"Well, since you say so," he laughed in reply, "I must plead guilty, especially as you yourself supplied the most valid excuse."

"Guilty with extenuating circumstances," said the Colonel. "I suppose most of us would have done the same, granted permission. And now, Siemens, what can you tell me about this wonderful horse of yours that our friends here saw you on this morning in the Park. You know there's nothing much I love better than a piece of really good horse flesh, and a good pacer, as Enstone describes him, is a bit of rarity here."

"Oh, yes," replied the millionaire, looking quickly at Grace and then at her husband, "you mean Guerrero, my Spanish-American beauty? Yes, you must come and have a look at him, Colonel. I have half a dozen pacers at Wynthrope, and when any of my South American friends come over we run down and have races. You must run down for a week-end and watch us. You don't go in for pacing, I suppose, but I have got some very good English horses, too, and they would be very much at your service. By the way, Enstone," he went on, turning to Harold, "when are Mrs Enstone and yourself going to honour the Towers by accepting that bold invitation? Of course you with your world- wide travels must often have been across a pacer."

"Yes," said Harold, looking hard at him and purposely ignoring the invitation—"in fact, I very much prefer pacing to trotting, and, of course, I have done a lot of it in the Western States. That's a magnificent animal of yours and wonderfully fast I should say. He's a Mexican, isn't he? When I saw you I said to the wife you were riding in quite the Mexican style."

Both Grace and Harold looked keenly at him for some slip of consciousness on his part, but they were disappointed. He returned their glance with perfect carelessness and frankness, and said,—

"I suppose I ought to take that as a great compliment, for, of course, Mexicans are about the finest riders in the world, but I am sorry to say you are wrong. Guerrero is a son of the Pampas, bred near Corrientes on the Parana, and I have never been in Mexico—in fact, I know nothing of North America outside its cities and business centres, but I have spent a good deal of time in South America, both on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts."

He took his leave a few minutes later, and as he strolled down towards the upper end of the Edgeware Road, where he meant to take a cab home, he murmured between his teeth,—

"Now why should Enstone have asked me so pointedly about that riding, and why should the beautiful Grace have looked at me quite as hard as she did? Mexican—Mexican—oh, good lord! of course I see it now. How in thunder could I have forgotten it! Of course he was riding beside the old man that day when he pulled his gun on me—that day at Poverty Fork, opposite Joe Redman's Last Chance saloon. Great Scott! I thought it was my last chance when I didn't get my gun out quick enough! Sacred snakes ! if he's only certain about that, I reckon he'll be able to make more trouble than enough. Still, I don't see as how there can be much fear of that unless the old man has left some record behind him. After all, it will be only word against word, and I guess if I couldn't swear him inside out

after all these years my name isn't what it used to be—to say nothing of what it is. Still, that's all the more reason for working out the other scheme if it can be done—the other scheme for making the beautiful Grace a widow. If Halkine really is alive he shouldn't have any too much love for Harold Enstone, and if he got Sir Godfrey out of the way as easily as he did for a million, there is no reason why he shouldn't be able to manage a job like this for two, and by all that's anything she's worth it!"

If Mr Hedley Siemens had spoken this little soliloquy aloud, and any of his acquaintances had listened to it, they would have been not a little astonished by the sudden change that had come over both the man and his manner. Hedley Siemens, millionaire and student, brilliant financier and polished man of the world, had disappeared for the moment, and his place had been taken by the more vulgar, if not more ruthless, adventurer of fifteen years before. In fact, there could not have been a more complete confirmation of what Harold Enstone happened to be saying about the same time to Grace.

"I am just as certain as ever I was that he is the man. More so, indeed, for now that I have placed him, he seems to get more familiar to me every moment. Anyhow, there must be someone left on Poverty Fork that knew him and us and remember the shooting. Let me see, they call it Pinebluff City now, after the clump of pines on the top of the bluff between the forks of the river. I will cable out this afternoon to the mayor and ask if he can give me any news. If he can't, he is pretty sure to know someone who remembers the once famous Bully Banfield, for he was everything on his lower plane that he is in his higher—I mean he was a highly-educated man, an artist and a musician, an incurable gambler, unflinching speculator and entirely unscrupulous scoundrel. Someone must remember him, and if so, over they come to England, and we'll have it out. It's better done sooner than later, for if I'm right, a blackguard like that ought to have no place in decent society."

"Of course you are quite right, dear," replied Grace, but looking up at him with a dawning apprehension in her eyes'; "justice is justice, and it should be done, but I am afraid it will be no child's play to make an enemy of that man, if he really is what you think, especially as he has won this great position in the world and is master of a great many more millions than you are."

"You needn't trouble much about that, dear," he said; "clever and all as Hedley Siemens is, Jenner Halkine was a thousand times cleverer and more dangerous, and we ran him to earth. Now, if Halkine were alive, and he and Siemens, alias Banfield,. by some miracle or other managed to put their heads together for the working of mischief, it would be a distinctly formidable combination, but happily that is improbable."

"I wonder how you got that idea in your head, Harold," she said quickly and rather anxiously, "you know I have had just the same idea in my mind since you told me the story this morning. If I didn't know, as you say, that it was totally impossible, I should begin to fear that my gift of second sight was coming back to me. I have been too happy since the other troubles were over to think about that, but„it's curious that what you said should have brought it back to me, isn't it."

"Well, there's one thing quite certain, dear," he replied, "there can't be possibly anything more than an idea suggested by the association of this man with Sir

Godfrey and, therefore, with Halkine, and as the realisation of it is entirely out of the question, you may as well put it out of your mind at once."

"Oh, yes, of course, it can't be anything but an idle fancy. I shouldn't have said anything about it, only I thought it was rather a curious coincidence that your story this morning should have suggested it so vividly; of course, there can't be anything in it. The impossible doesn't happen nowadays."

She spoke with a light-hearted confidence which she would have thought anything but justified if what she called her gift of second sight had enabled her to foresee what was going to happen in the Chamber of Secrets that night at the Institute.

Chapter XXIV

As was only natural Hedley Siemens's thoughts for the rest of the day were pretty equally divided between what had happened at the garden-party and what might happen that night at the Institute. The more he dwelt upon the suspicion that Harold had managed to connect his former self with his present one the more uncomfortable he became, and with him to feel uncomfortable about anyone was the same thing as deciding to put the unpleasant personality out of his way by whatever means seemed easiest and most efficacious. This incident, too, was not without its effect upon the desperate, if unrighteous, passion that he had conceived for Grace. He knew that the mere fact that nursing such a passion placed him, as it were, in the position of a moral outlaw. This, of course, did not trouble him in the slightest. In fact, it had been his normal position almost ever since he had been able to distinguish right from wrong. But it is one of the curiosities of human nature that the worst of men are generally pleased to find some sort of an excuse for their wrongdoing. Grace, it was quite clear to him, was absolutely unapproachable. Her whole existence was entirely bound up in her husband and her baby son. The mere idea of anything like levity of conduct in connection with her seemed unthinkably absurd. Unless a woman is radically bad, or incurably frivolous, she can only fall through powerful, nay, almost irresistible, temptation. But what temptation could touch Grace Enstone, throned as she was in her splendid position, and protected by the triple bulwarks of love and duty and pride? His millions might have bought poorer and weaker women. Indeed, there were more women than one, who held their heads high in Society, who had stooped to be indebted to him for exorbitant milliners' bills and desperate losses at Bridge which they dared not disclose to their husbands. But here again Grace was doubly sheltered by the golden rampart of her husband's ever- increasing millions.

If his ends were to be attained they could only be by means in which neither mercy nor scruples had any part. Crime certainly, and violence if necessary, offered the only hope of success, and now that his passion and the animal instinct of self-preservation had begun to work together there was no length to which he did not feel himself prepared, nay, as he could almost persuade himself, that he was not entitled, to go.

If Harold Enstone could connect his past with his present and prove that Hedley Siemens, the European Gold King, was identical with Collier Banfield the Western gambler and desperado, with a dozen murders and minor crimes to his credit, it would certainly mean social ruin and disgrace, and possibly financial catastrophe as well. If Sir Godfrey Enstone had left behind him any definite record of the discovery of Lone Hill mines, which were the corner stones of his fortune, it would be anything but convenient or pleasant to satisfy the claims of his heir-at-law. Finally, there was the even more unpleasant contingency of his being called to account for procuring the murder of Harold's own father at Yokohama, for he happened to know that his Eurasian accomplice had left a sworn and witnessed confession behind him. There was, therefore, as he said to himself while he was driving down to Dulwich, every possible reason to consider Harold Enstone as a most dangerous obstacle in the path of his almost royal progress, and that being so, it was not only necessary, but obligatory, to get him removed as quietly, as swiftly, and withal as effectually, as possible. The only question was, now that he had come to this decision, Had Jenner Halkine really returned to life, and, if so, would he help him? And that was a question which he had determined to solve before he had left the Institute.

He had to admit to himself that he entered Izah-Ramal's private sanctum with feelings if not exactly akin to fear at least of somewhat anxious apprehension.

"Good evening, friend—brother, as I trust we may be able to greet you before you depart," said Izah-Ramal, as Ram Dass salaamed him into the room and vanished.

"Good evening, Doctor," replied his visitor, as they shook hands. "Friends, of course, we are, at least I hope so, but brothers—perhaps you will pardon me for asking your interpretation of the difference between friendship and brotherhood?"

"Why should you not?" replied the Director, in his gentlest tones. It is just that subject which I wished to discuss with you before you, if I may put it so, cross the threshold of our Chamber of Secrets."

"But I was under the impression," said Siemens, as he took the chair towards which Izah-Ramal had waved his hand, "that I had already crossed it —at least, that is if you are referring to the scene of my too brief experiment with Princess Natieff."

"It is the same, and yet not the same," replied Izah-Ramal, gravely. "Still, that will serve as an introduction to what it is my duty to say to you. On that occasion you obtained a brief glimpse into the mental working of a beautiful and brilliant woman who, in spite of the fact that she is possessed of fortitude far above the average of her sex, was nevertheless unable to sustain the ordeal of viewing the soul of Hedley Siemens unveiled."

He paused and looked into his eyes as though, without the aid of the magical Soul Searcher, he would read the thoughts which were passing through his mind at the moment. His guest returned his gaze with perfect steadiness and said quietly,—

"Yes, I quite see what you mean—and now?"

"Now," continued Izah-Ramal, still holding his eyes with that magnetic glance which Hedley Siemens had come to know so well, "now, it will be you whose fortitude will be tested. You will be brought, in the mental sense, face to face with

one who is not the least of the adepts. You will see him eye to eye and soul to soul, and if you sustain that ordeal you will henceforth be one of us whether with your will or against it."

"I am afraid I don't quite follow you there, Doctor," interrupted Hedley Siemens, in something like his usual masterful tone. "With my will or against it? Really, I must ask you to make your meaning a little clearer."

"It is easily explained," replied the other, without the slightest trace of feeling in his tone. "The bond of our brotherhood consists in absolute knowledge, and, therefore, in absolute confidence. To put it otherwise, if two human beings know each other as they know themselves they are obliged to trust each other whether they will or not. Your own studies in mental science will, I trust, make that position perfectly plain to you."

"I think I follow you. In other words, you mean that a man who knows everything, hidden and unhidden, about another man must be trusted by him simply because, to put it quite vulgarly, if he didn't the other fellow could always give him away—and," he went on, leaning forward in his chair with his elbows on his knees, and talking at Izah-Ramal as if he had been an objecting shareholder at one of his own company's meetings, "as it may be taken for granted that the veneer of civilisation is not much thicker than a coat of mahogany stained on plain deal, in other words, that we are all savages under the skin and, therefore, in the eyes of the modern civilised person, criminals. If we all understand each other thoroughly, each of us knows enough to find means of putting his brother criminal, actual or potential, outside the pale of Society. Am I right, Doctor?"

"Yes," replied Izah-Ramal, also leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, "you are so completely right in your entirely unconventional estimate of the situation that I feel that I ought to compliment you upon yOur very close approach to our position. After what you have said I feel obliged to say that I think there is little fear of your surviving the ordeal."

