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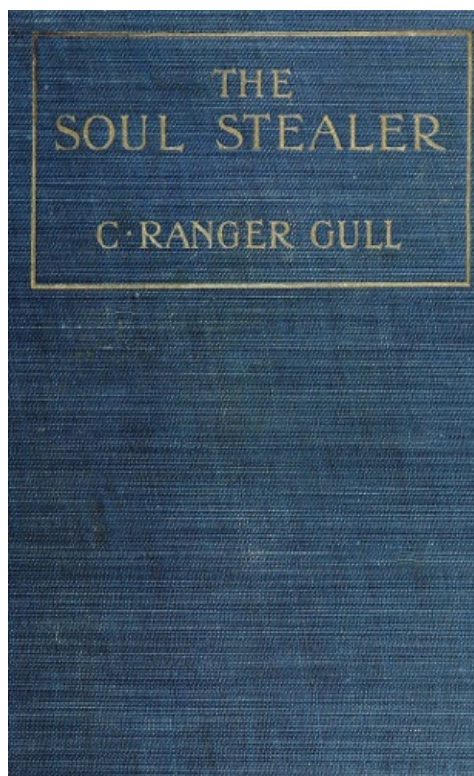
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THE SOUL STEALER

BY C. RANGER-GULL

Author of "The Serf," "The Harvest of Love," "The Price of Pity,"
"A Story of the Stage," etc., etc.

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THE SOUL STEALER

CHAPTER I

MR. EUSTACE CHARLIEWOOD, MAN ABOUT TOWN

Upon a brilliant morning in the height of the winter, Mr. Eustace Charliewood walked slowly up Bond Street.

The sun was shining brightly, and there was a keen, invigorating snap in the air which sent the well-dressed people who were beginning to throng the pavements, walking briskly and cheerily.

The great shops of one of the richest thoroughfares in the world were brilliant with luxuries, the tall commissionaires who stood by the heavy glass doors were continually opening them for the entrance of fashionable women.

It was, in short, a typical winter's morning in Bond Street when everything seemed gay, sumptuous and debonair.

Mr. Eustace Charliewood was greeted several times by various friends as he walked slowly up the street. But his manner in reply was rather languid, and his clean-shaven cheeks lacked the colour that the eager air had given to most of the pedestrians.

He was a tall, well-built man, with light close-cropped hair and a large intelligent face. His eyes were light blue in colour, not very direct in expression, and were beginning to be surrounded by the fine wrinkles that middle age and a life of pleasure imprint. The nose was aquiline, the mouth clean cut and rather full.

In age one would have put Mr. Charliewood down as four and forty, in status a man accustomed to move in good society, though probably more frequently the society of the club than that of the drawing-room.

When he was nearly at the mouth of New Bond Street, Mr. Charliewood stopped at a small and expensive-looking hairdresser's and perfumer's, passed through its revolving glass doors and bowed to a stately young lady with wonderfully-arranged coils of shining hair, who sat behind a

little glass counter covered with cut-glass bottles of scent and ivory manicure sets.

"Good-morning, Miss Carling," he said easily and in a pleasant voice. "Is Proctor disengaged?"

"Yes, Mr. Charliewood," the girl answered, "he's quite ready for you if you'll go up-stairs."

"Quite well, my dear?" Mr. Charliewood said, with his hand upon the door which led inwards to the toilette saloons.

"Perfectly, thank you, Mr. Charliewood. But you're looking a little seedy this morning."

He made a gesture with his glove which he had just taken off.

"Ah well," he said, "very late last night, Miss Carling. It's the price one has to pay, you know! But Proctor will soon put me right."

"Hope so, I'm sure," she answered, wagging a slim finger at him. "Oh, you men about town!"

He smiled back at her, entered the saloon and mounted some thickly carpeted stairs upon the left.

At the top of the stairs a glass door opened into a little ante-room, furnished with a few arm-chairs and small tables on which *Punch* and other journals were lying. Beyond, another door stood half open, and at the noise of Mr. Charliewood's entrance a short, clean-shaved, Jewish-looking man came through it and began to help the visitor out of his dark-blue overcoat lined and trimmed with astrachan fur.

Together the two men went into the inner room, where Mr. Charliewood took off his coat and collar and sat down upon a padded chair in front of a marble basin and a long mirror.

He saw himself in the glass, a handsome, tired face, the hair too light to show the greyness at the temples, but hinting at that and growing a little thin upon the top. The whole face, distinguished as it was, bore an impress of weariness and dissipation, the face of a man who lived for material enjoyment, and did so without cessation.

As he looked at his face, bearing undeniable marks of a late sitting the night before, he smiled to think that in an hour or so he would be turned out very different in appearance by the Jewish-looking man in the frock coat who now began to busy himself with certain apparatus.

The up-stairs room at Proctor's toilette club was a select haunt of many young-middle aged men about town. The new American invention known as "Vibro Massage" was in use there, and Proctor reaped a large harvest by "freshening up" gentlemen who were living not wisely but too well, incidentally performing many other services for his clients. The masseur pushed a wheeled pedestal up to the side of the chair, the top of which was a large octagonal box of mahogany. Upon the side were various electric switches, and from the centre of the box a thick silk-covered wire terminated in a gleaming apparatus of vulcanite and steel which the operator held in his hand.

Proctor tucked a towel round his client's neck, rubbed some sweet-smelling cream all over his face and turned a switch in the side of the pedestal.

Immediately an electric motor began to purr inside, like a great cat, and the masseur brought the machine in his right hand, which looked not unlike a telephone receiver, down upon the skin of the subject's face.

What was happening was just this. A little vulcanite hammer at the end of the machine was vibrating some six thousand times a minute and pounding and kneading the flesh, so swiftly and silently that Charliewood felt nothing more than a faint thrill as the hammer was guided skilfully over the pouches beneath the eyes, and beat out the flabbiness from the cheeks.

After some five minutes, Proctor switched off the motor and began to screw a larger and differently-shaped vulcanite instrument to the end of the hand apparatus.

Mr. Charliewood lay back, in a moment of intense physical ease. By means of the electrodes the recruiting force had vibrated gently through the nerves. New animation had come into the blood and tissues of the tired face, and already that sensation of youthful buoyancy, which is the surest indication of good health, was returning to his dissipated mask.

"Now then, sir," said Proctor, "I've screwed on a saddle-shaped electrode, and I'll go up and down the spine, if you please; kindly stand up."

Once more the motor hummed, and Mr. Charliewood felt an indescribable thrill of pleasure as the operator applied straight and angular strokes of the rapidly vibrating instrument up and down his broad back, impinging upon the central nerve system of the body and filling him with vigour.

"By Jove, Proctor," he said, when the operation was over at last, and the man was brushing his hair and spraying bay rum upon his face—"by Jove, this is one of the best things I've ever struck! In the old days one had to have a small bottle of Pol Roger about half-past eleven if one had been sitting up late at cards the night before. Beastly bad for the liver it was. But I never come out of this room without feeling absolutely fit."

"Ah, sir," said Mr. Proctor, "it's astonishing what the treatment can do, and it's astonishing what a lot of gentlemen come to me every day at all hours. My appointment book is simply filled, sir,

filled! And no gentleman need be afraid now of doing exactly as he likes, till what hour he likes, as long as he is prepared to come to me to put him right in the morning."

After making an appointment for two days ahead, Mr. Charliewood passed out into the ante-room once more. During the time while he had been massaged another client had entered and was waiting there, lounging upon a sofa and smoking a cigarette.

He was a tall, youngish looking man, of about the same height and build as Mr. Charliewood, clean-shaved, and with dark red hair. He looked up languidly as Proctor helped Charliewood into his fur coat. The first arrival hardly noticed him, but bade the masseur a good-day, and went out jauntily into Bond Street with a nod and a smile for the pretty girl who sat behind the counter of the shop.

It was a different person who walked down Bond Street towards Piccadilly—a Mr. Charliewood who looked younger in some indefinite way, who walked with sprightliness, and over whose lips played a slight and satisfied smile.

It was not far down Bond Street—now more bright and animated than ever—to Mr. Charliewood's club in St. James's Street, a small but well-known establishment which had the reputation of being more select than it really was.

Swinging his neatly-rolled umbrella and humming a tune to himself under his breath, he ran up the steps and entered. A waiter helped him off with his overcoat, and he turned into the smoking-room to look at the letters which the porter had handed him, and to get himself in a right frame of mind for the important function of lunch.

In a minute or two, with a sherry and bitters by his side and a Parascho cigarette between his lips he seemed the personification of correctness, good-humour, and mild enjoyment.

Very little was known about Eustace Charliewood outside his social life. He lived in Chambers in Jermyn Street, but few people were ever invited there, and it was obvious that he must use what was actually his home as very little more than a place in which to sleep and to take breakfast. He was of good family, there was no doubt about that, being a member of the Norfolk Charliewoods, and a second son of old Sir Miles Charliewood, of King's Lynn. Some people said that Eustace Charliewood was not received by his family; there had been some quarrel many years before. This rumour gained general belief, as Charliewood never seemed to be asked to go down to his father's place for the shooting, or, indeed, upon any occasion whatever. There was nothing against Eustace Charliewood. Nobody could associate his name with any unpleasant scandal, or point out to him as being in any way worse than half a hundred men of his own position and way of life. Yet he was not very generally popular—people just liked him, said "Oh, Eustace Charliewood isn't half a bad sort!" and left it at that. Perhaps a certain mystery about him and about his sources of income annoyed those people who would like to see their neighbour's bank-book once a week.

Charliewood lived fairly well, and everybody said, "How on earth does he manage it?" the general opinion being that his father and elder brother paid him an allowance to keep him outside the life of the family.

About one o'clock Mr. Charliewood went into the club dining-room. The head waiter hurried up to him, and there was a somewhat protracted and extremely confidential conversation as to the important question of lunch. As the waiter would often remark to his underlings, "It's always a pleasure to do for a gentleman like Mr. Charliewood, because he gives real thought to his meals, chooses his wine with care and his food with discrimination, not like them young men we get up from Hoxford and Cambridge, who'll eat anything you put before 'em, and smacks their lips knowing over a corked bottle of wine."

"Very well," Mr. Charliewood said, "Robert, the clear soup, a portion of the sole with mushrooms, a grilled kidney and a morsel of Camembert. That will do very well. A half bottle of the '82 Neirsteiner and a Grand Marnier with my coffee."

Having decided this important question, Mr. Charliewood looked round the room to see if any of his particular friends were there. He caught the eye of a tall, young-looking man with a silly face and very carefully dressed. This was young Lord Landsend, a peer of twenty-one summers, who had recently been elected to the Baobab Tree Club, and who had a profound admiration for the worldly wisdom of his fellow member.

The young man got up from his table and came over to Mr. Charliewood.

"I say, Charlie," he said, "I'm going to motor down to Richmond this afternoon, just to get an appetite for dinner; will you come?"

Charliewood was about to agree, when a waiter brought him a telegram upon a silver tray. He opened it, read it, crushed the flimsy pink Government paper in his hand and said—

"Awfully sorry, Landsend, but I've just had a wire making an appointment which I must keep."

He smiled as he did so.

"Ah," said the young gentleman, with a giggle, prodding his friend in the shoulder with a thin, unsteady finger. "Ah, naughty, naughty!"

With that he returned to his place, and Mr. Charliewood lunched alone.

Once he smoothed out the telegram again, and read it with a slight frown and an anxious expression in his eyes. It ran as follows—

Be here three this afternoon without fail.

GOULDESBROUGH.

When Mr. Charliewood had paid his bill and left the dining-room, the head waiter remarked with a sigh and a shake of the head that his pet member did not seem to enjoy his food to-day. "Which is odd, Thomas," concluded that oracle, "because a finer sole-oh-von-blong I never see served in the Club."

Charliewood got into a cab, gave the driver the name and address of a house in Regent's Park, lit a cigar and sat back in deep thought. He smoked rather rapidly, seeing nothing of the moving panorama of the streets through which the gondola of London bore him swiftly and noiselessly. His face wore a sullen and rather troubled expression, not at all the expression one would have imagined likely in a man who had been summoned to pay an afternoon call upon so famous and popular a celebrity as Sir William Goulesbrough, F.R.S.

There are some people who are eminent in science, literature, or art, and whose eminence is only appreciated by a small number of learned people and stamped by an almost unregarded official approbation. These are the people who, however good their services may be, are never in any sense popular names, until many years after they are dead and their labours for humanity have passed into history and so become recognized by the crowd. But there are other celebrities who are popular and known to the "Man in the street." Sir William Goulesbrough belonged to the latter class. Everybody knew the name of the famous scientist. His picture was constantly in the papers. His name was a household word, and with all his arduous and successful scientific work, he still found time to be a frequent figure in society, and a man without whom no large social function, whether public or private, was considered to be complete. He was the sort of person, in short, of whom one read in the newspapers—"and among the other distinguished guests were Sir Henry Irving, Sir Alma Tadema, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, and Sir William Goulesbrough."

He had caught the popular attention by the fact that he was still a comparatively young man of five and forty. He had caught the ear and attention of the scientific world by his extraordinary researches into the lesser known powers of electric currents. Moreover, and it is an unusual combination, he was not only an investigator of the lesser known attributes of electricity who could be ranked with Tessler, Edison, or Marconi, but he was a psychologist and pathologist of European reputation. He was said by those who knew to have probed more deeply into mental processes than almost any man of his time, and for two or three years now every one who was on the inside track of things knew that Sir William Goulesbrough was on the verge of some stupendous discovery which was to astonish the world as nothing else had astonished it in modern years.

Eustace Charliewood appeared to be an intimate friend of this great man. He was often at his house, they were frequently seen together, and the reason for this strange combination was always a fruitful subject of gossip.

Serious people could not understand what Goulesbrough saw in a mere pleasant-mannered and idle clubman, of no particular distinction or importance. Frivolous society people could not understand how Mr. Charliewood cared to spend his time with a man who took life seriously and was always bothering about stupid electricity, while in the same breath they rather admired Charliewood for being intimate with such a very important person in England as Sir William Goulesbrough undoubtedly was.

For two or three years now this curious friendship had been a piquant subject of discussion, and both Sir William's and Mr. Charliewood's most intimate friends had spent many pleasant hours in inventing this or that base and disgraceful reason for such a combination.

Yet as the cab rolled smoothly up Portland Place Mr. Charliewood did not look happy. He threw his cigar away with a petulant gesture, and watched a street arab dive for it among the traffic with a sneer of disgust.

He unbuttoned his heavy astrachan coat; it felt tight across his chest, and he realized that his nerves were still unstrung, despite the efforts of the morning. Then he took a cheque-book from his pocket and turned over the counterfoils till he came to the last balance. He frowned again, put it away, and once more leant back with a sigh of resignation.

In a few more minutes the cab drew up at a brick wall which encircled a large house of red brick, a house built in the Georgian period.

Only the top of the place could be seen from the street, as the wall was somewhat unusually high, while the only means of entrance was a green door let into the brickwork, with a brass bell-pull at one side.

In a moment or two the door opened to Charliewood's ring, and a man-servant of the discreet and ordinary type stood there waiting.

"Good afternoon, sir," he said. "Sir William expects you."

Charliewood entered and walked along a wide gravel path towards the portico of the house, chatting casually to the butler as he went.

It could now be seen that Sir William Gouldesbrough's residence was a typical mansion of George the First's reign. The brick was mellowed to a pleasant autumnal tint, the windows, with their white frames and small panes, were set in mathematical lines down the façade, a flight of stone steps led up to the square pillared porch, on each side of which a clumsy stone lion with a distinctly German expression was crouching. The heavy panelled door was open, and together the guest and the butler passed into the hall.

It was a large place with a tessellated floor and high white painted doors all round. Two or three great bronze urns stood upon marble pedestals. There was a big leather couch of a heavy and old-fashioned pattern, and a stuffed bear standing on its hind legs, some eight feet high, and with a balancing pole in its paws, formed a hat rack.

The hall was lit from a square domed sky-light in the roof, which showed that it was surrounded by a gallery, up to which led a broad flight of stairs with carved balustrades.

The whole place indeed was old-fashioned and sombre. After the coziness of the smart little club in St. James's Street, and the brightness and glitter of the centre of the West End of town, Charliewood felt, as indeed he always did, a sense of dislike and depression.

It was all so heavy, massive, ugly, and old-fashioned. One expected to see grim and sober gentlemen in knee-breeches and powdered hair coming silently out of this or that ponderous doorway—lean, respectable and uncomfortable ghosts of a period now vanished for ever.

"Will you go straight on to the study, sir?" the butler said. "Sir William expects you."

Charliewood did not take off his coat, as if he thought that the interview to which he was summoned need not be unduly prolonged. But with his hat and umbrella in his hand he crossed the hall to its farthest left angle beyond the projecting staircase, and opened a green baize door.

He found himself in a short passage heavily carpeted, at the end of which was another door. This he opened and came at once into Sir William Gouldesbrough's study.

Directly he entered, he saw that his friend was sitting in an arm-chair by the side of a large writing-table.

Something unfamiliar in his host's attitude, and the chair in which he was sitting, struck him at once.

He looked again and saw that the chair was slightly raised from the ground upon a low daïs, and was of peculiar construction.

In a moment more he started with surprise to see that there was something extremely odd about Sir William's head.

A gleam of sunlight was pouring into the room through a long window which opened on to the lawn at the back of the house. It fell full upon the upper portion of the scientist's body, and with a muffled expression of surprise, Mr. Charliewood saw that Sir William was wearing a sort of helmet, a curved shining head-dress of brass, like the cup of an acorn, from the top of which a thick black cord rose upwards to a china plug set in the wall not far away.

"Good heavens, Gouldesbrough!" he said in uncontrollable surprise, "what——"

As he spoke Sir William turned and held up one hand, motioning him to silence.

The handsome and intellectual face that was so well known to the public was fixed and set into attention, and did not relax or change at Charliewood's ejaculation.

The warning hand remained held up, and that was all.

Charliewood stood frozen to the floor in wonder and uneasiness, utterly at a loss to understand what was going on. The tremor of his nerves began again, his whole body felt like a pincushion into which innumerable pins were being pushed.

Then, with extreme suddenness, he experienced another shock.

Somewhere in the room, quite close to him, an electric bell, like the sudden alarm of a clock on a dark dawn, whirred a shrill summons.

The big man jumped where he stood.

At the unexpected rattle of the bell, Sir William put his hand up to his head, touched something that clicked, and lifted the heavy metal cap from it. He placed it carefully down upon the writing-table, passed his hand over his face for a moment with a tired gesture, and then turned to his guest.

"How do you do?" he said. "Glad to see you, Charliewood."

CHAPTER II

UNEXPECTED ENTRANCE OF TWO LADIES

For a moment or two Eustace Charliewood did not return his host's greeting. He was not only surprised by the curious proceeding of which he had been a witness, but he felt a certain chill also.

"What the deuce are you up to now, Goulesbrough?" he said in an uneasy voice. "Another of your beastly experiments? I wish you wouldn't startle a fellow in this way."

Sir William looked keenly at the big man whose face had become curiously pallid.

There was a tremendous contrast in the two people in the room. Goulesbrough was a very handsome man, as handsome as Charliewood himself had been in younger days, but it was with an entirely different beauty. His face was clean shaved, also, but it was dark, clear-cut and ascetic. The eyes were dark blue, singularly bright and direct in glance, and shaded by heavy brows. The whole face and poise of the tall lean body spoke of power, knowledge, and resolution.

One man was of the earth, earthy; the other seemed far removed from sensual and material things. Yet, perhaps, a deep student of character, and one who had gone far into the hidden springs of action within the human soul, would have preferred the weak, easy-going sensualist, with all his meannesses and viciousness, to the hard and agate intellect, the indomitable and lawless will that sometimes shone out upon the face of the scientist like a lit lamp.