"Surviving, Doctor," said the millionaire, with a just perceptible start, "I wasn't aware that this was a matter of life and death."

"Only of mental life or death, my dear sir," replied Izah- Ramal, "not physical death. That, you will admit, even if desirable, under certain circumstances might produce complication which we have no wish to be roubled with. And now," he went on, rising from his chair, "if you feel quite prepared to commence the experiment will you follow me? Only," he said again, after a little pause, "for the last time I must warn you that the threshold of the Chamber of Secrets must be for you the borderland between two roads—the world of the half knowledge you have now and that of the perfect knowledge, if you are found worthy to bear the burden."

"And the perfect knowledge, does that also mean the perfect power? the man who knows all things within the scope of human life, can he also do all things within the same limits?"

"That, my dear sir, depends entirely upon the way in which the perfect knowledge is used. We, as I have hinted to you before, do not measure right and wrong, virtue or vice, but according to the conventional standards of a world which is almost entirely populated by human beings in a very low stage of moral

and intellectual development. We do not judge ourselves, or each other by, we will say, the standards of the law of England—"

"Exactly," interrupted Hedley Siemens, who had been waiting for his advantage, "I quite see what you mean. In fact, it is hardly necessary to quote the case in point—"

"There is no necessity," interrupted Izah-Ramal, with a motion of his right hand towards the door. "I think that we shall understand each other quite well enough without any furthur explanation. And now," he continued, stepping outside the door into the passage, "there are two ways before you—that one to the right will, as you know, take you into our entrance hall and from there back to the. commonplace world you have lived in so far. This one," he went on, making a motion with his left hand towards the curtained corridor which, as Hedley Siemens knew, led to the Chamber of Secrets, "will take you into another world—the world of perfect human knowledge and, therefore, of influence and power and, it may be, even as you use that power, to an invisible throne from which you may sway the destinies of nations, since knowledge is power."

"Then, of course, I take this one," said Hedley Siemens, turning to the left and laying his hand lightly on Izah-Ramal's right shoulder; "but there are other things dear to the heart of man which even those who sit on thrones do not always attain to—prizes which all the political power of the world cannot compel, and all the money that ever was coined cannot buy. Can this knowledge and power that you have told me about compel these also?"

"As they are used wisely or unwisely, yes or no. I can give you no clearer answer than that at present," replied Izah-Ramal taking his hand from his shoulder and holding it for a moment in his own. Then he went on, his voice almost sunk to a whisper, "You have been blessed by the love of a woman for whom many other men have hungered; you are cursed by your own love for a woman who, so far as the conditions of the world in which you live are confined, is unattainable to you."

"And under the other conditions?"

"It is not I who have undertaken the task of leading you across the border of your world to ours," replied Izah-Ramal in his strangely impersonal tone.

"I know that because you have told me so already," said Hedley Siemens, instinctively gripping his hand hard. "What I want to know is just this: When I go into that room shall I meet Jenner Halkine in the flesh? I mean the man who—"

"Yes, yes," replied Izah-Ramal, laying his hand on Siemens's with a little stroking movement which instantly relaxed his grip. "Yes, not only in the flesh, but also soul to soul. When you have done that, then—and if you remain yourself—it will be time for us three perhaps to talk over those other smaller matters which now seem to be of such importance to you."

"I can ask for nothing more than that," replied the Gold King, dropping his hand. "I am entirely at your service and ready to learn all that the Chamber of Secrets can teach me."

"Very well, then," said Izah-Ramal, parting the curtains at the end of the corridor, "this way lies knowledge, but do not blame me if afterwards you remember that the wisest of the wise said many centuries ago, Whoso getteth knowledge getteth sorrow."

Chapter XXV

Hedley Siemens had not yet seen Jenner Halkine in the flesh. In fact, since his marvellous escape from Nethermoor, no human eyes had seen him undisguised, save those of Izah-Ramal and Ram Dass. The electric cluster over the table was alight, and as the director ushered him in he saw a rather tall, spare man dressed in black, clean shaven, grey-haired and wearing blue spectacles, rise from one of the seats of the table, fold his hands and bow in silence as Izah-Ramal said,—

"Brother, this is Hedley Siemens."

"Welcome," replied Halkine, with, as Siemens thought, a just perceptible start. Then he quickly removed his spectacles, and taking a couple of steps forward, he looked straight into the Gold King's eyes. For the first time in his life Hedley Siemens found himself instantaneously under the power of a stronger will than his own. The magnetic eyes had caught his glance and held it just as a man's grip might hold the hand of a child. He simply stared back helplessly, and in a moment or two he found his thoughts beginning to wander and scatter until he seemed only to have one clear idea in his mind, that was that somewhere and somewhen, far away and long ago, these eyes had already looked into his just as they were doing now. Then he heard Halkine's clear, strangely familiar voice say in a low, almost gentle tone,—

"I never forget a face and I know yours. I saw it last in Japan— yes, in Yokohama; but then it was not the face of Hedley Siemens, millionaire and student of the inner mysteries."

The words, quietly spoken, and in a voice almost as soft as a woman's, hit Hedley Siemens like so many blows in the face. Never to his knowledge had he seen Jenner Halkine, the escaped convict from Nethermoor, before, and yet here was this man with luminous, penetrating, magnetic eyes looking, as it seemed to him, through his own and into his brain, and telling him about that other self of his which that day had begun to follow him like a spectre rising from a grave, which the brilliant successes of his later years had convinced him was by this time nameless and forgotten. But now it had a name and a memory. If this man with the awe-compelling eyes had not only recognised him, but named the very place in which his other self had deliberately procured the killing of Harold Enstone's father, what chance could there be that Enstone himself had made a mistake? There was practically none. His clear, quick intellect, trained to act instantly and almost automatically in the face of any possible combination of circumstances, told him that Izah-Ramal, possibly speaking from more perfect knowledge, had been right when he told him that absolute understanding of each other was the most unbreakable bond that could be forged between man and man.

"I think, Dr Halkine, if I am right in addressing you by that name, that after what you have just said, the proposed experiment with the apparatus here seems rather superfluous. It seems to me that, at anyrate, I should enter upon it at a decided disadvantage. What do you think about it!" he continued, as it were

wrenching his eyes away from Halkine by a supreme mental effort and turning to Izah-Ramal.

"That is a question which I think I can answer perhaps even better than our friend the Director," said Jenner Halkine quickly, and with a certain emphasis which added to Siemens's conviction that he and not Izah- Ramal was the master spirit which controlled the Institute and all its vast possibilities. "You see, my dear sir," he continued, moving a pace to the right and facing the Gold King once more, "there can be no advantage on either side, when you and I are both at the mercy of the Searcher of Souls, the Revealer of the inmost secrets of the human mind. I need not remind one of your vast knowledge and experience of the world that there is no man, however good he may seem in the eyes of his fellow-men, whose inmost soul does not contain that which would revolt his dearest friend if he could see it."

"Quite so, I think that, if you will excuse me saying so, was said rather more neatly by some Frenchman about a century ago," replied Siemens, with a justifiable touch of acidity in his tone. "In fact, the saying has passed into an axiom by this time, and it only needed the invention of such a diabolical contrivance as you have here to give it both mathematical and mechanical proof. I hope that you will pardon the adjective."

"Certainly," laughed Halkine—"that and the rest of what you said. Of course, I ought to have known that such a well-known saying must be quite familiar to a man of your wide reading. But may I ask why diabolical?" he went on, with a motion of his hand towards the machine, the inner mechanism of which was already purring gently as though in anticipation of the work that it was about to do.

"To tell you the truth, my dear Doctor, the word is not my own—at least, it was suggested by the recollection of my last experiment. You remember that, Dr Ramal, of course, don't you?—when her Highness snatched her hands away from mine and fell back into her chair saying that she had seen into Hell. It was not particularly complimentary, but on the French philosopher's hypothesis it might possibly have been true."

"Possibly," replied the Director, dividing a smiling glance between him and Halkine. "You see, my dear sir, you committed what you will, perhaps, allow me to call an indiscretion in permitting a woman, and, worst of all, a most clever, brilliant and charming woman, to look open-eyed through the windows of your soul."

"And after a very brief inspection, as I understand," laughed Halkine, in a suggestively irritating fashion, "she came to the conclusion that she had seen quite enough of what she described with perhaps more candour and completeness than pre-meditated courtesy. And now, Mr Siemens, am I to be privileged to take a look into that same, what shall I say?—inferno?"

"If you understand me, Doctor, as well as I believe I understand you," replied the man who had never shown mercy to a fellow-creature whom he thought he had at a disadvantage, "I guess it won't be anything very far from a fair exchange. If you were going to look into an inferno, I reckon that I shall have the enjoyment of a pretty lurid spectacle in exchange."

Insensibly he had lost control of himself for the moment and drifted back through the years to his other self.

"Ah, yes," said Halkine, looking into his eyes again, "yes, I remember now in those days you were Collier Banfield, if I am not mistaken in the name?"

"You needn't worry any further, Doctor. That will do," replied Hedley Siemens, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets and walking towards the mechanical demon that was purring on the table. "I guess it will be a pretty fair exchange. Sit down."

"I am very glad that we understand each other so far to begin with," said Halkine, as he went towards the chair in which the Princess had fainted and sat down.

In all the history of psychology such a struggle of soul against soul, each laid bare to the inner vision of the other, had never taken place as that which ensued during the half-hour in which Hedley Siemens and Jenner Halkine had seen each other exactly as they were. The mask of flesh, which for ages had been impenetrable to human vision, had been removed. The disguise, in which every man, woman and child of all the myriads of the human race had passed through life from the creation until now, had been stripped off. As the athletes of Greece and Rome had wrestled naked with each other in the arena, so these two souls had struggled through that terrible thirty minutes, and both had come out of the conflict outworn yet not outdone. Their vision had grown blurred. The unearthly light generated by the tubes and reflected in the mirrors had grown dim. Their hands had relaxed their grip, and in the end, almost at the same moment, they had fallen back in their chairs with a nearly simultaneous sigh which told Izah-Ramal that the experiment had proceeded to the utmost limits of human endurance.

He moved the two switches on the table and turned on the light in the electric cluster. Then came a swift descent, if not from the sublime to the ridiculous, at least from the occult to the practical. He touched the button by the side of the door. Ram Dass appeared, and he ordered him to bring brandy-and- soda, and do it quickly.

Both men wanted it very badly, so badly, indeed, that Izah-Ramal found it necessary to prescribe another when he had got them back into his own sanctum and planted them in arm-chairs facing each other on either side of the fireplace. Seated thus they formed the most curious study in humanity that even he, who had progressed through age after age and life after life to the possession of almost perfect knowledge, had ever seen. They sat still and silent and stared at each other with blank, unmeaning eyes. They, too, he saw, had in a sense reached the perfection, or, at anyrate, the completeness, of knowledge as regards each other. So the spectacle suggested itself to the student of many mysteries, as one disembodied spirit might have looked at another, bare—naked, knowing everything and, therefore, unashamed. They were the verification of another penetratingly-wise French saying, Tout comprende est tout pardonne, and yet there was another factor in the solution of this weird problem which astonished, almost shocked, even him. Those two men, knowing each other as no two human beings had ever known each other before, also most manifestly hated each other with a hatred which seemed to be almost superhuman.

And then another chilling thought struck him. What if he and Jenner Halkine, while inventing and constructing what Hedley Siemens had already called, with

perhaps some justice, this diabolical contrivance, had really overstepped that frontier which divides the humanly possible from the impossible? What if they had placed within the control of human hands an engine too mighty for human hands to control? How would it go with them if this machine, through the medium of which they hoped to control Society, merely wrecked it by making human association impossible? There was something terrifying in the thought, even to him, but as he stood and looked on these two silent, dull-eyed men, who an hour before had been two of the most brilliantly capable men to be found between east and west, he knew in his own soul that the thought was a true one. While he was thinking thus, Hedley Siemens lifted his glass with a limp, nerveless hand, carried it unsteadily to his lips, gulped the brandy-and-soda down in long swallows, put the glass back on the table, and ended the long silence by saying in a voice strangely unlike his own,—

"Well, Jenner Halkine, thief and philanthropist, murderer and martyr, liar and truth-finder, what do you propose to do? Knowledge such as we have now cannot remain unused. What use do you suggest that we should make of it?"

"I think the best use we can put it to will be to accomplish each other's complete annihilation as far as this stage of existence is concerned," replied Halkine, listlessly and without any apparent interest in the subject. "But that, I presume, would hardly be an acceptable proposition to a man like yourself."

"No," replied Siemens, slowly, "not quite. At the same time, I must say that if you and I were alone together in some places I have been in I should have the greatest satisfaction in killing you."

"Of course you would," said the other, without a trace of emotion in his voice. "And I should equally, of course, consider it a duty to abolish you, granted always that I could, which I do not now think possible."

"And why should that be so," exclaimed Izah-Ramal, startled for the moment out of his habitual calm by this amazing statement.

"Because," replied Halkine, turning his head slowly towards him as though with an effort, "because I have learned now, as Hedley Siemens has learned, that, contrary to all human belief, perfect knowledge does not mean perfect power. On the contrary, it means impotence. How could I injure this man, or this man injure me, when each of us must know the intention of the other beforehand? Can you not see, adept as you are, that all power of human injury consists primarily in the ignorance of the injured? Could I, for instance, have made Godfrey Enstone forge his own will, drive himself mad with drugs, and then kill himself, if he had known all the time that I intended him to do so? That is why Hedley Siemens and Jenner Halkine, each desiring the other's death, are utterly incapable of even hurting each other in the smallest degree. It is an utterly infernal situation, but we have created it ourselves, and, of course, we must take the consequences."

"Yes, I understand," said Izah-Ramal, quietly and yet with a faint note of triumph in his tones; "I see that a new power has been born into the world —a power which can only be used for evil on those who become subject to it. I am glad that I did not make the experiment with you."

Hedley Siemens laughed the spectre of a laugh and said, speaking just as impersonally as Halkine had done, "That gives you a distinct advantage over both

of us. Incidentally it also suggests that it will become necessary for one of us to abolish you."

Chapter XXVI

The next morning about ten o'clock, as he was getting ready to go to the City, Hedley Siemens was somewhat surprised by a message which Saunders brought him to the effect that a lady had called and wished to see him particularly.

"What sort of a lady, Saunders?" he asked rather irritably, for the strange events of the previous night had shaken his nerves up very considerably and he was not by any means himself. "Didn't she send a card or give her name? What sort of a lady is she?"

The astute Saunders instantly noted the emphasis on the lady and replied with a demure smile,—

"Oh, she's a lady right enough, sir. No doubt about that, a regular top- heeler too, and, if I might say so, pretty as a picture and dressed like a duchess."

"Very well, Saunders," said his master, with a dry smile, "I'll accept your recommendation. You may show her in."

"Yes, sir," replied Saunders and disappeared, closing the door gently behind him.

"Now who the deuce can that be?" said the Gold King half aloud, as he turned towards one of the windows overlooking the park. ' Pretty as a picture and dressed like a duchess.' Saunders certainly has a turn for crisp description, and as there are only two women—Oh, yes, of course, it must be the Princess. Now what the devil does she want? I wish I had never heard of that confounded Institute and Halkine's infernal machine. It strikes me the situation is getting rather too complicated to be pleasant. Here I am hopelessly in love with another man's wife who looks at me as if I was a shopwalker, and on the other hand, one of the most brilliant and beautiful women in Europe has fallen in love with me, not only with my millions either. Halkine's infernal machine told me that much. Yes, come in."

"Lady to see you, sir," murmured Mr Saunders, behind the opening door. He heard a swish of skirts and a rustle of hidden silk and there stood Cara Natieff, hatted and gowned to absolute perfection, with a lurking gleam of mischief in her eyes, and a faint pink flush tinging the exquisite purity of her cheeks.

"Good morning, your Highness; this is indeed an unexpected—honour."

There was just the slightest perceptible pause between the last two words, which deepened the flush on the Princess's cheeks.

"Of course, you would think that," she replied, looking straight at him with a challenge in her eyes, "but I hardly thought you would say it. It was rather commonplace for you, and doesn't fit the situation. Of course, this is a shockingly unconventional visit. To be quite candid, that is why I did not give my card to the porter. But at the same time the situation itself is unconventional, almost painfully so, I am afraid, but then that is just why I have taken the liberty—and the risk—"

"My dear Princess," he replied, moving a luxurious arm-chair so that if she sat in it the light from one of the long windows would fall on her face, "my dear Princess, I am afraid you must pardon me if I say that the one suggestion is as unthinkable as the other. Pray sit down and let us talk, and to begin with, how can I best serve you?"

"By listening to me and telling me what you think of what I am going to say," she replied, sinking slowly down into the depths of the big chair. "Of course, I needn't go into particulars as to certain details, but considering the nature of those details I felt it was both my duty and my inclination to come at the earliest possible moment and warn you that you are in very considerable danger."

"My dear Princess," he interrupted, "it is very kind of you, very kind indeed, but perhaps I may save you trouble by telling you that I am already aware of the fact, and that I am taking every possible means for my own protection. Last night I made alike a powerful ally and a very detestable enemy. That sounds paradoxical, but at the same time it is true. In other words, I carried out the experiment at the Institute."

"Ah, and may I ask with whom?" said the Princess, sitting up and looking keenly at him. "The Director, I presume?"

"I am afraid I am not at liberty to answer that question even to you," he replied, with a suspicion of stiffness. "It is, I believe, one of the secrets of that Temple of Mysteries. I may, however, tell you that the other party to the experiment was not our good friend, Izah-Ramal. I am afraid we are wandering a little from the subject. May I recall it by thanking you for coming to me on such a charitable purpose? You were alluding, I presume, to some especial danger that is threatening; and you know, of course, that that sort of thing is one of the inevitable penalties of such success as I have been able to win."

"Yes, you must forgive me. It was quite my fault," she replied, as though she had not noticed the refusal to answer her question. "I came to tell you that Harold Enstone has somehow got into his head that you are someone else, and that he has cabled to a place called Pinebluff City asking the mayor whether there is anyone there who knew a man named Collier Banfield, a rather too well-known character in Arizona, about fifteen years ago, and who could identify him now. If so, these people are to be forwarded to London as speedily as possible without any regard to expense. Of course, I need hardly remind you of the consequences of such an identification."

"And now may I ask your Highness a question?" said Hedley Siemens, with wonderful self-control, and yet feeling that he had turned half a shade paler. "How has it been possible for you to discover that, and why should you find any reason for thinking I am the person whom Enstone wishes to identify as somebody else."

"Fortunately, I am able to answer your question more frankly than you were able to answer mine," she replied very sweetly, and yet with a smile which he did not altogether appreciate. "It was all perfectly simple. I met Grace Enstone last night at Lady Bermondsey's, and got her talking as a woman generally does with another woman whom she dislikes. Your name came up and she, not knowing that I was at all interested in the matter, told me that after seeing you riding in the Park yesterday morning her husband had got an idea that he had met you before in America, but that you had said afterwards at Mrs Graver's garden-party that

you had never been anywhere in the States except in the cities. When I got home, I found a copy of a cable which Harold Enstone sent yesterday afternoon to Pinebluff City and an answer from the mayor saying that he had found five citizens who could swear to Collier Banfield if they saw him, and that he was sending them to England by the next mail."

"But how in thunder—I beg your pardon—a thousand times—but how on earth could you, even with your influence, get copies of private cables like those?"

"That, I am afraid, I must answer as you answered my question about the experiment. The secret is not mine. I could only remind you that even telegraphic clerks are not all incorruptible, and that a sort of telegraphic press cutting-agency isn't altogether impossible. Of course it is expensive, but, fortunately, I can afford to indulge the hobby, and I assure you we find it a great deal more useful than most are."

"Well," he repeated, with a sudden lift of his eyelids. "Ah, yes, I think I understand. I have heard of these little arrangements before. And I suppose it is quite easy for the personal matter to get conveniently mixed up with the official."

"Exactly," she said, with a nod and a little laugh, "and there is not the slightest reason why, since it is so difficult for you and I to have any secrets from each other, you should not understand the circumstances. But now the point is, What ought you to do under them?"

"In other words," he said, "what use ought I to make of the very valuable information which you have so kindly brought me."

He paused for a moment and looked steadfastly at her. If she did not know the truth already, was not this precisely the moment to put her love to the test of knowledge? If it could survive that revelation, surely there could be hardly any extreme to which it would not lead Cara Natieff.

"Cara," he said, speaking more tenderly than she had ever heard him speak before—so tenderly indeed that her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened, "as you have just said, it is difficult for us to have any secrets from each other, so now tell me quite plainly how you would regard me if you knew that Harold Enstone's suspicion was correct, and that the arrival of these people from America will prove it?"

"I knew it before I came here," she said quietly, "and, therefore, I suppose the fact that I have come is a sufficient answer."

"More than sufficient," he replied slowly, "and you—you with your beauty, your wealth, your brilliant position in the world, would still be willing to join your lot with the man who was once Collier Banfield?"

"The man with whom I would join hands," she said, with just the faintest quiver of emotion in her voice, "is Hedley Siemens. If he was anybody else in the past, that has nothing to do with me. I love in the present and not in the past, and I look only at the future."

"But I am afraid there is yet another offence that you will have to forgive, Cara, before you and I can join hands with perfect understanding and confidence."

"I know what you are going to say," she said, with a smile that had very little sweetness in it. "You are going to ask me to forgive you for loving another woman. Well, that is the greatest of all offfences that a woman can forgive in the man she loves. But, perhaps, I am not altogether like other women. I may be better than

some, and so far as my potentialities go I might very possibly be worse than a great many. You love Grace Enstone with what I may perhaps call the sentimental side of your nature, and possibly your tender feelings are made tenderer by the knowledge that she is unattainable—at least at present."

"At present," he exclaimed, rising from his chair and going towards her. "There need be no more secrets between us now, I think. What do you mean? What are you thinking about? Yes, it is true that I love Grace Enstone just in the way you have said. If I thought I had a soul, in the, vulgar sense of the word, I would sell it to get her—"

"As wife or—what?"

"Wife? No, at least not for preference," replied Hedley Siemens, with a brutal frankness which delighted Cara Natieff in a fashion which he could hardly have comprehended. "There is only one wife, one real helpmeet in the world for me now, Cara," he went on, catching her by the wrists, "and there is no need for me to tell you who that is. No other woman, I believe, could have done what you have done this morning, and no other woman shall ever sit beside me on this golden Midas throne that I have raised and from which I can rule men like slaves and shake kingdoms. Will you come?"

"Yes," she whispered, as he drew her towards him.

In the next moment she was in his arms, his lips were upon hers, thrilling with the passion with which she had so subtly inspired him.

When he had at length released her she walked away to the window, and after looking out over the park a few moments she turned and faced him, her body inclined backwards a little, her draperies falling in perfect lines, her exquisite shape framed by the softly tinted hangings of the window, her lips slightly parted in a half smile, her cheeks slightly flushed and her eyes aflame—a perfect vision of that loveliness which was created to save or damn the souls of men—and sometimes of women also.

"And now," she said in a low, soft voice, which sounded like very strange music in his ears, "shall I tell you why I was able to forgive you that offence which is the most grievous in the eyes of a woman who loves the man that has committed it?"

For the moment he was utterly intoxicated by her beauty and the sensuous delight of that long embrace. She had come to conquer, and she had conquered. She had made him love her as she wished him to do in spite of his love for Grace. She had won, and she was magnificent, all-conquering in her triumph. For the first time in his life Hedley Siemens found himself mastered instead of mastering. He said, with an effort to keep his voice steady,—

"Yes, Cara, do."

"Very well," she replied, with another dazzling glance, "I will, and the explanation is very simple. You love Grace Enstone after the sentimental fashion. I love you and therefore I hate her, and when a woman hates another she gets back to the instincts of the primeval savage. She wants revenge, the bitterest, deadliest, most utterly destroying revenge that she can get, and that is the revenge I mean to have on Grace Enstone."

"But how?" he asked rather weakly, "how can that be possible?"