Charliewood sat down in obedience to a motion of his host's hand. He sat down with a sigh, for he knew that he had been summoned to Sir William Goulesbrough's house to perform yet another duty which was certain to be distasteful and furtive.

Yes! there was no hope for it now. For the last few years the man about town had been under the dominion of a stronger will than his, of a more cunning, of a more ruthless brain. Little by little he had become entangled within the net that Goulesbrough had spread for him. And the lure had been then and afterwards a lure of money—the one thing Charliewood worshipped in the world.

The history of the growth of his secret servitude to this famous man was a long one. Money had been lent to him, he had signed this or that paper, he had found his other large debts bought up by the scientist, and at the end of three years he had found himself willy nilly, body and soul, the servant of this man, who could ruin him in a single moment and cast him down out of his comfortable life for ever and a day.

No living soul knew or suspected that there was any such bond as this between the two men. Even Charliewood's enemies never guessed the truth—that he was a sort of jackal, a spy to do his master's bidding, to execute this or that secret commission, to go and come as he was ordered.

As yet all the services which Charliewood had rendered to Sir William, and for which, be it said, he was excellently paid, were those which, though they bordered upon the dishonourable and treacherous, never actually overstepped the borders.

Goulesbrough employed Charliewood to find out this or that, to make acquaintance with one person or another, to lay the foundation, in fact, of an edifice which he himself would afterwards build upon information supplied by the clubman. There was no crime in any of these proceedings, no robbery or black-mail. And what happened after he had done his work Charliewood neither knew nor cared. Of one thing, however, he was certain, that whatever the scientist's motives might be—and he did not seek to probe them—they were not those of the ordinary criminal or indeed ever bordered upon the criminal at all. All that Charliewood knew, and realized with impotence and bitterness, was that he had allowed himself to become a mere tool and spy of this man's, a prober of secrets, a walker in tortuous by-paths.

"What did you wire to me for?" Charliewood said in a sulky voice. "What do you want me to do now?"

Sir William looked quickly at his guest, and there was a momentary gleam of ill-temper in his eyes, but he answered smoothly enough.

"My dear Charliewood, I wish you wouldn't take that tone. Surely we have been associated too long together for you to speak to me in that way now. It has suited your convenience to do certain things for me, and it has suited my convenience to make it worth your while to do them. There is the whole matter. Please let's be friendly, as we always have been."

Charliewood shrugged his shoulders.

"You know very well, Goulesbrough," he said, "that I am in your hands and have got to do anything you ask me in reason. However, I don't want to insist on that aspect of the question if you don't. What did you wire to me for?"

"Well," Sir William said, passing a cigar-box over to the other, though he did not smoke himself, "there is a certain man that I am interested in. I don't know him personally, though I know something about him. I want to know him, and I want to know everything I can about him too."

"I suppose," Charliewood answered, "that there is no difficulty for you in getting to know anybody you want to?" He said it with a slight sneer.

"Oh, of course not," Sir William answered, "but still in this case I want you to get to know him first. You can easily do this if you wish, you are sure to have some mutual acquaintances. When you get to know him make yourself as pleasant as you can be to him—and nobody can do that more gracefully than yourself, my dear boy. Become his intimate friend, if possible, and let me know as much as you can about his habits and objects in life. I don't want you to spare any expense in this matter if it is necessary to spend money, and of course you will draw upon me for all you require in the matter."

Charliewood held up his cigar and looked steadily at the crust of white ash which was forming at the end.

"What's the man's name?" he asked without moving his eyes.

"His name," said Sir William lightly, "is Rathbone, a Mr. Guy Rathbone. He is a barrister and has chambers in the Temple. A youngish man, I understand, of about seven and twenty."

At the name Charliewood gave a momentary start. He allowed a slight smile to come upon his lips, and it was not a pleasant smile.

Gouldesbrough saw it, flushed a little and moved uneasily, feeling that although this man was his servant there were yet disadvantages in employing him, and that he also could sting when he liked.

Directly Sir William had mentioned the name of the person on whose actions and life, not to put too fine a point on it, he was ordering his henchman to become a spy, Charliewood knew the reason. He realized in an instant what was the nature of the interest Sir William Gouldesbrough took in Mr. Guy Rathbone, barrister-at-law.

The famous scientist, long, it was said in society, a man quite impervious to the attractions of the other sex and the passion of love, had but a few months ago become engaged.

Wealthy as he was, distinguished, handsome and attractive in his manner, there had not been wanting ladies who would have very gladly shared and appropriated all these advantages. Like any other unmarried man in his desirable position, the scientist had been somewhat pursued in many drawing-rooms. Of late, however, the pursuit had slackened. Match-making mothers and unappropriated daughters seemed to have realized that here was a citadel they could not storm. Six months ago, therefore, society had been all the more startled to hear of Sir William's engagement to Miss Marjorie Poole, the only daughter of old Lady Poole of Curzon Street.

Marjorie Poole was the daughter of a rather poor baronet who had died some years before, the title going to a cousin. Lady Poole was left with a house in Curzon Street and a sufficient income for her own life, but that was all. And among many of the women who hunt society for a husband for their daughters, as a fisherman whips a stream for trout, the dowager was one of the most conspicuous.

It was said that she had angled for Sir William with an alertness and unwearying pursuit which was at last crowned by success. More charitable people, and especially those who knew and liked Miss Poole, said that the girl would never have lent herself to any schemes of her mother's unless she had been genuinely fond of the man to whom she was engaged. There had been much talk and speculation over the engagement at first, a speculation which had in its turn died away, and which during the last few weeks had been again revived by certain incidents.

Eustace Charliewood, whose whole life and business it was to gather and retail society gossip, was very well aware of the reason which made people once more wag their heads and hint this or that about the Gouldesbrough engagement.

Mr. Guy Rathbone had appeared upon the scene, a young barrister of good family but of no particular fortune. Several times Mr. Rathbone had been seen skating with Miss Poole at Prince's. At this or that dance—Sir William Gouldesbrough did not go to dances—Rathbone had danced a good deal with Miss Poole. Many envious and linc-like eyes had watched them for some weeks, and men were beginning to say in the clubs that "young Rathbone is going to put the scientific Johnny's nose out of joint."

It was this knowledge which caused the little sneering smile to appear on Charliewood's face, and it gave him pleasure to detect the human weakness of jealousy in the inscrutable man who held him so tightly in his grip.

"Well, all right," Charliewood said at length. "I'll do what you want."

"That's a good fellow," Sir William answered, smiling genially, his whole face lighting up and becoming markedly attractive as it did so, "you've always been a good friend to me, Charliewood."

"My banking account is very low just at present," the other went on.

"Then I'll write you a cheque at once," Sir William answered, getting up from his chair and going to the writing-table in the corner of the room.

Charliewood's face cleared a little. Then he noticed his cigar had been burning all down one side.

He dropped it into an ash-tray and put his hand in his coat pocket to find a cigarette.

He took out an ordinary silver case, when his eye fell upon the crest engraved upon the cover. He started and looked again, turning it so that the light fell full upon it.

The crest of the Charliewood family was a hand with a battle-axe and the motto, "Ne Morare," and in the usual custom it was engraved upon Charliewood's own case.

But this was not the Charliewood crest. It was a wyvern charged on a shield, and the motto consisted of the single word "GARDEZ."

He gave a startled exclamation.

"What's the matter?" Sir William said, turning round sharply.

"I've got some other fellow's cigarette-case," Charliewood answered in amazement, opening it as he did so.

There was only one cigarette in the case, but there were several visiting-cards in one compartment, and moreover the name of the owner was cut in the inside of the lid.

The case dropped from Charliewood's fingers with a clatter, and he grew quite pale.

"What is it?" his host inquired again.

"Have you been playing some infernal trick on me, Gouldesbrough?" Charliewood said.

"No; why?"

"Because this cigarette-case, by some strange chance, is the cigarette-case of the man we've been talking about, this Guy Rathbone!"

He stood up, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of the fur coat as he did so. Then he pulled out a letter, stamped and addressed and obviously ready for the post.

"Good heavens!" he said, "here's something else. It's a letter for the post."

"Who is it addressed to?" Sir William asked in a curious voice.

Charliewood looked at it and started again.

"As I live," he answered, "it's addressed to Miss Poole, 100A, Curzon Street!"

There was a curious silence for a moment or two. Both men looked at each other, and mingled astonishment and alarm were on the face of either. The whole thing seemed uncanny. They seemed, while concocting something like a plot, to have trodden unawares into another.

Suddenly Charliewood stamped his foot upon the ground and peeled off his overcoat.

"I've got it," he cried. "Why, of course I've seen the very man myself this morning. This is his coat, not mine. I went to a hairdresser's this morning and left my coat in the ante-room while I was going through a massage treatment. When I came out there was a man waiting there for his turn, and I must have taken his coat in exchange for mine. And the man was this Mr. Guy Rathbone, of course. You know these dark blue coats lined with astrachan are quite ordinary, everybody is wearing them this year. And I noticed, by Jove, that the thing seemed a little tight in the cab! It's about the oddest coincidence that I've ever come across in my life!"

Sir William bowed his head in thought for a minute or two.

"Well, this is the very best opportunity you could have, my dear fellow," he said, "of making the man's acquaintance. Of course you can take him back the coat and the cigarette-case at once."

"And the letter?" Charliewood said swiftly. "The letter to Miss Poole?"

Sir William looked curiously at his guest.

"I think," he said slowly, "that I'll just spend half-an-hour with this letter first. Then you can take it away with the other things. I assure you that it will look just the same as it does now."

Charliewood shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way," he said contemptuously, "but don't ask *me* to open any letters to a lady, that's all."

Sir William flushed up and was about to make an angry reply, when the door of the study was suddenly thrown open and they saw the butler standing there.

There was a rustle of skirts in the passage.

"Lady Poole and Miss Poole, sir," said the butler.

CHAPTER III

NEWS OF A REVOLUTION

Marjorie and Lady Poole came into the room. For two at least of the people there it was an agonizing moment. But a second before, Sir William Gouldesbrough had been proposing to steal and open a letter written by another man to his *fiancée*. But a second before, Mr. Eustace Charliewood, the well-known society man, had sullenly acquiesced in the proposal. And now here was Marjorie Poole confronting them.

"We thought we'd come to tea, William," Lady Poole said effusively, going forward to shake hands with her future son-in-law. "Ah, Mr. Charliewood, how do you do?" She gave him a bright nod, and he turned to Marjorie, while her mother was shaking hands with the scientist.

Charliewood's face was flushed a deep red, and his hand trembled so that the tall girl looked at him in some surprise.

Marjorie Poole was a maiden for whom many men had sighed. The oval face with its pure olive complexion, the large brown eyes, clear as a forest pool, the coiled masses of hair, the colour of deeply ripened corn, made up a personality of singular distinction and charm. She was the sort of girl of whom people asked, "Who is she?" And if younger sons and other people who knew that they could never win and wear her, said that she was a little too reserved and cold, it was only a prejudiced way of expressing her complete grace and ease of manner.

"How are you, Mr. Charliewood?" she said in a clear, bell-like voice. "I haven't seen you since the Carr's dance."

"Well, to tell the truth, Miss Poole," Charliewood answered with a voice that had a singular tremor in it, "you startled me out of my wits when you came in. Just a moment before, Sir William had mentioned your name, and we were both thinking of you when, as quick as one of those ridiculous entrances on the stage, pat upon the very word, the butler threw open the door and you came in."

"Oh, a stage entrance!" Marjorie answered. "I don't like stage entrances;" and turning away she went up to her *fiancé*, making it quite clear that, whatever her opinions about the conventions of the boards might be, she did not like Mr. Charliewood.

The big, light-haired man stayed for a moment or two, made a few conventional remarks, and then wished his host farewell.

As he crossed the hall he began mechanically to put on the heavy astrachan coat upon his arm, then, with a muttered curse which surprised the butler, he took it off again and hurriedly left the house.

"Well, and how are you, William?" said Lady Poole, sitting down by the fire. "Are you going to give us some tea? We have been paying calls, and I told Marjorie that we would just come on and see how you were, in case you might be in. And how is the electricity going? Why don't you invent a flying-machine? I'm sure it would be more useful than the things you do invent. How charming it would be to step out of one's bedroom window into one's aëriel brougham and tell the man to fly to the Savoy!"

Gouldesbrough did not immediately reply, but old Lady Poole was used to this.

She was a tall, florid old thing, richly dressed, with an ample and expansive manner. Now that Sir William had proposed and the forthcoming marriage was an accepted thing, the good lady felt her duty was done. Having satisfied herself of Sir William's position, his banking account and his general eligibility, she cared for nothing else, and she had grown quite accustomed to the little snubs she received from his hands from time to time.

Gouldesbrough was looking at Marjorie. His deep blue eyes had leapt up from their usual intense calm into flame. The thin-cut lips were slightly parted, the whole man had become humanized and real in a single moment.

The sinister suggestion had dropped from him as a cloak is thrown off, and he remembered nothing of the plot he had been hatching, but only saw before him the radiant girl he adored with all the force of his nature and all the passion of a dark but powerful soul, to which love had never come before.

"How are you, dearest?" he said anxiously. "Do you know that I haven't heard from you or seen you for nearly four days? Tell me all that you have been doing, all that you have been thinking."

"Four days, is it?" Lady Poole broke in. "Well, you know, my dear William, you will have plenty of time with Marjorie in the future, you mustn't attempt to monopolize her just at present. There have been so many engagements, and I'm sure you have been entirely happy with the electricity, haven't you? Such a comfort, I think, to have a hobby. It gives a real interest in life. And I'm sure, when a hobby like yours has proved so successful, it's an additional advantage. I have known so many men who have been miserable because they have never had anything to do to amuse them. And unless they take up wood-carving or fretwork or something, time hangs so heavily, and they become a nuisance to their wives. Poor Sir Frederick only took up tact as a hobby. Though that was very useful at a party, it was horribly boring in private life. One always felt he understood one too well!"

Up to the present Marjorie had said nothing. She seemed slightly restless, and the smile that played about her lips was faint and abstracted. Her thoughts seemed elsewhere, and the scrutiny of the deep blue eyes seemed slightly to unnerve her.

At that moment the butler entered, followed by a footman carrying a tea-table.

Marjorie sank down with a sigh of relief.

"I'm so tired," she said in a quiet voice. "Mother's been dragging me about to all sorts of places. William, why do you have that horrid man, Eustace Charliewood, here? He always seems about the house like a big tame cat. I detest him."

Gouldsbrough winced at the words. He had put his hand into the side-pocket of his coat, and his fingers had fallen upon a certain letter. Ah! why, indeed, did he have Charliewood for a friend?

His answer was singularly unconvincing, and the girl looked at him in surprise. He was not wont to speak thus, with so little directness.

"Oh, I don't know, dear," he answered. "He's useful, you know. He attends to a lot of things for me that I'm too busy to look after myself."

Again Marjorie did not answer.

"What have you been doing, William?" she said at length, stirring the tea in her cup.

"I've been thinking about you principally," he answered.

She frowned a little. "Oh, I don't mean in that way," she answered quickly. "Tell me about real things, important things. What are you working at now? How is your work going?"

He noticed that something like enthusiasm had crept into her voice—that she took a real interest in his science. His heart throbbled with anger. It was not thus that he wished to hear her speak. It was he himself, not his work, that he longed with all his heart and soul this stately damsel should care about.

But, resolute always in will, completely master of himself and his emotion, he turned at once and began to give her the information which she sought.

And as he spoke his voice soon began to change. It rang with power. It became vibrant, thrilling. There was a sense of inordinate strength and confidence in it.

While old Lady Poole leant back in her chair with closed eyes and a gentle smile playing about her lips, enjoying, in fact, a short and well-earned nap, the great scientist's passionate voice boomed out into the room and held Marjorie fascinated.

She leant forward, listening to him with strained attention—her lips a little parted, her face alight with interest, with eagerness.

"You want to hear, dearest," he said, "you want to hear? And to whom would I rather tell my news? At whose feet would I rather lay the results of all I am and have done? Listen! Even to you I cannot tell everything. Even to you I cannot give the full results of the problems I have been working at for so many years. But I can tell you enough to hold your attention, to interest you, as you have never been interested before."

He began to speak very slowly.

"I have done something at last, after years of patient working and thought, which it is not too much to say will revolutionize the whole of modern life—will revolutionize the whole of life, indeed, as it has never been changed before. All the other things I have done and made, all the results of my scientific work have been but off-shoots of this great central idea, which has been mine since I first began. The other things that have won me fame and fortune were discovered upon the way towards the central object of my life. And now, at last, I find myself in full possession of the truth of all my theories. In a month or two from now my work will be perfected, then the whole world will know what I have done. And the whole world will tremble, and there will be fear and wonder in the minds of men and women, and they will look at each other as if they recognized that humanity at last was waking out of a sleep and a dream."

"Is it so marvellous as all that?" she said almost in a whisper, awed by the earnestness of his manner.

"I am no maker of phrases," he replied, "nor am I eloquent. I cannot tell you how marvellous it is. The one great citadel against which human ingenuity and time have beaten in vain since our first forefathers, is stormed at last! In my hands will shortly be the keys of the human soul. No man or woman will have a secret from me. The whole relation of society will be changed utterly."

"What is it? What is it?" she asked with a light in her eyes. "Have you done what mother said in jest? Have you indeed finally conquered the air?"

He waved his hand with a scornful gesture.

"Greater far—greater than that," he answered. "Such a vulgar and mechanical triumph is not one I would seek. In a material age it is perhaps a great thing for this or that scientist to invent a means of transit quicker and surer than another. But what is it, after all? Mere accurate scientific

knowledge supplemented by inventive power. No! Such inventions as the steam-engine, printing, gun-powder, are great in their way, but they have only revolutionized the surface of things; the human soul remains as it was before. What I now know is a far, far loftier and more marvellous thing."

In his excitement he had risen and was bending over her.

Now she also rose, and stared into his face with one hand upon his arm.

"Oh, tell me," she said, "what in life can be so strange, so terrible in its effects as this you speak of?"

"Listen," he answered once more. "You know what LIGHT is? You know that it can be split up into its component parts by means of the prism in the spectroscope?"

"Every child knows that to-day," she answered.

"Good!" he replied. And he went on. "I am putting this in the very simplest possible language. I want you to see the broadest, barest, simplest outlines. Do you know anything of the human mind? What should you say hypnotism was, for instance, in ordinary words?"

"Surely," she replied, "it is the power of one brain acting upon another."

"Exactly," he said, "and in what way? How is a brain, not physically touching another brain, able to influence it?"

"By magnetism," she replied, "by"—she hesitated for a word—"by a sort of current passing from one brain to another."

He held out both his hands in front of him. They were clasped, and she saw that his wrists were shaking. He was terribly excited.

"Yes," he went on, his voice dropping lower and lower and becoming even more intense, "you have said exactly the truth. The brain is a marvellous instrument, a sensitive instrument, an electric instrument which is constantly giving out strange, subtle, and hitherto uninvestigated currents. It is like the transmitter at the top of Signor Marconi's wireless telegraphy station. Something unseen goes out into the air, and far away over the Mother of Oceans something answers to its influence. That is exactly what happens with the human brain. Countless experiments have proved it, the scientists of the world are agreed."

"Then—?" she said.

"Supposing I had discovered how to collect these rays or vibrations, for that is the better word, these delicate vibrations which come from the human brain?"

"I think I begin to see," Marjorie said slowly, painfully, as if the words were forced from her and she spoke them under great emotion. "I think I begin to see a little light."