"Most things are possible to those whose love and hate are strong enough," she replied. "Listen and I will tell you. In the first place, Harold Enstone's abolition is

now as vitally necessary to me as it is to you, and that ought to take place if possible before these people, whoever they are, arrive from America. At the same time, we must remember that that is not quite so easy an achievement here in this inconveniently free country as it would be elsewhere. Now there is a castle that I know of not very far from the border of Russian Poland. It is part of my ancestral heritage, and it is one of the most conveniently out-of-the-way places in Europe. It is about fifteen miles from the nearest post town, surrounded on all sides by leagues of pine forest, and those forests are inhabited for miles round by the descendants of my grandfather's serfs, who are fortunately so stupidly and ignorantly loyal to the House of Natieff that they are, to all intents and purposes, no more free men than their fathers were. It is not exactly the sort of place that one would select for a honeymoon, but I think that matters might be so arranged that we could spend a portion of ours there with Mr and Mrs Harold Enstone as our guests, and if that could once be done, of course all the rest, I mean as regards your particular enemy and mine, might be quite satisfactorily arranged—always supposing that we could not find a shorter and easier way here in London."

"I don't quite know about that," he replied, going to her and putting his arm round her shoulders, "but now that you and I are just we, I think I might tell you that, if the matter cannot be satisfactorily arranged in London, the scheme which you have outlined so admirably might at least be well begun here."

"Yes," she said, putting her arm up over his shoulder. "I am so glad you continually agree with me as far as the main outlines of our little plot are concerned. And, now, how would you propose to begin from this end, as I daresay you have heard them say in America."

"This way, dear," he replied, drawing her to him and putting his left hand so as to bring her head down to his shoulder. "If you do not already know it I think this is the right time to tell you that a once notorious relative of Grace Enstone's—"

"You don't mean Jenner Halkine?"

"I do."

"Are you going to tell me that he is still alive?" she whispered, drawing his head down towards her upturned face and bringing her tempting lips closer to his. "Of course I know all of the story that was made public and perhaps a little more. Now, if he were only alive I think everything would be easy. We might begin our honeymoon in Paris or Vienna among the Italian Lakes and finish in my castle in Poland, with Mr and Mrs Enstone as our guests."

"He is alive and he will help us," he replied, "in fact he must."

"Must! What do you mean?" she asked. "Why must? Have you the power to compel him to help us?"

"I completed the experiment with him which I began with you," he replied, "and I saw more deeply into his soul than I did into yours. He killed Sir Godfrey Enstone, or rather made him kill himself, after getting him to forge his own will. Harold Enstone prosecuted him and got him penal servitude for life. If Harold Enstone knew that he was alive, and practically in command of the Institute, what do you suppose he would do?"

"Send him back to prison at once, of course," she replied in a half whisper, "and if he knew that Harold Enstone suspects that he is alive, and where he is, I

suppose he wouldn't have much more mercy on him than he had on poor Sir Godfrey."

"That, my Princess, was an inspiration which shows how closely our thoughts follow each other. Yes, exactly, but there is something more even than that which the vision of the Soul Searcher revealed to me. Before she married Harold Enstone Grace was the absolute mental slave of her uncle, who, I believe, is either her father or her stepfather, although that I did not see quite distinctly. Since her marriage something, perhaps the magic of matrimony, has enabled her to escape entirely from his control. He would give a good deal to get that control back. He cannot do that while Harold Enstone lives, and that is why I think we can count upon his help in carrying out the first part of our plan."

"I see, I see," she whispered. "We could be married by special license as they call the dispense tion here. Since we are both patrons of the Institute and also disciples of our good friend, Izah-Ramal, it would not be difficult to hold our reception there. Of course, Mr and Mrs Enstone would be among our guests. It would be easy to arrange for an interview, a little private stance in the Sanctuary of the Secrets and then—well, then, if things work out as I intend them to do, I—your wife, in my old Polish stronghold, will make you a present of Grace Enstone as my ancestors did sometimes with their serfs. No woman could wish for a sweeter revenge than that, could she?"

"No. I have found the perfect woman at last! You are as damnable in hate as you are divine in love, and no man can hope more from his ideal woman than that."

Then his arms closed about her, he crushed her up close to him, and their lips sealed the unholy contract.

Chapter XXVII

On the third morning after the momentous interview at Hyde Park Court, Grace Enstone, running through the little pile of letters which lay at her right hand at the breakfast—table, opened an envelope which had a coronet and a monogram on it, took out two exquisitely-designed cards, glanced at one of them and said, tossing it across to her husband,—

"There, Harold, what do you think of that? The gossips were right, after all, don't you see. But what if your suspicions about him are right, and the poor Princess were to find it out too late, to wake up some fine morning and find that she had married such a man as Collier Banfield was. Don't you think —"

"No, dear, I don't," he replied somewhat coldly. "I know what you were going to say—' Don't I think she ought to be warned ' before she takes the fatal step? Certainly not. It is no business of ours to interfere with the matrimonial projects of an experienced woman of the world like the Princess Natieff. If she chooses to marry without inquiring into his antecedents, what on earth has that to do with us? Besides, you know, I am not absolutely certain, and if we said anything of that sort before I am, a man like Siemens could make things very unpleasant for me, and would. No, I think her Highness will have to stand the hazard of her luck. She

is not exactly the sort of woman I like, in spite of her undeniable beauty and brilliance, but for all that I really should be sorry for her if she marries Siemens and he turns out to be Banfield."

"Yes, poor thing," said Grace, "that would be a fate for a woman who is received at all the Courts of Europe, in spite of all his millions."

"Which would not be very much use to him socially or financially if our friends from America are able to help me to prove him to be what I think he is, for, Princess or no Princess, I'll have no mercy for him. But for the present, at anyrate, I suppose we must give him the benefit of the doubt, and therefore, I suppose you will attend the reception at the Institute."

"Oh, yes, of course," she replied, with a laugh, "all the disciples of the new craze will be sure to be there, and considering the Princess's position and Mr Siemens's enormous wealth and influence, I should think all the upper half of Society will be there as well. It will be quite one of the picturesque functions of the season. But what about you? I'm afraid you won't be able to go."

"Oh, no," he said. "That is quite out of the question. I absolutely must start for Enstone tomorrow. I have put that business off quite long enough and, after all, ironworks and collieries are a little bit more important than the wedding receptions of one's friends who may shortly become one's enemies. Still, that won't matter to you, dear. You can easily fix up a party with Lady Georgina and Mrs Grover, and, of course, the gallant colonel will be only too delighted to escort you. Don't you worry about me. I shall be much happier fighting for my own way with those hard-headed Northern coal and iron kings than I should be loitering about the grounds of the Institute, and paying more or less insincere compliments to Her Highness Mrs Hedley Siemens. Rather curious mixture of titles, isn't it?"

"It would be still more curious, I am afraid, if she found herself Her Highness Mrs Collier Banfield; but for her sake I think we may hope that she hasn't anything like that in store for her. But isn't it just like her springing the news of her marriage on the world like this at a couple of days' notice, and selecting the Institute for her reception. I rather wonder the grave and reverend Izah-Ramal gave the use of his sanctuary for such a frivolous purpose as a wedding reception, but they are, of course, both disciples, and, I daresay, very considerable contributors to the funds, unless poor Sir Godfrey's million has made them independent of that sort of thing."

"Well, from what I hear of their operations in other parts of the world I should imagine there wasn't much of that million left," replied Harold, "and without any undue prejudice it is a jolly good job that your late lamented uncle isn't still in the position to devote more millions to the object which Izah-Ramal and the rest of them had a part. Now, dear, I must be off. I suppose your most immediate concern now is something dazzling in the way of costumes for the function."

"Of course," she replied, with a laugh. "What else do you suppose a woman would be thinking about under the circumstances? I shall have the victoria at once and go and see Lady Georgina and Mrs Grover, if I can catch them before they go out, have a good talk, and then we'll go and enjoy ourselves in dressland."

"Right you are, dear," he said, going round the table and taking her by the shoulders. "Good morning, you go and spend the money on fineries and I'll go and see if I can make a few pounds to repair the damage."

"A few pounds," she laughed, when she had returned his kiss. "I am afraid it will come to rather more than that, you mercenary person; but after all it won't make a very big hole in those thousands of thousands that you keep on piling so recklessly on top of each other. Now get away to your old money- making. I must go and see Harold the Second, and then dream about dresses."

The Princess Natieff's wedding reception at the Institute of Psychic Science was, as Grace Enstone had so innocently anticipated, a very brilliant, in fact, a triumphal, success. The wedding ceremony had been performed quite quietly at St Luke's, Kensington, under special license. The invited guests had not numbered more than a dozen, and the bride, who had no near relatives in England, was given away by the Russian Ambassador, an old friend of her father's who acted in loco parentis.

With an instinctive genius or stage effect, and for other purposes of her own and her husband's, the Princess had concentrated all her efforts on the reception, and the result had amply justified even her most sanguine anticipations. Everyone from East and West complimented her at the leave-taking on having organised and achieved the most brilliant matrimonial function that London had so far seen.

But the real achievement for which the function had been organised had yet to be accomplished. It was a difficult and, as some might have thought, practically impossible, task to spirit such a well-known woman as Mrs Harold Enstone out of London in the full swing of the season, and cause her to thenceforth vanish from the world which knew her so well. And this had to be done if the unholy marriage compact was to be kept, and this carefully arranged opportunity could never be repeated. Her husband's absence had in one sense confused the plans of the conspirators, but in another had simplified them.

When Grace came with Lady Georgina and Mrs Rowell-Grover to say goodbye and offer their final congratulations, the Princess slipped her arm through hers and drew her aside towards the door of the big reception room.

"My dear Mrs Enstone," she said in a voice in which Grace immediately recognised a note of apprehension, "I want you to do me a very great favour. Will you?"

"Of course, if I can," replied Grace. "Under the circumstances, it would be difficult to say ' no,' wouldn't it, even if one wanted to, which I don't. What is it?"

"To begin with," said the Princess, "I am going to ask you to come and have a little private chat with me. It isn't quite the sort of thing I can explain to you here, but really, I can assure you that to me it is of the most vital importance. It is rather hard," she went on in a whisper, "that a shadow, and a rather dark one too, should fall across a woman's life path on her wedding day, but that has happened to me, and you are the only one that can help me to clear it away. Perhaps you understand?"

"Yes," said Grace, remembering what her husband had said at breakfast- time three mornings before. "I think I do—at least, if it has anything to do with Mr Siemens and a case of questioned identity."

"Exactly," whispered the Princess. "That horrible rumour reached me only last night, on the eve of my wedding day, but faith goes where love goes, and by something like a miracle, my husband has, within the last few hours, received evidence which enables him to absolutely destroy all ground for that terrible

suspicion. We had hoped your husband would be here, but we will give the proofs to you that you may give them to him. Now, will you come with me?"

"Of course I will," replied Grace. "Who am I that I should refuse to make a bride happier upon her wedding day?"

"Thank you, dearest," whispered the Princess. "You will truly be my good angel if you will. Now we will go and say good-afternoon to our mutual friends. You can tell them that you are going to stop a little while with me and I shall have a message sent to your coachman to wait for further orders, and then we can go and have our talk."

They made their adieux, and Grace followed the radiant bride out of the reception room and down the long curtained corridor which led to the Sanctuary of Secrets.

"This, I think, dear Mrs Enstone," said the Princess very sweetly, drawing the red curtain aside and opening the door, "is one of the most interesting rooms in the Institute, and only those of us who are earnest students of the mysteries have been admitted so far, and as I want our little talk to be very private I have taken the responsibility of bringing you here."

She stood aside, holding the door half open, and Grace walked past her with her head slightly bowed. The next instant the door closed sharply behind her. She raised her head, and to her utter amazement her eyes met those of Jenner Halkine, the convict, who, as she had believed for the last three years, had paid the penalty which discharges all the debts of humanity and opens the prison gates for ever.

"Uncle, uncle, is it really you? No, it can't be possible. You have been dead—"

"In one sense, yes, my dear Grace," replied the long familiar voice, as he came towards her, his eyes staring straight into hers, "socially and professionally, yes, but physically as you see, no. Circumstances have unfortunately compelled us to be strangers for too long, but thanks to the Princess and her husband, with whom we shall have a little important talk shortly, I am able to renew your acquaintance, and this time I trust that it will not be broken off quite so abruptly as it was before."

As he had gone on speaking, every word had come more slowly from his lips and his eyes had come closer and closer to hers. He put out his hands and clasped her temples. She saw his two eyes merge into one—one all- compelling visual force which she recognised as the once familiar instrument of the masterful soul behind the eye. Her own sight grew dim, her senses began to wander. She struggled hard to keep her self-control, but it was no use. Her limbs relaxed and she began to sway from side to side. She had a sense of being caught and lifted up, and then through the mists of the dreamland into which she was sinking, she heard a voice which she dimly recognised as the Princess's saying,—

"It is very wonderful, Doctor. I don't think there should be any great difficulty after this."

Chapter XXVIII

"Can you not see, Dr Halkine, that, all things considered, the course which I propose is the only practicable, in fact the only possible one for all of us? By some means or other your continual existence and presence here have become suspected, and you know perfectly well that if Harold^ Enstone can send you back to prison he will, and this time there will be no escape. You know also that I have the best of reasons for wishing him permanently out of the way. I won't say that his existence is quite as dangerous to me as it is to you, but it is sufficiently so to be exceedingly unpleasant. Now here we have an opportunity which could hardly come to us again. You will assume one of those admirable disguises of yours and come with us to Natieffburg. Your niece as I think you prefer to call your daughter—"

"Ah, yes," interrupted Jenner Halkine, in a voice like the snarl of an angry dog, "of course you know that too and, therefore, the reason?"

"I do," replied Siemens gravely, looking at him with unconcealed disgust, "and therefore I know that you are the most unspeakable mixture of madman and scoundrel that ever was allowed to live. However, for decency's sake, we will call her your niece. If you come she must, and when we get into the safe seclusion of Natieffburg you will cause her to write a note to her husband saying that at the last moment the Princess had persuaded her to accompany us on our trip as far as Paris. We can send her carriage back for her maid and the necessary luggage. There will be plenty of time for that before we catch the train. Then the letter from Natieffburg will bring her husband there hot-foot, and meanwhile we can arrange for the necessary accident to happen to him."

"Of course I know that I am talking to one of the greatest criminals, potentially, at least, that exists," replied Halkine, slowly. "I would rid the earth of you if I could, but, unfortunately perhaps for the world, neither you nor I can harm each other. Therefore, as we must live we may as well do so in the most convenient fashion. As you know, I have nothing to live for except science, but for that I would live a thousand years if I could. In comparison with science I hold nothing of any value and, therefore, I agree although I know you ought to be killed for even thinking of what you wish to do. For me it is a choice between continuing the glorious and mighty work that I have begun at the Institute—a work which before I die will place me on the throne of the world with statesmen and monarchs as my servants and puppets—and the living death of the prison. Therefore, Harold Enstone shall come to Natieffburg and never leave it, and when that danger to us both, which is incarnate in him, has ceased to exist, I will go back to my work, will live my life and you will live yours. There will be no need for us to meet again."

"I quite agree with you," said Hedley Siemens, taking a cigar out of his case and snipping the end with his cutter. "It is just as well that people who know each other as intimately as you and I do should keep as far apart as possible. You perform your part of the bargain and I'll perform mine. As soon as Harold Enstone has been duly abolished I will give you a million's worth of negotiable securities, and we will say goodbye, I hope, for ever—at least, as far as this existence is concerned. What we shall be in the next —well, we needn't trouble ourselves about that for the present. If we get what we deserve I suppose we shall be reborn as the

children of pickpockets, and grow up in slums on the edge of starvation, steal for a living, and go to prison as an occasional diversion."

"One life at a time, if you please," said Halkine, with a smile which was anything but mirthful. "Who are we that should anticipate the intentions of Eternal Wisdom?"

"Well, we won't trouble about that now," said Siemens, getting up. "This is a curious sort of conversation for a man to have on his wedding day, but of course one can't trifle with necessities.' Then you will be ready to start with us for Paris this evening? You know we shall have a special train, and my yacht will be waiting at Dover, so we shall have quite a comfortable trip."

"Yes," replied Halkine, "I shall be ready. And now, perhaps, the Princess had better arrange for Grace's maid to bring what she will want."

He got up and opened the door of his own sanctum in which this conversation had taken place, and Hedley Siemens went in search of his bride to discuss the final details of the villainous plot with her.

Of all the facts which are repeated over and over again in the history of crime, the most remarkable is that, no matter how daringly or how skilfully a crime is planned, some apparently trifling detail, which might or might not have been foreseen, is left out of the calculation and, more often than not, either upsets the whole scheme or becomes the means of bringing the criminal to justice after the crime has been committed.

Now it will be admitted that the crime which Hedley Siemens and Cara Natieff had planned, and which Jenner Halkine, in his insane devotion to what he believed to be the preeminent interests of science, was as foul and revolting in its nature as it was clever in the simplicity of its conception. Apparently nothing had been overlooked. Grace, once more completely under the influence of the overmastering, although deranged, intellect of her father, would travel with them just as though she were a guest instead of, as she might be called, a mental prisoner.

There would be no suspicion. Not even her maid would be able to detect the fact that she was not mistress of her own actions. She would reach Natieffburg practically without knowing how or why she had come. Then, at Halkine's dictation, she would write a letter to her husband which would bring him, wondering perhaps, but unsuspicious of evil, to the Princess's stronghold in the Polish wilderness. There the deadly work would be done in such fashion as would leave no trace of anything.

But Grace's maid happened to be a North Country girl—the daughter, in fact, of one of Sir Godfrey's tenants, who had shown signs of peculiar brightness which had attracted Sir Godfrey's attention. He knew that Harold would some day marry, and, by a most happy chance, he selected this girl as a possible maid for his future wife. He had her well educated, perhaps somewhat beyond her station in life; but her quick intellect had amply justified his choice, and the consequence was that Grace came into the possession of a lady's maid very far above the average, and, moreover, gratefully devoted to the fortunes of the House of Enstone, in the person of Miss Lacy Merrett.

When the carriage came back with the message from her mistress she at once set to work on her packing, but while she was engaged on this task her shrewd

wits were also working rapidly, and by one way and another she speedily arrived at the conclusion that the first person who ought to know about this curious journey was her master, and the result of this very essential little piece of thinking was that, late that evening, unhappily just too late to get a train to the South, Harold Enstone, in a remote village in Northumberland, which was to be the centre of the new iron fields, received by a mounted messenger a telegram which, to his utter amazement, told him that his wife was starting—indeed had started—for Paris, as the guest of Hedley Siemens and his wife on their wedding tour.

His first idea was to wire to Colonel Rowell-Grover, who was the one man in London on whom he felt he could absolutely depend, and ask him to follow Grace to Paris and bring her back by any means that he might find possible; but a moment's reflection told him that the colonel could not possibly cross the Channel until the next morning, and by that time, if Hedley Siemens and his wife really had any sinister designs upon Grace, they would certainly have made pursuit for the present impossible. The telegram told him that the party were travelling by special train, and that Siemens's yacht was to take them from Dover to France, but whether to Calais or Boulogne, it did not say, and, for the matter of that, what was to prevent Hedley Siemens, who, as he now felt certain, had every reason to fear him, and therefore to injure him, from taking the yacht anywhere else?

She was a thousand tonner, one of the finest yachts afloat, and could go anywhere. Once away from Dover and every trace of her might be lost for days and weeks. She could run down to the Mediterranean and idle about there among the Ionian Islands or in the island-studded Aegean. She could take the passage round the Cape to Australia, coal up at one of the Australian ports and spend a year or so among the South Sea Islands. She could run across the Atlantic, coal at Kingston, and get away down the east coast of South America, where Hedley Siemens's millions would buy him absolute immunity from the operations of all civilised law, until it was too late for the law to act. He could do anything, because he possessed the two first factors of civilisation—money and the means of rapid transit.

He was fully convinced now that Hedley Siemens was the scoundrel whom he had hoped to run to earth, but what a hostage to fortune he had so skilfully and so suddenly captured. How many horrible possibilities were there just in the simple fact that Grace was the guest, and very possibly the prisoner, of Collier Banfield and his Polish wife.

His early training under his father and Sir Godfrey in the wild life they had led in the outlands of the earth had taught him what is perhaps the most invaluable lesson that man can learn—to think quickly and act instantaneously on the thought. That is what he did now. He had crushed the telegram up in his hand, he spread it out again and read it, took out his watch, and said between his teeth, "If I can only catch the five train from Newcastle to London tonight I'd be in London by eleven in the morning, but damn it all! I'm five-and-twenty miles from the nearest station on the main line, and I can't possibly catch it. No, it's no good tonight I am afraid."

He was striding up and down the little sitting-room he had taken at the inn, chewing half inches off a cigar which he was trying to smoke, while these agonising thoughts were chasing each other through his brain. He stopped and

threw himself down into an arm-chair and said,bitingeach syllable off as it came,—

"Now what the devil am I to do?"

The next moment he heard a rattle of machinery, and a loud toot-toot under the window. He jumped up and looked out.

"Thank God! there's Hargreaves with his Panhard. He'll get me there in time. She'll do it in fifteen minutes."

He ran downstairs just as the big forty horse-power motor car owned by his partner, Hargreaves, the man with whom he was working against the other iron and coal kings, stopped panting, puffing and stinking at the door. He had snatched his golf cap off the peg in the hall as he ran out, but he had forgotten he had left his coat off in order to do a cool and luxurious smoke and think at the end of the long northern summer afternoon.

"Hello, Enstone!" exclaimed Arthur Hargreaves, millionaire and mine owner and much-fined motorist, "what the deuce is the matter with you? Your costume seems a bit different to mine," he went on, as he climbed out of the big car, capped, goggled, and leather coated—"nothing serious, I hope."

Enstone caught him by the arm and pulled him away out of hearing of his chauffeur.

"It's everything that's serious to me, Hargreaves," he said in a hurried whisper. "I am in a difficulty, a bad one, and you are the only man who can help me out of it."

"Anything you like, old man, what is it? If it's anything that wants speed in it, here you are—sixty-five miles an hour, and hang the police! We can afford the fines, I think, if it's anything urgent."

"That's just it," replied Harold, "never mind about details just now. I'm twenty-five miles from Enstone and sixty from Newcastle, and I want to catch the five express to town or get a special. It's something more than life or death with me, but I will tell you afterwards. Can you do it for me?"

"Do it, my dear chap," replied the owner of the mechanical monster that was panting, rattling and throbbing as though it had made up it's mind either to burst or go flying away down the long straight road, "do it? the roads are open enough; there's very little traffic about here, and I will put you into Newcastle inside eighty minutes, bar accidents, and then I can give you plenty of time to pack your portmanteau and have a whisky-and-soda with me." "Good enough," said Harold, putting his hand on his shoulder, "come and have that whisky-and-soda. By the Lord Harry, you are a friend indeed this time, Hargreaves."

Within ten minutes he had taken his place beside Hargreaves on the panting, shuddering machine. The horn hooted twice. Hargreaves turned the wheel, and with a swift series of angry snorts, as though it were venting its rage at having its powers so long restrained, the great motor car bounded forward and vanished in a cloud of dust away down the long, solitary country road.

Chapter XXIX

Hargreaves and his chauffeur made the big Panhard do its best, and it thumped and bounded and jumped along the roads anywhere between sixty and seventy miles an hour until, within about fifteen miles of Newcastle, it became absolutely necessary to slow down or run the risk of manslaughter.

"Sorry, old man," said Hargreaves, "but I really must do it. We can't go charging through these little villages at the speed of the Flying Scotchman. There you are! Great Caesar! We nearly did some damage there. I'm afraid I've hurt the kid after all."

He shut the power off, jammed the brake down hard, and brought the throbbing, panting monster to a standstill almost within its own length.

"I am afraid you have," said Harold, jumping out of the car and running back about twenty yards to where the little girl was standing with her knuckles dug into her eyes, surrounded by a small but vociferous crowd.