"Ah," he answered, "you are always above ordinary women. There is no one in the world like you. Your brain is keen, subtle, strong. You were destined for me from the first."

Once more, even in the midst of her excitement, a shade passed over her face. She touched him on the arm again.

"Go on! Tell me! Not this, not that. Tell me about the work!"

"I," he repeated, "I alone of all men in the world have learnt how to collect the invisible vibrations of thought itself. Now, remember what I told you at first. I mentioned Light, the way in which Light can be passed through a prism, split up into its component parts, and give the secret of its composition to the eye of the scientist. Not only can I collect the mysterious vibrations of the human brain, but I can pass them through a spectroscope more marvellous than any instrument ever dreamt of in the history of the world. I can take the vibrations of thought, and discover their consistency, their strength, their MEANING."

She stared at him incredulously. "Even yet," she said, "I fail to see the ultimate adaptation of all this. I realize that you have discovered a hitherto unproved truth about the mechanism of thought. That is an achievement which will send your name ringing down the avenues of the future. But there seems to be something behind all you are telling me. You have more to say. What is the *practical* outcome of all this, this theoretical fact?"

"It is this," he answered. "I hold in my hands the power to know what this or that person, be it a king upon his throne, a girl on her wedding day, or a criminal in the dock, is thinking at any given moment."

She started from him with a little cry. "Oh no," she said, and her face had grown very white indeed. "Oh no, God would not allow it. It is a power only God has."

He laughed, and in his laugh she heard something that made her shrink back still further. It was a laugh such as Lucifer might have laughed, who defied a Power which he would not acknowledge to be greater than his.

"You will never do that," she said, "wonderful as you are."

"Marjorie," he answered, "I am a man with a brain that theorizes, but never ventures upon a statement that cannot be proved by fact. If I tell you this, if I hint broadly at the outcome of my life's work, I am doing so, believe me, because I have chapter and verse for all I say, because I can prove that it has passed from the dim realms of theory and of hope into the brilliant daylight of actual achievement!"

She stared at him. His words were too much for her mind to grasp immediately.

It was an intense moment.

But, as in real life intense moments generally are, it was broken by a curious interruption.

A voice came thickly from the arm-chair by the fire, where old Lady Poole had been reclining in placid sleep. It was the strange voice of one who sleeps, without expression, but perfectly distinct.

"I will not have it, cook—(indistinguishable murmur)—explained when I engaged you—will *not* have men in the kitchen!"

Sir William and Marjorie looked at each other for a moment with blank faces. Then, all overstrung as they were, the absurdity of the occurrence struck them at the same moment, and they began to laugh softly together.

It was a little pleasant and very human interlude in the middle of these high matters, and at that moment the great man felt that he was nearer to Marjorie than he had been before at any other moment of the afternoon. She no longer hung entranced upon his impassioned and wonderful words, she laughed with him quite quietly and simply.

Lady Poole snored deeply, and no longer vocalized the drama of her domestic dream.

Suddenly Marjorie turned back once more to Sir William.

"It's only mother dreaming about one of the servants we have had to send away," she said. "What a stupid interruption! Now, go on, go on!"

Her voice recalled him to his marvellous story.

"Tell me what is the actual achievement," she said.

"It is this. When you speak into a telephone the vibrations of your voice agitate a sensitive membrane, and by means of electricity the vibrations are conveyed to almost any distance. When Madame Melba sings into the gramophone, her voice agitates the membrane, which in its turn agitates a needle, which in its turn again makes certain marks upon a waxen disc."

"Yes, go on, go on!"

"When I put a certain instrument upon the head of a man or a woman, when I surround the field of emanation by a shield which captures the vibrations, they are conducted to a receiver more delicate and sensitive than anything which has ever been achieved by scientific process before. That receiver collects these vibrations and can transmit them, just in the manner of a telephone or telegraph wire, for almost any distance."

"And at the other end?" Marjorie asked.

"It has been a difficulty of ten long, anxious, unwearying years."

"And now?"

"Now that difficulty has been finally overcome."

"Therefore?"

"What a person thinks in London can be sent in vibrations along a wire to Paris."

"I see. I understand! But when there they can only be transmitted to another brain, of course. You mean that you have invented a more marvellous system of telegraphy than has ever been invented before. For instance, I could sit here in this room and communicate with you with absolute freedom in Paris. How wonderful that is! What a triumphant achievement! But—but, William, marvellous as it is, you do not substantiate what you said just now. The secrets of thought may be yours, but only when the sender wills it."

"Ah," he answered, with a deep note of meaning coming into his voice. "If I had only discovered what you say, I should have discovered much. But I have gone far, far away from this. I have done much, much more. And in that lies the supreme value of my work."

Once more they were standing together, strained with wonder, with amazement and triumph passing between them like the shuttle of a loom; once more she was caught up into high realms of excitement and dawning knowledge, the gates of which had never opened to her brain before.

"To come back to the phonograph," Sir William said. "The marks are made upon the waxen disc, and they are afterwards reproduced in sound, recorded upon metal plates to remain for ever as a definite reproduction of the human voice. Now, and here I come to the final point of all, I have discovered a means by which thought can be turned into actual vision, into an actual expression of itself for every one to read. What I mean is this. I have discovered the process, and I have

invented the machine by which, as a person thinks, the thought can be conveyed to any distance along the wire, can be received at the other end by an instrument which splits it up into this or that vibration. And these vibrations actuate upon a machine by the spectroscope, by the bioscope, which show them upon a screen in the form of either pictures or of words as the thoughts of the thinker are at that moment sent out by the brain in words or pictures."

"Then what does this mean?"

"It means that once my apparatus, whether by consent of the subject or by force, is employed to collect the thought vibrations, then no secrets can be hidden. The human soul must reveal itself. Human personality is robbed of its only defence. There will be no need to try the criminal of the future. He must confess in spite of himself. The inviolability of thought is destroyed. The lonely citadel of self exists no longer. The pious hypocrite must give his secret to the world, and sins and sinners must confess to man what only God knew before."

Marjorie sat down in her chair and covered her face with her hands. Various emotions thronged and pulsed through her brain. The stupendous thing that this man had done filled her with awe for his powers, with terror almost, but with a great exultation also. She did not love him, she knew well that she had never loved him, but she realized her influence over him. She knew that this supreme intellect was hers to do with as she would. She knew that if he was indeed, as he said, master of the world, she was mistress of his mind, she was the mistress of him. The mysterious force of his love, greater than any other earthly force which he could capture or control, had made him, who could make the minds of others his slaves and instruments, the slave of her.

Yes! Love! That, after all, was the greatest force in the whole world. Here was a more conclusive proof than perhaps any woman had ever had before in the history of humanity.

Love! Even while the inmost secrets of nature were wrested from her by such a man as this, love was still his master, love was still the motive power of the world.

And as she thought that, she forgot for a moment all her fears and all her wonder, in a final realization of what all the poets had sung and all the scientists striven to destroy. Her blood thrilled and pulsed with the knowledge, but it did not thrill or pulse for the man whose revelations had confirmed her in it. The man whom she had promised to marry was the man who had confirmed her in the knowledge of the truth. And all he had said and done filled her with a strange joy such as she had never known before.

At that moment Sir William came towards her. He had switched on the electric light, and the room was now brilliantly illuminated. In his hand he held a large oval thing of brass, bright and shining.

At that moment, also, old Lady Poole woke up with a start.

"Dear me," she said, "I must have taken forty winks. Well, I suppose, my dear children, that I have proved my absolute inability to be *de trop*! What are you doing, William?"

"It's a little experiment," Sir William said, "one of my inventions, Lady Poole. Marjorie, I want you to take off your hat."

Marjorie did so. With careful and loving hands the great man placed the metal helmet upon her head. The girl let him do so as if she were in a dream. Then Sir William pressed a button in the wall. In a few seconds there was an answering and sudden ring of an electric bell in the study.

"Now, Marjorie!" Sir William said, "now, all I have told you is being actually proved."

He looked at her face, which flowered beneath the grotesque and shining cap of metal.

"Now, Marjorie, everything you are thinking is being definitely recorded in another place."

For a moment or two the significance of his words did not penetrate to her mind.

Then she realized them.

Lady Poole and the scientist saw the rapt expression fade away like a lamp that is turned out. Horror flashed out upon it, horror and fear. Her hands went up to her head; she swept off the brilliant helmet and flung it with a crash upon the ground.

Then she swayed for a moment and sank into a deep swoon.

She had been thinking of Mr. Guy Rathbone, barrister-at-law, and what her thoughts were, who can say?

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND LOVER ARRIVES

On the evening of the day in which she had fainted, Marjorie Poole sat alone in the drawing-room

of her mother's house in Curzon Street.

It was a large, handsome place, furnished in the Empire style with mirrors framed in delicate white arabesques, and much gilding woven into the pattern. The carpet was a great purple expanse covered with laurel wreaths of darker purple.

There was but little furniture in the big, beautiful place, but it was all airy, fantastic and perfect of its kind. There was a general air of repose, of size and comely proportion in this delightful room. Here, an old French clock clicked merrily, there were two or three inlaid cabinets, and upon the walls were a few copies of some of Watteau's delightful scenes in the old courtly gardens of Versailles.

Marjorie wore a long tea-gown, and she was sitting quite alone in the brilliantly lit place, with a book in her hand. The book was in her hand indeed, but she was not reading it. Her eyes were fixed upon the opposite wall, though they saw nothing there. Her thoughts were busy and her face was pale.

She had recovered from her swoon in a minute or two, and found her mother fussing round her and her lover generally skilful in doing all that was necessary. And a short time afterwards she had driven home with Lady Poole.

What she had heard, the very strain of hearing and being so intensely interested in it, had taken her strength away. Then had come the words when Sir William told her that the very thoughts that she was thinking at that moment were being in some mysterious way recorded and known. And she knew that she had been thinking of another man, thinking of him as an engaged girl should never think.