"I'm very sorry," he said, breaking through the circle and taking the girl by her shoulders and lifting her from the ground. He put her on to her feet again and she stood upright though still shaking with the fright. "Fortunately it's a case of more frightened than hurt. I don't think it touched you after all, little woman. Come now, I'm in a hurry. See if these won't make you feel a bit better."

He pulled his sovereign case out of his right waistcoat pocket, rattled six sovereigns and a half-sovereign out of it, took hold of her little tear- stained hand, put them into it, closed the little fist, broke through the circle again, and jumped into the car.

"Right away, Hargreaves. Let her go. I am afraid that will miss us the train."

The car jumped away into space, but now it was necessary to slow down time after time as they passed through the more and more crowded, narrow streets leading into the north-eastern metropolis.

The car ran up one side of the semi-circle in front of the Newcastle station at perhaps a little over regulation speed.

"Very sorry, Enstone, but I'm afraid we have missed it," said Hargreaves, as he brought the volcanic monster to a standstill under the clock tower.

Harold jumped out, ran into the station, collided with an inspector whom he caught by the shoulders.

"Here, where are you going to at a speed like that?—Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr Enstone. Excuse me, but is there anything serious the matter?"

"Yes, I beg your pardon, Hawkins, running into you like this, but there is really something very serious the matter, and I've missed the up- express, haven't I?"

"Yes, sir, you have, by about two minutes and a half."

"That was the kid's fault for nearly getting in the way," thought Harold, rapidly. "Now, look here, Hawkins," he went on, taking his hands from the inspector's shoulders. "I've got to get to London in the shortest possible time, even if I have missed the express. I know you always have one or two good engines round here. Go and tell the station-master to get one of those coupled up to a carriage of some sort and pull it in just as quickly as he can.

He needn't worry about the cost, but he must wire up the line, stop everything and give me a free run to King's Cross. Hurry up, now."

He turned away and went back to the motor car. "She's gone, Hargreaves, but perhaps I can get a special. If I can, will you come to London with me? As a matter of fact, I want a man like you, and I don't know too many of your sort in England, and I believe you've got a bit of influence on this line, haven't you? and I have some."

"What's up, Enstone? Give me the facts, quick, and if you are in real trouble, I needn't say that—"

"I know that, Hargreaves. The trouble is just this. It may not be very understandable to you just now, but I will explain it when we get into the special. My wife has by some absolutely mysterious means been persuaded to go to Paris and after that to the Lord knows where, on a honeymoon trip with Hedley Siemens and his bride Cara Natieff. I just got the telegram at the moment you stopped at the inn up there. "You've come too fast for me to speak, or I would have told you before, but that's so." "Oh, good Lord," replied Hargreaves, getting out of the car. "And from what I happen to know of Mr H. S. I suppose you are pretty anxious to stop that little excursion. Look here, I fortunately happen to know Mr Sanderson, the district super-intendent here. In fact, I did a little bit towards getting him his berth, and if there is anything in the way of specials that he can manage he'll do it. Come along, now, and we'll see."

They went into the station and the inspector met them. He touched the peak of his cap to Harold and said,—"I've seen the stationmaster, sir, and he'll be glad to see you in his office. This way, sir, if you please, and as it just happens the line superintendent is with him."

"Oh, that's all right, then," said Hargreaves. "I think we can manage things all right now. Come along."

The interview with the stationmaster and the line superintendent was not very long, but it was very much to the point. Both Harold Enstone and Hargreaves were known as men to whom money, even in thousands, was of very little account, and when Harold said, after a very brief interview, to the superintendent,—

"Look here, sir, I will give you a thousand pounds if you will clear the line and run Mr Hargreaves and myself through to King's Cross in the fastest possible time. Shunt everything, I'll pay any loss there may be to the company through delay, but I want to get there."

He took his cheque book out of the right-hand pocket of his Northfolk jacket and stylographic pen out of the left-hand pocket of his waisicoat, sat down at the table and wrote out a cheque for a thousand pounds payable to the district superintendent to the account of the Great Northern Railway Company. He blotted it, tore it off, threw it across the table.

"There you are, Mr Sanderson. Now what can you do for me?"

The superintendent picked up the little slip of paper which meant so much, looked at it, and then at the stationmaster. Then he put the cheque down again on the table, took the stationmaster by the arm and led him away from the table for a few moments, during which he engaged him in a hurried, whispered conversation, punctuated with frequent nods of the stationmaster's head. Then the super-intendent came back to the table and said,—

"It is not in my power, Mr Enstone, to accept this cheque of yours, but if you will allow it to remain in the safe until the manager comes in the morning, I will

take it on my own responsibility to clear the line for you and give you a couple of saloon cars and one of our new flyers that we are going to race the North-Western with. She's been running one of her trial trips today and she has steam up. I'll have her ready alongside the platform in ten minutes, and she'll take you to London inside three hours. That's about half an hour in front of the Scotchman."

"I'm there," said Enstone, getting up and tossing the check towards him. "You can do what you like with that. I'll buy the engine, if you like, but have her ready quick. You needn't worry about the cars. It wouldn't be the first time that I've had a run on an engine."

"The cars are here, sir," replied the super-intendent, "and the engine shall be at the platform in a few minutes. Mr Andrews, will you kindly wire down the line and clear it? Everything through from here to King's Cross. She'll about overtake the express at Peterborough, but we don't want any accidents."

"There won't be any fear of that!" said the stationmaster. "Specials are specials, and everything else has to keep out of the way for them. That'll be all right, Mr Enstone."

"And now," said Hargreaves, "I think we may as well go and get a whisky-and-soda and have some provisions for the trip put on board. If you only have a good digestion, eating and drinking are a great relief from the variegated worries of life. Come along, let's go and find the bar."

About ten minutes later they were standing on the platform in front of a long corridor carriage with a big postal brake van behind it. There happened to be a very heavy correspondence from the North to London that evening and so the superintendent had taken advantage of the special to get away a few dozen bags which had been too late for the mail. A long, high-shouldered, short-funnelled, green-painted and yet withal, graceful shape came sliding in on its fourteen smoothly revolving wheels, until it touched the buffers of the saloon car, hissing, snorting and vibrating throughout the length and breadth of its steel fabric with the suppressed energy of the three thousand horse-power which its boilers and furnaces were ready to put into its compound cylinders.

As the buffers touched, the superintendent went to the footplate and said to the driver, a grizzled descendant of some Norse invader of a thousand years back,—

"Jock, you are to drive her for all she's worth. We've cleared the line for you, and if ever 999 had a chance of a record you've got one now."

"And if the way is right, she'll make it," replied Jock, pulling his beard and looking from end to end of the steel darling of his widowed life.

"And every minute that you make over ordinary time will be worth a pound to you, and here's something to begin with," said Harold Enstone, putting a five-pound note into his hand. "And now, as soon as you are ready, I am."

"All right, gentlemen," replied the driver, climbing back into the cab, "and thank you, sir. As soon as you have taken your places we'll be off."

The superintendent conducted the two millionaires to the door of the long saloon carriage, shut it, touched his cap, and signalled "right away" to the driver. There was a shrill hiss of steam under the great engine, and with an almost imperceptible motion Harold Enstone's special slid out of the station and crossed the long high level bridge over the Tyne. Then the great engine settled down to its work. Jock let her go and she did go. He knew that he had an almost perfect

permanent way under him and a clear road in front of him, and so, when he had cleared the outlying stations, he threw the throttle valve open and gave her her head. Conversation soon became impossible for Enstone and Hargreaves, and so they laid down on the sofas of the luxuriously furnished saloon and surrendered themselves, even in spite of their anxiety, to the rapturous delight of rapid travel. They heard the whistle shriek and saw the lights of Gateshead flash past them in a swift, continuous gleam. They roared out into the darkness, the moon and stars danced and jumped about the heavens as the great engine and its two satellites plunged thundering through the night. The fields and the scattered woods and coppices on either side of the line melted into a confused blurr. The lights of hamlets and towns a few miles away from the line jumped up out of the growing darkness, shone for a moment and vanished. The special rushed, shrieking and roaring through Peterborough, where the Scotchman lay waiting on a siding, and sped away out into the darkness again. The lights of Grantham glittered out ahead. No. 999 shrieked and thundered through the long station, and the next moment the lights were lost behind. She covered the hundred and four miles to King's Cross in eighty minutes, and when they ran up alongside the platform at King's Cross, as easily and smoothly as though nothing had been done out of the common, and the green giant came to a stop, fizzling as modestly as a tea- kettle, Enstone went to the driver with his watch in his hand and said,—

"I think that was rather a fine performance. You are almost an hour ahead of the express this time."

"Eighty-three miles an hour, sir," replied Jock, "and if it hadn't been for the junctions and the cross lines I could have made it ninety with safety. She's as fine a bit of machinery as ever run on metals. Talk about your Yankee engines, I'd pull one of them backwards and then make pretty good time, and if it came to racing I could get a hundred out of her easy."

"Yes, I daresay you could," replied Enstone. "I know you have done your best, but I'm afraid we have cut it too fine. Well, here you are," he continued, putting four five-pound notes into his hand. "Share up with your mate, goodnight. Now, Hargreaves, quick, a smart hansom; yes, that will do. Pile in. Charing Cross," he shouted to the driver, "as hard as you can go. I will pay the fine if you hurt anyone."

The horse was a good one, and the man a good driver. Instead of keeping to the main streets he went away down the less crowded thoroughfares. Enstone made the journey with the watch in his hand, and at last, as they were bowling down Charing Cross Road, he snapped the case of his watch to, threw himself back with a comprehensive American curse and said,—

"It's no good, old man. It's nine o'clock. These South-Eastern trains do sometimes start punctually whatever time they get there, and we cannot hire a Great Northern flyer here."

The horse skated and clattered up into the station. Harold threw the doors open and shouted to a porter,—

"Has the boat train gone?"

"Yes, sir; four minutes ago."

Harold jumped out, gave the cabman a sovereign, and strode on to the platform. He found an important official with plenty of gold lace on his cap, and asked him if

there was any chance of a special to catch the boat at Dover. The official pondered deeply for a few intolerable moments and then said with exasperating slowness,—

"Well, no, sir. I'm afraid not tonight. At least one could not be got ready in less than an hour, even if we had an engine, and, you see, the expresses are all out."

"Yes," said Harold, "I ought to have known that none of your old kettles on wheels on this line would have done it. I got a special at Newcastle in ten minutes and got here under three hours. And this company cannot do seventy-six miles and catch the boat? Are you sure?"

"If you will come with me to the stationmaster's office, sir, I will see if anything can be done," replied the official, in a tone of injured dignity.

Harold followed him, fuming with rage and yet not willing to miss even the limited chance of getting what he wanted, but the stationmaster only repeated what his subordinate had said. The traffic on the line was very heavy just then, and a special to catch the boat was quite out of the question, added to which it would be impossible to get the boat and the train on the French side.

"It's no good, Hargreaves, we can to nothing tonight," he said, as he left the office. "These people have not got an engine that could catch the boat train. It is only what one might have expected from the Amalgamated Crawlers. Now the best thing we can do is to get away to the colonel's, and if he happens by good luck to be at home we might get some information out of him. It is infernally annoying, but I suppose there's no help for it."

Chapter XXX

Fortunately the Rowell-Grovers were having an early, quiet dinner at home that night, prior to indulging in a couple of frivolous hours at the Palace. They were naturally somewhat surprised to see Enstone, who was not expected back for three or four days. He apologised for their sudden invasion, introduced his friend Hargreaves, and with his usual directness . got to business at once. To his disgust but not altogether to his astonishment, he learned that they knew nothing of Grace's departure for the Continent. All Mrs Grover could tell him was that the Princess had brought a message from Grace to herself and Lady Georgina to the effect that Grace had been a little overcome by the heat and had a headache, so she was lying down for half an hour with the Princess's maid looking after her.

"Then, of course, that settles it," said Enstone. "If this trip had been all fair and square Grace would certainly not have gone without sending me a wire, and she would certainly not have sent such a message as that to you. Instead of that the Princess brings you a message, which is probably a lie, sends the carriage home for Lucy and some luggage, and vanishes. Now, my dear Mrs Grover, is that the sort of thing that Grace would be likely to do?"

"It is certainly very extraordinary," she replied ,"but the idea of her being taken away against her will, if that is what you mean, is surely quite out of the question. This is the twentieth century, you< know, Mr Enstone, not the eighteenth."

"Yes," he replied, "but money can still work miracles."

"Quite so," said the colonel, "but, my dear Enstone, people don't run such a tremendous risk as that of—well, if you like, we will say abducting—the wife of a millionaire and a Member of Parliament and one of the best-known women in Society, without some very strong motive, and what earthly reason could Hedley Siemens and the Princess have for such an amazing act, and on their own wedding trip, too?"

"I think I can throw some light on that," replied Enstone. Then he gave them a rapid outline of his suspicions as to Siemens's identity with the desperado, Banfield, and the means he had taken to satisfy himself upon the point. "Now," he continued, "if I am right and he knows it, he is just the man to go to any length for either revenge or self- protection."

"But, my dear fellow," said the colonel, "granted all that, how could they possibly have got her away unless she had gone of her own free will ? As Fanny said just now you can't carry well-known women off to the coast and put them on board a yacht vi et armis nowadays, and, besides, they've gone to Paris. I have not the slightest doubt you will have a letter from her in the morning or a telegram."

"I wish I could believe it," replied Enstone, shaking his head, "but I can't. Something bad has happened, I'm absolutely certain. I think Grace must have given me some of that queer, power of second sight of hers, or else I got it from some northern ancestor, for I am absolutely certain that she is in danger and great danger. Good Heavens! I believe I've got it," he exclaimed, suddenly getting up from his chair.

"Got what?" said Mrs Grover. "Second sight or an idea?"

"Both, I think," he replied, "the one suggested the other. That fellow, Izah-Ramal, at the Institute, I'm sure he has the same uncanny powers as that villain Halkine had, and at one time Grace was very susceptible to hypnotic influence or whatever the infernal thing is. Now, suppose they got her under Ramal's influence and he suggested the trip to Paris? She would go just as though she went of her own free will. No one would notice anything out of the way about her, and they could take her where they liked. Then, when they got her safely stowed away somewhere in the wilds of Poland or Russia, of course Siemens, afias Banfield, could make what terms he liked with her. That's what they've done it for. He couldn't have any other motive."

Harold Enstone had got nearer to the facts than any of his hearers really believed, and it was well for him that he did not know the whole of the horrible truth. He wanted all his energy and wits about him if Grace was to be found, and the knowledge that she was threatened by the hideous fate that Cara Natieff and her husband had doomed her to might well have gone far towards unhinging his mind for the time being.

"Well, I must say there might be something in that," said Mrs Grover, who had, or believed she had, a very strong leaning towards the occult and was already inclined to look upon the famous Doctor and Director of the Institute as the high priest of a new religion. "Everyone says that Dr Ramal does possess the most remarkable powers, but, Mr Enstone, I am perfectly convinced that he would never use them for such an abominable purpose as that. He is far too distinguished and, I am certain, too good a man to lend himself to anything of that sort."

"Well, for the sake of your confidence, I hope he is, Mrs Rowell-Grover; but he is an Oriental, and I know enough about the East to trust an Oriental about as far as I could throw him with one hand. But that's not the question now, and we've troubled you quite enough. You had better come back and sleep at my place, Hargreaves, then, if you are inclined for a man-hunt on the Continent, we'll be off by the mail tomorrow morning. Of course, I shall have to put off that business in the North for the present, but don't let me haul you away unless you feel you can come without hurting things."

"I think the others will be able to fix that business up now if we send them a wire giving them full powers to act," replied Hargreaves, on whom the excitement of the prospective chase had already taken hold; "and if I can be of the slightest use to you, I'm there."

"Of course you can," said Enstone; "you're just the man I want, and I don't think it will be quite the sort of journey that it will be good for one to be alone on.

"I should think not," said the colonel, "and if I can be of any service to you here, of course, command me as one entirely at your disposal. For instance, as you'll be pretty busy, suppose I wire to all the likely hotels in Paris, find out where they are stopping, and let you know, say at the Bristol? We've an office near here that's open all night, and as they went over in Siemens's yacht, of course, we can find out its whereabouts. And now, just before you go, you must have a whisky-and-soda to help you on your way."

Enstone and Hargreaves drove to Prince's Gardens in almost absolute silence, only broken now and then by the strange oaths in many languages which escaped between Harold's tightly-clenched teeth. His friend knew what his feelings must be and respected them. He had not been married quite as long as Enstone, and so it was not difficult for him to sum up the situation.

When Harold opened the door with his latch-key a footman rose from a chair and straightened himself up in a somewhat sleepy fashion and said—

"There's a gentleman in the library to see you, sir. I told him you were out of town, but he said he thought he would wait till midnight in case you did come back. I think the gentleman's an American, sir. This is his card, sir."

Harold took it up and looked at it and read:—

ALBERT J. Cantor.
150 Water Street, Liverpool.

"Can't say that I know the gentleman," said Harold, "but come along, Hargreaves; we may as well go and make his acquaintance. I suppose it's something important, or he wouldn't be quite so persistent."

As they went into the library, a tall, well-dressed man got out of an armchair and came to meet them. He was a man of about fifty, well-preserved and set up, and with the iron-grey hair and dark moustache so often found among Americans who have fought hard in the battle of life and won.

"Mr Cantor, I believe. My name is Enstone. I am afraid we have kept you waiting a long time. This is my friend, Mr Hargreaves. We have only just come back from the North of England."

"Good evening, Mr Enstone," said the stranger, with just the slightest trans-Atlantic intonation. "I am afraid it is I who have taken the liberty, but I had an urgent cable from my old friend Judge Bromyard, Mayor of Pinebluff City, at Liverpool this morning about you and a mutual friend of ours, and as I happened to be in the country and know the man "pretty well I thought I had better come on right ahead as advance guard. Four old citizens of Pinebluff will be here the day after tomorrow to complete the identification you ask for beyond doubt. I have wired to you in the North to the address your man gave me, but I reckon you won't have had that yet as it only went this afternoon. Anyhow, I thought I'd wait a bit in case you did arrive."

"Quite right, Mr Cantor," said Harold, putting his finger on the bell push. "Sit down. Of course you will take a whisky-and-soda and have a cigar. My man ought to have offered you something before. Now about this identification. I am sorry to say that only this very day the man that I believe to be Collier Banfield married a Polish princess and went off to the Continent, and, what is more, the happy couple managed in some mysterious way to persuade my wife to go with them at a few moments' notice and without letting me know. To be quite frank, I suspect foul play."

"If Collier Banfield has any hand in it, you can bet your life it won't be any too clean a business," replied the American. "I knew him pretty well in the rough days out there, and I never knew anything good of him yet. And so he's blossomed out into Hedley Siemens, millionaire, railway king, gold king, and all the rest of it."

"That's what has to be proved yet," replied Enstone. "But, personally, I feel morally certain of it, but at present, as you will understand, I am rather more concerned about my wife. Mr Hargreaves and I are crossing to Paris by the next train to see if we can get on his tracks."

"Well," said Mr Cantor, "if there's anything like a chance of running Collier Banfield down by a man who knows him from the roots of his hair to the soles of his feet, and doesn't like a little bit of him, and can be of any service to you, I reckon I'll come too."

"Nothing would please me better," replied Enstone. "Hullo, what's that? Sounds like a wire."

A thundering double knock resounded through the quiet hall, and presently the door opened and a foot-man came in with a telegram marked for urgent delivery. Harold almost snatched it out of his hand, tore it open, and at the next moment said to Hargreaves,—

"Well, I'll be kicked. Read that."

And Hargreaves read:—

> "Mr Siemens and Princess married today. Took sudden resolve to run over to Paris with them, and now they have, persuaded me to go on with them to her castle Natieffburg, North-Eastern Poland. Will you follow when business is settled? Good sport and delighted to see you.—Grace."

The telegram had been sent from Calais to Enstone, and repeated, via Newcastle, by an intelligent clerk who knew that Harold had left by the special.

"Either you are entirely wrong," said Hargreaves, "or it is a trap."

"I believe it is a trap," said Harold, "and, anyhow, Grace is in it, so I'm going. Mr Cantor, if you care to join us on the trip, will you meet us at Charing Cross a little before nine?"

"I'll be there," replied the American, meaningly, his hand wandering instinctively towards his hip pocket, "and if Collier Banfield really is in it, I guess we ought to have some good sport before we get back."

"I hope so, very much," said Harold. "Now we may as well have a smoke and a drink and see if we can't knock out some sort of a plan of campaign."

Chapter XXXI

Natieffburg, which had been the home and stronghold of Cara Natieff's ancestry ever since the dim old days when it had been a fortress of logs fenced about by triple stockades of outward-pointing, sloping stakes, was now a curious mixture of mediaeval castle and eighteenth century pleasure-house. It stood on the topmost rise of a promontory about five hundred feet high, which jutted out between a very considerable river and an inconsiderable tributary, which joined its sluggish flow to the main stream about seven miles from the broad entrance into the Baltic. For the rest, the vast forest-clad regions which lay south and east and west of it, and the long sandy reaches to the north were a sort of debateable ground between the Russian and the German empires. Most of the Princess's ancestors had died fighting one or other of the two encroaching despotisms as occasion demanded, and the inhabitants of the region, foresters, huntsmen, charcoal burners, small farmers and fishermen, still hated both with a cordial impartiality.

The long, northern summer was still in the mid-most height of its glory. The forests and the vast, interspersed stretches of meadow and cornland were like dark green oceans dotted with islands of gold and emeralds, and the sands were golden too. The ripples of the shallow sea, like long lines of frosted silver, and the waters of the Baltic beyond, almost as smooth as a sea of ice, glittered with a million ripples.

The older portion of the castle, the high, round keep, and the thick crumbling walls, flanked at every corner and angle as they climbed round the sides of the headland, were flanked with round watch towers, all ivy and moss- grown, like the rest of the ruin, and grey with the age of many centuries. Below the remains of the great outer bastions, and fronting a magnificent sweep of the great gleaming river, fringed to its edge with dusky lines of giant pines and yet divided from the forest by flower-covered terraces and smooth, green lawns, sloping away into the gloom of the wilderness, was the modern schloss built of red bricks that had been burned over three centuries before, turretted at the corners and roofed with tiles blackened and moss-grown as old as the bricks.

It was here that Cara Natieff had brought her strangely-won husband and her no less strangely-invited guests, present and to come, in order that she might, as she believed, enjoy the complete fruition at once of her love for the man she loved, and her revenge on the woman whom, in a sense, he loved better than herself—

and, bleak and ghastly as these northern wildernesses were when once the shroud of winter fell over them, they were very beautiful now with a weird and sombre beauty which no southern landscape can show. In a word, the scene exactly suited both the mood and beauty of the woman who owned everything but the sea as far as the eye could reach, from the topmost tower of Natieffburg.

According to the old custom of the land, Princess Cara and her husband occupied separate sleeping chambers, communicating with each other by a curtained archway. Very early in the morning of the third day after their arrival, in fact, soon after the brief, northern night had ended, she was lying awake with many thoughts revolving in her mind, when she heard her husband's voice in the next room speaking in Spanish, a language which she of course understood, but which he had never used in converse with her. The words came slowly and brokenly with little intervals of silent, deep breathing between them, but the first few that she heard were quite enough to bring the blood to her cheeks and the fire to her eyes. The truth was that, like nearly all men who have passed a great part of their lives in the silences and solitudes of the outlands of the world, Hedley Siemens had contracted the habit of talking to himself, which strongly conduces to sleep-talking, and, curiously enough, yet by no means singularly, he never spoke but one language in his sleep, and that was Spanish.