But as she had returned to consciousness, Sir William had told her kindly and simply that if she had feared her thoughts, whatever they might be, were known to him, she need fear no longer. "There was no one," he said, "observing any record of vibrations from your dear mind. Do you think that I should have allowed that, Marjorie? How could you think it of me?"

She had driven home relieved but very weary, and feeling how complex life was, how irrevocable the mistakes one made from impulse or lack of judgment really were.

Ambition! Yes, it was that that had brought her to where she was now. Her heart had never been touched by any one. She never thought herself capable of a great love for a man. From all her suitors she had chosen the one who most satisfied her intellectual aspirations, who seemed to her the one that could give her the highest place, not only in the meaningless ranks of society, but in and among those who are the elect and real leaders of the world.

And now? Well, now she was waiting because Guy Rathbone was coming to the house.

A letter from him had arrived just before dinner. She had expected it by an earlier post, the post by which all his letters usually came, and she had been impatient at its non-arrival. But it had come at last, and she was sitting in the drawing-room waiting for him now.

He was on intimate terms in that house, and came and went almost as he would, old Lady Poole liking to have young people round her, and feeling that now Marjorie's future was satisfactorily settled, there was no need to bar her doors to people she was fond of, but who, before the engagement, she would have regarded as dangerous.

Even as Marjorie was thinking of him, the butler showed Guy Rathbone into the room.

Marjorie got up, flushing a little as she saw him.

"Mother's very tired," she said; "she's not well to-night, and so she's gone to bed. Perhaps you'd rather not stay."

He sat down, after shaking hands, without an answer in words. He looked at her, and that was his answer.

He was a tall young man, as tall as Sir William, but more largely built, with the form and figure not of the student but rather of the athlete. His face was clean-shaven, frank, open and boyishly good-looking; but a pair of heavy eyebrows hung over eyes that were alert and bright, robbing the upper part of his face of a too juvenile suggestion. His head was covered with dark red curls, and he had the walk and movements of perfect health and great physical power, that had once led a dyspeptic friend at the Oxford and Cambridge Club to remark of him, that "Rathbone is the sort of fellow who always suggests that he could eat all the elephants of India and pick his teeth with the spire of Strasburg Cathedral afterwards."

There was force about him, the force of clean, happy youth, health, and a good brain. It was not the concentrated force and power of Sir William, but it was force nevertheless.

And as he came into the room, Marjorie felt her whole heart go out to him, leaping towards him in his young and manly beauty. She knew that here indeed was the one man that would satisfy her life for ever and a day. He was not famous, he was clever without having a great intellect, but for some reason or other he was the man for her. She knew it, and she feared that he was beginning to know she knew it.

He was sitting in the chair, when he turned and looked her straight in the face.

"I have come to-night," he said, "to say something very serious, very serious indeed. I am glad Lady Poole isn't here, just for to-night, Marjorie."

"I've told you you oughtn't to say Marjorie," she said.

"Well," he answered, "you've called me Guy for a good long time now, and one good turn deserves another."

He smiled, showing a perfect and even row of teeth, a smile so simple, hearty and spontaneous that once more that furiously beating heart of hers seems striving to burst its physical bonds and leap to him.

Then he passed his hand through his hair, and his face immediately became full of perplexity and doubt.

"I should have been here before," he said, "only I was detained. I met a man who happened to take my overcoat to-day in mistake for his own from the hairdresser's. He turned out to be a decent sort of chap, and I couldn't get rid of him at once. But that's by the way. I've come here to say something which is awfully difficult to say. I've fought it out with myself, and I've wondered if I should be a boulder in saying it. I'm afraid I'm going to say something that a gentleman oughtn't to say. I don't know. I really don't know. But something within tells me that if I don't say it I should be doing something which I should regret all my life long. But you must forgive me, and if after what I've said to you you feel that I oughtn't to have done so, I do beg you will forgive me, Marjorie. Will you forgive me?"

Her voice was very low. "Yes," she said in almost a whisper.

"You are engaged to another man," he said. "I don't know him, I have never seen him. I know he is a great swell and very important. A year ago, if anybody had told me that I was going to talk to a girl who was engaged to another man as I'm going to talk to you, I should probably have knocked him down. Shows one never knows, doesn't it, Marjorie?"

She began to breathe quickly. Her breast rose and fell, her agitation was very manifest. The tears were beginning to well up in her eyes. She hated herself for this visible emotion; she did her best to control it, but it was utterly impossible, and she knew that she was telling him even now what she knew also he most desired to hear.

He got up from his chair, big, forceful, manly and young, and was by her side in a moment.

"Marjorie," he said, "dear, sweet girl, I can't help telling you, however wrong it may be. I love you, I love you deeply and dearly. I am quite certain, I don't know how, but I'm certain, and nothing in the world could persuade me I wasn't, that I'm the man who was made for you, and that you're the girl who was made for me. I can't put it poetically, I don't know how to say it beautifully, as the Johnnies say it in the novels and on the stage, but, darling, I love you."

There was a catch and a break in his voice; a sob had come into it.

Then he went on. "Do you know, Marjorie, I can't help thinking somehow that you must have made a mistake—" He was kneeling now by the side of her chair. His arms stole round her, she made no motion to forbid it. It was a moment of absolute surrender, a surrender which she had no power to withstand.

And now he held her in his strong arms, his kisses fell upon her lips, her head was on his shoulder, she was sobbing quietly and happily. With no word of avowal spoken, she gave herself to him at that moment. He had felt, and his whole body was shaken with joy and triumph, that come what might, she was his in spirit if indeed she could never be his in any other way.

It was a great moment for those two young lives. Young man and maid, knowing themselves and each other for the first time. It wasn't romantic, exactly, there was nothing very striking about it, perhaps, but it was sweet—ah! unutterably sweet!

He was walking about the room.

"You must tell him," he said, "dearest. You'll have to go through so much more than I shall, and it cuts me to the heart to think of it. You'll have to face all the opposition of everybody, of your people, of society and the world generally. And I can't help; you'll have to go through this alone. It's a bitter thought that I can't help you. Dear, dare you fight through this for me? Are you strong enough? are you brave enough?"

She went up to him, and placed both her hands upon his shoulders, looking straight into his face.

"I have been wicked," she said, "I have been wrong. But perhaps there were excuses. Until one has felt love, real love, Guy, one doesn't realize its claims or the duties one owes it. I was ambitious. I liked William well enough. He interested me and stimulated me. I felt proud to think that I was to be the companion of a man who knew and had done so much. But now the mere thought of that companionship fills me with fear. Not fear of him, but fear of the treachery I should have done my nature and myself if I had married him. I don't know what will happen, but here and now, Guy, whatever may be the outcome, I tell you that I love you, and I swear to you,

however wrong it may be, whatever violence I may be doing to my plighted troth, I tell you that, however great the unworthiness, I will be yours and yours alone. I know it's wrong, and yet, somehow, I feel it can't be wrong. I don't understand, but—but——" He took her in his arms once more and held her.

It was late, and he was going, and was bidding her farewell. He knelt before her and took her hand, bowing over it and kissing it.

"Good-night," he said, "my lady, my love, my bride! I am with you now, and shall be with you always in spirit until we are one—until the end of our lives. And whatever may be in store in the immediate future I shall be watching and waiting, I shall be guarding you and shielding you as well as I can, and if things come to the worst, I shall be ready, and we will count the world well lost, as other wise lovers have done, for the sacred cause and in the holy service of Love."

So he bowed over her slim white hand and kissed it, looking in his beauty and confidence and strength like any knight of old kneeling before the lady he was pledged to serve. And when he was gone, and she was alone in her room up-stairs, Marjorie was filled with a joy and exhilaration such as she had never known before. Yet there seemed hanging over the little rosy landscape, the brightly-lit landscape in which she moved, a dark and massive cloud.

She dreamt thus. She dreamt that this cloud grew blacker and blacker, and still more heavy, sinking lower and lower towards her. Then she saw her lover as a knight in armour cutting upwards with a gleaming sword until the cloud departed and rushed away, and all was once more bathed in sunlight. She knew the name of that sword. It was not Excalibur, it was Love.

CHAPTER V

A CONSPIRACY OF SCIENTISTS

Sir William Gouldsbrough had been up very late the night before. He came down from his room on a grey morning a fortnight after the day on which he had told Marjorie something of his hopes. It was nearly twelve o'clock. He had not retired to rest until four upon the same morning. And when he had at last left the great laboratories built out of the back of the house, he had stumbled up to his room, a man drunk with an almost incredible success—a success of detail so perfect and complete that his intelligence staggered before the supreme triumph of his hopes.

But the remaining portion of the night, or rather during the beginning of the chill wintry dawn, he had lain alone in his great Georgian bedroom, watching the grey light filtering into the room, flood by flood, until the dark became something more terrible, something filled with vast moving shadows, with monstrous creatures which lurked in the corners of the room, with strange half lights that went and came, and gave the wan mirrors of the wardrobe, of the mantel-shelf, a ghost-like life only to withdraw, and then once more increase it.

And as this great and famous man lay in this vast lonely room without power of sleep, two terrible emotions surged and throbbed within him,—two emotions in their intensity too great for one mind to hold.

One was the final and detailed triumph of all he held dear in the world of science and in the department of his life's work. The other was the imminent and coming ruin of his heart's hope, and the love which had come to him, and which had seemed the most wonderful thing that life could give.

Yes, there he lay, a king of intellect, a veritable prince of the powers of the air, and all his triumph was but as dust and ashes and bitterness, because he knew that he was losing a smaller principality perhaps, but one he held dearer than all his other possessions.

Emperor of the great grey continent of science, he must now resign his lordship of the little rosy principality of Love.

So, as he came down-stairs close upon mid-day of the winter's morning—a tall distinguished figure in the long camel's-hair dressing-gown, with its suggestion of a monk's robe—the butler who was crossing the hall at the time was startled by the fixed pallor of his face.

The man went up to him.