"O Gracia, Gracissima," these were the words which flushed her cheeks and kindled her eyes. She sat up in bed and listened with tensely- strained ears. There was a little pause and he went on again, in words slow and broken—yet for her fatally distinct,—

"Thou knowest that I love thee and thee alone—thou alone art the love of my heart, the light of my eyes, the star of my life—shall I tell thee again that I married her only to get possession of thy sweet self and obtain vengeance on that husband of thine who has ruined me—it was the easiest way, and—bah!—what matters another crime or two—he is coming here, lured by the knowledge of thy sweet presence—coming to his death, for we shall kill him, but it must be she that will kill him—she and that evil-eyed uncle of thine shall kill him—the guilt shall be theirs, and the penalty of it—then we shall be free and all these lands shall be mine, and in this beautiful wilderness, far away from the world, we will taste the joys of a new paradise."

By this time Princess Cara was out of bed, a morning wrapper girdled round her and soft, noiseless slippers of down on her feet. She was white now to the lips, and her eyes were blazing and black with anger. She went to a splendid black old oak cabinet which nearly covered the end wall of the room, ran her fingers quickly over the apparently solid wood at one end of it about five feet from the floor, and presently a little panel flew out. She put her hand into the space behind and drew out a richly-chased silver box about four inches square; she touched a spring at one of the corners and the lid slid off. Inside were eight tiny stoppered bottles of clearest crystal. She took out the seventh and looked at it against the light. It was three parts full of a very pale greenish liquid—the famous, or rather infamous, Aqua Tofana, which, with the other deadly liquids in the case, had been handed down by her ancestors from the time of the Borgias.

What she had done had occupied the space of only a few moments and, meanwhile, she had heard more softly spoken words coming brokenly from the

sleeper's lips, and they were such as only served to strengthen the deadly resolve which she had taken.

"And so I have loved and married a traitor—a traitor who has outwitted me, moreover, and used me—me, Cara Natieff, as a mere means to an end.

He has not only cheated me, but he has dishonoured me as well. There can be no forgiveness for that, and no traitor ever entered the walls of Natieffburg and left them alive; it shall not be for me, the last of the race, to break the tradition."

The words were not spoken or even whispered, they only ran like so many lightning flashes through her mind as she moved noiselessly towards the curtained archway.

Hedley Siemens was lying a little on his right side with his head back, and his left arm thrown up over it. "Yes, it would be quite safe," ran the unspoken words again. "It will be the usual verdict—heart failure."

She looked down for a moment on the dark, strong, almost grimly handsome, face of the man who had inspired her so strangely with the only real love of her life. But hers was a nature whose love is very swiftly turned to hate, and she hated him now with a hate that nothing but the sacrifice of his life could quench.

Again his lips opened in movement.

"Gracia—Gracissima—"

Her eyes blackened deeper and her teeth clenched harder. She drew the stopper out of the phial with the little finger of her left hand, just as a practised chemist would do, let a couple of drops fall into the palm of her hand, quickly replaced the stopper, and then laid her hand softly over the sleeper's mouth and nose. He drew one deep breath, his eyes opened and stared horribly at her for a moment and a shudder ran through his frame, his jaw dropped, and he was dead.

As she turned away from the bed to go back to her own room and replace the terrible poison, the curtains parted and Jenner Halkine stood before her fully dressed, his face death white and his luminous eyes blazing with what seemed to her a supernatural light. For once in her life she was taken completely off her guard by this utterly unexpected apparition.

"Dr Halkine!" she exclaimed in a voice which she vainly tried to keep steady, "what are you doing here, here in my bedchamber? It is an outrage."

"What have you been doing in that other chamber?" he said, in a perfectly even, passionless voice, putting his hand quickly on her forehead, bending her head back a little and looking down into her fixed, wide-opened eyes. She struggled hard against the subtle, swiftly-acting influence that was overcoming her, but it was no use. Her tongue stiffened and the word of protest would not come. Gently, irresistibly, he forced her back into the room where her husband lay dead.

"I saw you," he went on. "I saw you with the eyes which are not of the flesh, but of the spirit. Eyes to which nothing is opaque. You have killed him. A life more or less in the world does not matter, but you have killed more than him, you have destroyed more than his one life. You have destroyed for the present, at least, it may be for many years, perhaps even beyond the scope of this life of mine, the hope of our great work. Without the money he promised and would have given the greatest project ever conceived by human minds must come to nothing. For that at least you are worthy of death, and you shall die—die, as you have killed him. Give me that bottle."

He took the little phial from her unresisting hand. s

"Now lie down there beside him, for this shall be the couch of your death bridal."

She employed the last remains of will force that was left to her to resist him, but the influence was already too strong upon her. It melted away under the searching fires of those terrible eyes. The hand was still upon her forehead, and as it pressed she yielded. Then with a quick movement of his hand he caught hold of her limp, yielding form and laid it on the bed beside the corpse of the man, who, but a few minutes before, had been her husband.

As her head fell back on the pillow, he put his right hand on her forehead again for a moment and drew it down swiftly and yet softly over her face. Her eyes closed and her lips parted.

"Sleep, worker of evil—you who have interrupted the progress of the good work—sleep, until the awakening of another life you shall learn the full extent of the evil that you have wrought."

Her eyes closed in the hypnotic sleep which was seen to change into one which most men believe has no wakening, until the last trump calls up the sleepers from land and sea to face the final judgment.

He drew the stopper from the phial and let a couple of drops fall between her parted lips—and so she died as the man she had murdered had died a few moments before. He scattered the rest of the fluid over the thick carpet, dropped the stopper on the silken counterpane between them, closed the chilling fingers of her right hand over the phial, drew her left arm out over the dead man's breast, and, after a moment's glance of mingled hate and genuine sorrow, left the room with silent steps and went back into the Princess's room. For a few moments his eyes were everywhere, then at last they detected the little open panel in the end of the big cabinet and the silver box standing on the lower shelf. He looked into it, picked out a few of the bottles, and, after a little hesitation, said to himself,—

"No, they are of no use to me. I have other weapons even deadlier than these. I had better leave them here. They will make very convenient evidence."

And so he left them there and went back to his own room. He packed a portmanteau with just what was necessary for a journey, counted over his money, then lay down upon his bed to do a little hard thinking.

He lay for nearly an hour with closed eyes, looking mentally at the suddenly created problem from every possible point of view, then the strain of three sleepless nights and the brief but intense mental activity of that early morning told upon him at last. Not even his powers could struggle against the overwhelming desire to sleep, and his eyes closed. Again and again he opened them, and again and again they closed in spite of the utmost efforts of his will, and then sleep, deep and utterly oblivious, held him fast in its invisible but unbreakable bonds.

When he finally woke it was to see Harold Enstone with two other men in travelling clothes and an officer of police standing by his bedside, and hear Enstone's voice say in English,—

"Good Heavens! then the age of miracles hasn't passed after all! That's Jenner Halkine, the man that we thought was cremated three years ago. Hargreaves, tie his eyes up quick, and don't let him look at you. We have had enough of his hypnotism, or whatever it is."

As he spoke, Halkine struggled up into a sitting position.

"I've heard something of hypnotism, too," said Mr Cantor, whipping out his revolver. "We have got just a bit more poison of that sort than we can do with in the States, but you just hypnotise that and I reckon you will get a more conclusive funeral than you had last time. Now, Mr Hargreaves."

By this time, Hargreaves, for want of anything better had picked up a towel, wrapped it two or three times round Halkine's head at the risk of suffocating him, tied the two ends tight across his face while Enstone was saying to the officer in German,—

"This man, sir, is a convict escaped from an English prison. He was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to penal servitude for life. If it had been in France or Germany, the sentence would have been death. Perhaps you remember the famous case of Jenner Halkine?"

"Ah, yes," said the officer, straightening himself up, "of course, I remember. It was a notable case. But I thought he escaped and was frozen to death, so police journals said, and also the English papers."

"So they did," replied Harold, "but he did not die. You know who I am. Now I pledge my credit that this is the man, and I give him into your charge. Extradition will be applied for in the usual way, and if I am wrong, I will take care that you are held guiltless."

"Herr Enstone," replied the officer, "it is quite enough. Murder has been done in this house; murder, and perhaps suicide too. All within the house, excepting yourself and your friends, who arrived with me after the crime was committed, will be held responsible to the law till the inquiries have taken place. You will make your statement in the proper form, and you can rest assured that this man will be held until all charges against him have been cleared up."

Epilogue

The mystery of the deaths of Hedley Siemens and his newly-wedded bride, which fell like a thunderbolt upon the social world of Europe and America, to say nothing of that financial world from which one of the greatest powers had so strangely and so suddenly disappeared, was never cleared up. The newspapers of many countries naturally did their best and worked up odds and ends of dubious and partially and wholly incorrect information into thrillingly sensational narratives which, perhaps, went quite as well as the truth would have done—and there, as far as the public was concerned, the matter ended.

There were certain international reasons why the inner life of the brilliant woman who had once been Princess Cara Natieff should not be too closely inquired into. She was dead and so was her newly-wedded husband, and they were buried with all due ceremony in the catacombs under the foundations of Natieffburg which had received the remains of nearly twenty of her ancestors, although this was perhaps the first time that the body of a once notorious American desperado had received such honourable sepulture.

On examination of his body the wound inflicted by Godfrey Enstone's bullet was found to be there. Both Harold Enstone and Mr Cantor identified him, and the latter said with characteristic force,—

"Well, there is no doubt about that being what's left of Collier Banfield, but whatever the Princess may have been, it seems an almighty shame to plant a low-down skunk like that alongside of her from now to the Day of Judgment. Still, I guess it's got to be, and that's all there is to it."

There was very little difficulty about the extradition of 'Jenner Halkine. There were many who had cause to know him too well, and finally, to make the matter quite certain, Izah-Ramal, after a brief but pregnant interview with Harold Enstone and a solicitor from the Treasury, decided to escape prosecution by telling all that he knew about the extraordinary circumstances under which Halkine's apparent death had been arranged. When this interview was over he at once went into the Sanctuary of Secrets, and after looking for a while at the ill-omened machine on the table, he murmured to himself,—

"I always told him that such a thing could work, even in the hands of the wisest, for evil and not for good. It has produced no good and produced much evil. We have not yet reached that perfection which would justify man in using such an instrument as this. It shall cease to exist and its secrets shall die with him and with me."

And that day, before sun had set, the Soul Searcher, the most marvellous machine that human knowledge and almost superhuman experience had ever devised, had most satisfactorily ceased to exist.

As soon as his extradition was completed, Jenner Halkine, once more masked and goggled, was, in the ordinary course of things, taken back to Nethermoor, the prison from which he had escaped in such extraordinary fashion. His advent was quite an event in the cold, silent world which is enclosed by prison walls. As an escaped prisoner, he had first to undergo the ordinary punishments—the starvation diet, the solitary cell and the forfeiture of all hope of remission of his sentence. In the mental sense this killed him, but, as the event proved, one element of human nature was left alive in him.

When his period of punishment was over, he was sent out to work with one of the quarry gangs, and when they got to work his eyes, peering through the darkened glasses of his goggles, recognised in the thin, bronzed, scrubby- bearded convict beside him, all that three years' penal servitude had left of the once sleek and well-fed man who had been his accomplice in the Enstone tragedy.

"Hello, Halkine," he heard a familiar, and yet curiously unfamiliar voice whisper between the strokes of the picks. "Back again, are you, in spite of your dying and coming to life again? but you'll have to die in real good earnest next time to get out. I got the best of it after all. Enstone's paying me a thousand a year while I am here, and I am to have five thousand down when I get—"

He never uttered the other word. Halkine swung his pick as high as he could above his head, and instead of striking the stones, the point of it took Bonham Denyer in the back of the neck, smashed the vertebrae and sank down deep into his lungs. As the corpse dropped he let go the handle, walked up to the warder in charge of the party and told him what he had done.

A month later, the man who might have been one of the most brilliant scientists in the world, if his genius had only been properly directed, and if it had not been, as my friend Dr Saunderson always maintained, warped by one of the most obscure forms of insanity, and might have added untold treasures to the stores of human knowledge, stood with the white cap over those once awe- compelling eyes of his, with the hangman's noose lying on his shoulders, and the double doors opening into the pit of death beneath his feet.

He heard the chaplain read the words of the burial service; the last words he heard were, "Christ have mercy upon us."

And as the bottomless pit opened, myriads of lights flashed to and fro; then came the darkness through which the soul of Jenner Halkine passed to its next incarnation.