"Excuse me, Sir William," he said, "but you're working too hard. You're not well, sir. You mustn't overdo it. I have got you a sole and mushrooms for breakfast, sir, but I should not advise you to touch it, now I've seen you. If you'll allow me to offer my advice, I should suggest a bowl of soup."

"Thank you, Delaine," Sir William answered. "But I don't think I could even take anything at present. Will you send my letters into the study?"

"Yes, Sir William," the man replied, "and I shall make so bold as to bring you a bowl of soup in half-an-hour, as well."

Gouldsbrough crossed the great gloomy hall and entered the study.

A bright fire was glowing on the hearth, the place was all dusted, tidy and cheerful, even though the world outside was a blank wall of fog.

He stood up in the middle of the room. Tall, columnar, with a great dignity about him, had there been any one there to see. It was a dual dignity, the dignity of supreme success and the dignity of irremediable pain.

The butler came in with the letters upon a copper tray. There was a great pile of them, and as the man closed the door after he put the tray upon the writing-table, Sir William began to deal the letters like a pack of cards, throwing this and that one on the floor, with a shuffling movement of the wrist, and as he did so his eyes were horrid in their searching and their intensity. At last he came to the one he sought. A letter addressed to him in a bold but feminine handwriting. As his fingers touched it a loud sob burst out into the silence of the room. With shaking fingers he tore it open, standing among the litter of the unopened letters, and began to read.

He read the letter right through, then walked to the mantel-piece, leaning his right arm upon it as if for support. But the tension was now a little relaxed. He had come down to find the worst, to meet the inevitable. He had met it, and there was now neither premonition of the moment of realization nor the last and torturing flicker of despairing hope.

This was the letter. It began without preface or address—

"You must have known this was coming. Everything in your manner has shown me that you knew it was coming. And for that, unhappy as I am, I am glad. I have a terrible confession to make to you. But you who are so great, you who know the human mind from your great height, as a conquering general surveys a country from a mountain-top, you will understand. When you asked me to marry you and I said 'Yes,' I was pleased and flattered, and I had a tremendous admiration and respect for you and for all you have done. Then when we came to know each other, I began to see the human side of you, and I had, and if you will let me say so, still have, a real affection for you. And had it not been that something more powerful than affection has come into my life, I would have been a true and faithful wife and companion to you.

"But you have seen, and you must know, that things are changed. Are we not all subject to the laws of destiny, the laws of chance? Is it not true that none of us on our way through the world can say by whom or how we shall be caught up out of ourselves and changed into what we could not be before? Oh, you know it all. You of all men know it!

"I need not here speak in detailed words, because from things you have seen you know well enough what I am about to say, of whom I would speak if I could. But it is enough, William, to tell you what you already know. That I love some one else, and that if I am true to myself, which is after all the first *duty* of all of us, I could never marry you. I can never be to you what you wish or what I would like to be as your wife. I am stricken down with the knowledge of the pain all this will give you, though, thank God, it is not a pain for which you are unprepared. I dare not ask your forgiveness, I can say nothing to console you. I have acted wickedly and wrongly, but I cannot do anything else but what I am doing.

"Forgive, if you can. Think kindly, if you can, of Marjorie."

Now he knew. He folded the letter gently, kissed it—an odd action for a man so strong—and put it in the inside pocket of his coat, which pressed next his heart.

Then he rang the bell.

"Ask Mr. Guest to come," he said.

"Very well, Sir William," the butler answered, "but Mr. Charliewood has just arrived."

"Then ask him in," Goulesbrough answered.

Charliewood came into the room.

"By Jove!" he said, "you look about as seedy as I've ever seen you look!"

Sir William went up to him and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"Look here," he said, "I've had a smack in the face this morning, Charliewood. You know what it is, I need not tell you. And look here, too, I'm going to ask you to help me as you've never helped me before. I'm afraid, old fellow, I've often been a nuisance to you, and often rather rubbed in the fact that you owe me money, and that you've had to do things for me. Forgive me now, if you will. I'm going to call upon you for active friendship."

"Oh," Charliewood answered, "we won't talk about friendship between you and me. I've done what I had to do and there's enough."

Sir William still held him by the shoulder. "You don't really feel that, Charliewood?" he said in a quiet voice, and as he did so the magnetism of his personality began to flow and flood upon the weaker man and influence him to kindness.

"Well, well," he said, "what is it now? I suppose we've been running round a vicious circle and we've come to the last lap?"

"That's just about it," Sir William answered. "Just let me say that this is the last service I shall ever ask from you. I'll give you back all the I.O.U.'s and things, and I'll give you enough money to put yourself absolutely right with the world, then we'll say good-bye."

Charliewood started. "That's awfully good of you," he said. "I don't think that I want to say good-bye. But still, what is it?"

"Rathbone," Sir William answered, pronouncing the name with marked difficulty.

"It's all over then?" Charliewood answered.

"Yes."

"I thought it would be. I have told you all that has been going on, and I knew it would be."

"She's written to me this morning," Gouldesbrough said. "A kind letter, but a letter finishing it all."

Then the weaker, smaller man became, as so often happens in life, the tempter—the instrument which moves the lever of a man's career towards the dark sinister side of the dial.

Charliewood was touched and moved by the unexpected kindness in his patron's voice.

"Don't say it's finished," he said; "nothing is finished for a man like you, with a man like me to help him. Of course it's not finished. You have not always been all you might to me, William, but I'll help you now. I'll do anything you want me to do. Buck up, old boy! You will pass the post first by a couple of lengths yet."

"How?"

"Well, what were you going to ask me to do?"

They looked each other in the face with glowing eyes and pale countenances, while a horrible excitement shone out upon them both.

At that moment the door opened very quietly, and an extraordinary person came into the room.

He was a short, fat, youthful-looking man, with a large, pink, and quite hairless face. The face was extremely intelligent, noticeably so, but it was streaked and furrowed with dissipation. It told the story not of the man who enjoyed the sensuous things of life in company, and as part of a merry progress towards the grave, but it betrayed the secret sot, the cunning sensualist private and at home.

This man was Mr. Guest, Sir William's faithful assistant in science, a man who had no initiative power, who could rarely invent a project or discover a scientific fact, but a man who, when once he was put upon the lines he ought to go, could follow them as the most intelligent sleuth-hound in the scientific world.

Wilson Guest was perhaps the greatest living physicist in Europe. He was of inestimable value to his chief, and he was content to remain between the high red-brick walls of the old house in Regent's Park, provided with all he needed for his own amusements, and instigated to further triumphs under the ægis of his master.

"Well, what is it?" said this fat, youthful and rather horrible-looking person.

"We've come to grips of the great fact, Guest," Sir William answered, still with his hand upon Charliewood's shoulder.

The pink creature laughed a hollow and merciless laugh.

"I knew it would come to this," he said, "since you have added another interest to your scientific interests, Gouldesbrough. Why have you called me in to a consultation?"

Gouldesbrough's whole face changed; it became malignant, the face of a devil.

"I'm going to win," he said. "I've had a knock-down blow, but I'm going to get up and win still! Mr. Rathbone must disappear. That can be easily arranged with the resources at our command."

Guest gave a horrible chuckle.

"And when we've got him?" he said.

"He must disappear for always," Gouldesbrough answered.

"Quite easy," Guest replied. "Quite easy, William. But, *not until we've done with him, shall he?*"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, isn't it the last condition of our experiments that we should have some one a slave, a dead man to the world, to use as we shall think fit? Here's your man. Do what you like to him afterwards. Let's make your rival a stepping-stone to your final success."

Then the three men looked at each other in fear.

Charliewood and Sir William Gouldesbrough were pale as linen, but the short, fat man was pink

still, and laughed and chuckled nervously.

CHAPTER VI

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOUR?"

Mr. Eustace Charliewood's chambers were in Jermyn Street. But few of his many friends had ever seen the interior of them. Such entertaining as the man about town did—and he was always one of those who were entertained, rather than one of those who offer hospitality—was done at his club.

The man who looked after the place and valeted his master was therefore the more surprised when Charliewood had called him up one morning after breakfast.

"Look here, William," Charliewood had said, "I've got a gentleman coming to dinner. We've some business to talk over, so I shan't dine him at the club. I suppose you can manage a little dinner here?"

"Certainly, sir, if necessary," the man answered. "Of course you're not in the habit of dining at home, and you've not got your own things. That is if you mean a proper little dinner, sir."

"I do, I do, William," his master answered hurriedly.

"But, there, that needn't matter," the man answered, "we can have everything in if you like, sir."

"That will be best," Charliewood answered. "I leave everything to you, William. Except," he added as an afterthought, "the menu. I want a small dinner, William, but quite good. Shall we say a little *bisque* for the soup? Then perhaps a small Normandy sole. Afterwards a chicken cooked *en casserole*. As an *entrée* some white truffles stewed in Sillery—you can get them in glass jars from Falkland & Masons—and then a morsel of Brie and some coffee. That will do, I think."

"And about the wine, sir?" said William, astonished at these unaccustomed preparations, and inwardly resolving that Mr. Eustace Charliewood had discovered a very brightly plumed pigeon to pluck.

"Oh, about the wine! Well, I think I'll see to that myself. I'll have it sent up from the club. You've an ice-pail for the champagne, haven't you, William?"

"Yes, sir, we certainly have *that*."

"Very good then. We'll say at eight then."

William bowed and withdrew.

All that day the various members of this or that fast and exclusive club round about St. James's Street, noticed that Eustace Charliewood was out of form. His conversation and his greetings were not so imperturbably cheerful and suave as usual. He took no interest in the absorbing question as to whether young Harry Rayke—the Earl of Spaydes' son—would after all propose to Lithia Varallete, the well-known musical comedy girl. The head waiter of the Baobab Club noticed Mr. Charliewood was off his food, and everybody with whom the man about town came in contact said that "Richard was by no means himself."

As the evening drew on, a dark, foggy evening, which promised as night came to be darker and foggier still, Charliewood's agitation increased, though just now there was no one to see it.

He walked down St. James's Street, past Marlborough House, and briskly promenaded the wide and splendid avenue which now exists in front of Buckingham Palace. The fog made him cough, the raw air was most unpleasant, and it was no hour for exercise. But, despite the cold and misery of it all, Charliewood continued his tramp backwards and forwards.

When he returned to his chambers in Jermyn Street, about seven o'clock, he found that his clothes were wet with perspiration, and only a hot bath before dressing for dinner and a couple of bromide tabloids in a wine-glass full of milk seemed to bring him back to his ordinary condition.

When, however, he went into his little dining-room, to all outward appearances he was the usual Eustace Charliewood of the pavements and club-rooms of the West End.

The room was comfortable. A bright fire glowed upon the hearth, shining upon the high-class sporting prints, the subdued wall-paper, the comfortable padded chairs, and the shelves loaded with bachelor nick-nacks and sporting trophies of his youth.

In one corner was a little round table set for two, gleaming with glass and silver and lit by electric lights covered with crimson shades.

It was all very warm and inviting. He looked round it with satisfaction for a moment.

Then, suddenly, as he stood on the hearth-rug, he put his plump, white hand with the heavy seal ring upon it, up to his throat. The apple moved up and down convulsively, and for a single

moment the whole being of the man was filled with overmastering fear of the future and horror and loathing for himself.

The spasm passed as quickly as it came, the drug he had taken asserted its grip upon the twitching nerves, the man whose whole life was discreet adventure, who was a soldier of social fortune, who daily faced perils, became once more himself.

That is to say, to put it in two words, his better angel, who had held possession of him for a moment, fled sorrowfully away, while the especial spirit deputed to look after the other side of him happened to chance that way, and remembering he had often found a hospitable reception from Mr. Eustace Charliewood, looked in, found his old quarters duly swept and garnished, and settled down.

Charliewood's rooms were on the ground floor. In a minute or two, it was about a quarter to eight, he heard someone upon the steps outside, in Jermyn Street, and then the electric bell whirr down below in the kitchen.

He rushed out into the hall. It generally took William some time to mount from the lower regions, which were deep in the bowels of the earth, and no doubt Mr. Charliewood kindly desired to spare the butler the trouble of opening the door.

So, at least, William thought, as he mounted the kitchen stairs and came out into the hall to find Mr. Charliewood already helping his guest off with his coat and showing him into the dining-room. William did not know that there were any special reasons in Mr. Charliewood's mind for not having his guest's name announced and possibly remembered by the servant.

"Well, my dear Rathbone, how are you?" Charliewood said, and no face could have been kinder or more inviting and pleasant to see than the face of the host. "Awfully good of you to come and take me like this, but I thought we should be more comfortable here than at the Club. There are one or two things I want to talk over. I'll do you as well as I can, but I can't answer for anything. You must take pot luck!"

Guy Rathbone looked round the charming room and laughed—a full-blooded, happy laugh.

"I wish you could see my chambers in the Temple," he said. "But you fellows who live up this end do yourselves so jolly well!"

"I suppose one does overdo it," Charliewood answered, "in the way of little comforts and things. It's a mistake, no doubt, but one gets used to it and was brought up to it, and so just goes on, dependent upon things that a sensible man could easily do without. Now, sit down and have a sherry and bitters. Dinner will be up in a minute. And try one of these cigarettes. It's a bad plan to smoke before dinner, I know, as a rule, but these little things just go with the sherry and bitters, and they are special. I get them over from Rio. They're made of black Brazilian tobacco, as you see; they're only half as long as your finger, and instead of being wrapped in filthy, poisonous rice paper, they're covered with maize leaves."

Rathbone sank into the luxurious chair which his host pointed out to him, took the sherry, in its heavily cut glass, and lit one of the cigarettes. He stretched out his feet towards the fire and enjoyed a moment of intense physical ease. The flames and the shaded electric lights shone upon his fine and happy face, twinkled upon the stud in his shirt front, and showed him for what he was at that moment—a young gentleman intensely enjoying everything that life had to give.

In a moment or two more dinner was served.

"You needn't wait, William," Charliewood said, as they sat down to the *hors d'œuvre*. "Just put the soup on and I'll ring when we're ready."

"So good of you to ask me," Rathbone said. "I should have gone to the Oxford and Cambridge Club, had a beef-steak, looked at the evening papers, and then returned to chambers to write letters. Rather a dismal proceeding on a night like this!"

"Hadn't you anything on to-night, then?" Charliewood asked carelessly.

"Not a single thing," Rathbone answered. "I've been cutting all my engagements during the last week or two, telling people I was going out of town. I've got a special reason for working very hard just now."

Charliewood started, and a slight gleam came into his eyes.

"Good idea, that!" he said, "telling people you're going out of town when you want to be quiet for a week or two!"

"It is," Rathbone replied. "At most of the houses I'm in the habit of going to just now every one thinks I'm away. I've been living the life of a recluse, as far as society goes."

Charliewood slightly lifted a glass of Pol Roger.

"Here's success to the work, my dear boy," he said jovially. "And I congratulate myself on the odd accident which brought us together. And of course I don't know you very well, Rathbone, and I am sure I should hate to be impertinent in any way. But still, as you know, I go about everywhere, and one can't help hearing things. And, besides, I'm in a special position in regard to a certain matter, too. Here's my best wish for your happiness in the future, in another way!"

He looked straight into the young man's eyes as he said this, and as he did so Rathbone, whose glass was lifted in response, began to colour until his whole face became crimson.

"I haven't offended you?" Charliewood said quickly.

"Oh—er—not a bit, of course," Rathbone answered with manifest uneasiness. "But I didn't know that anything had got about. I didn't know that you knew. Oh, confound it," he concluded, "I don't want to talk about my own affairs; I—Hang it all, Charliewood, tell me straight out what you mean."

"I repeat," Charliewood answered, "that I haven't known you very long, and therefore I am very chary of in any way infringing the natural reticence that should be between men in our position. Still, you know who I am; everybody knows all about me, and I should like you to believe that I am really a friend."

As he said this, though his face was full of frankness and kindness once more, Charliewood felt that sick loathing of himself he had experienced just before his guest had arrived. There was a throbbing at his temples, his throat felt as if it were packed with warm flour. He hurriedly gulped down some champagne and went on. "Everybody knows by this time," he said in a quiet voice, "that—that—well, old chap, that there has been a sort of set to partners and a change in certain quarters."

At that moment William appeared with the fish, Charliewood having rung for him at the psychological moment, knowing that the little interlude would give his guest time to collect his thoughts.

When the man had once more left the room, Rathbone, who had been biting his lips in perplexity and drumming upon the table with his fingers, bent towards his host.

"I see you know all about it," he said; "and, upon my word, if you'd let me, I should like to talk things over with you from one point of view."

"My dear Rathbone," Charliewood replied, "say nothing whatever to me unless you like, but understand that what you did say would be said in absolute confidence, and that if the experience of a man older in social life, and accustomed to all its vagaries, can help you, I give it to you with all my heart."

"Now I call that very good of you, Charliewood," the young man answered. "I'll tell you straight out, what you probably already know, and I'll ask you for a hint as to what I ought to do. Miss Poole"—he mentioned the name with obvious reluctance—"has found that she made an—er, well, a sort of mistake in her affections. I have no doubt it's all over London that she's written to Sir William Gouldesbrough telling him so."

"Throwing him over, in fact," Charliewood said.

"If you like to put it so," the other answered, "and of course that is just what it amounts to."

"Well then?" Charliewood said.

"I feel in a sort of way that I've done an awfully caddish thing," Rathbone went on. "Fortunately, I am not in Gouldesbrough's set. I don't know him at all. At the same time it's awfully bad form to make love to a girl who's engaged to any one else. And that, unconsciously, is just what I seem to have been doing for a very long time. But, believe me," he concluded with a singular simplicity and boyishness, "I really couldn't help it."

Charliewood laughed a little and then sighed to himself.

"I quite understand," he said; "these things do and will happen, and it wasn't your fault at all. But I do think it's very wrong if a girl who finds that she has made a mistake doesn't put it right before it becomes unavoidable."

"Do you really?" Rathbone cried. "Well, do you know, that's just my point of view, and it relieves me to hear you say so."

"And do you know," Charliewood replied, "that I'm probably the most intimate friend William Gouldesbrough has in the world?"

Rathbone started. "Good Lord!" he said. "Then—what—then—why? And you really mean that you can be friends with me?"

"That's just what I do mean," Charliewood answered; "and now we've got to the point, I will tell you frankly that though our meeting was a pure accident in the first place, I am awfully glad that we did meet and that you are here to-night. I have talked the whole matter over with poor dear Sir William a good deal lately. He has done me the honour to make me his confidant in the matter. Two or three days ago I mentioned that I knew you."

"What did he say?" Rathbone asked quickly.

"I can't tell you his words," Charliewood answered, "but I can tell you their purpose. And it was a wonderful revelation to me of the strength and beauty of my old friend's character. He's a fine fellow, Rathbone, and when you know him you'll say so too."

"Know him?" Rathbone said. "My dear Charliewood, surely you see that it's impossible that I

should meet a man to whom I have unconsciously done such a great injury."

"Ah," Charliewood answered, "you don't know William. It is just the possibility which makes his character so fine. Practically, what he said to me was this. 'You know this young fellow, Eustace. Is he a decent sort of man? A gentleman in ideas, as well as in position, clean living and all that?' 'As far as I know,' I answered, 'he's just so in every way.'"

Once more Rathbone coloured up to the eyes.

Charliewood went on.

"Then William unburdened himself to me fully. 'I only want Marjorie Poole to be happy,' he said, 'and when the proper time arrives I shall just write and tell her so. I was fond of her, deeply fond of her; what man would not be? I thought if she cared for me that she would be a worthy mistress of my house, and an ideal partner to share my fortune and the position I have won. But I am much older than she is. I am immersed, as you know, in grave, scientific pursuits, and I quite realize that I could not give her what as a young girl she has a right to expect. I don't say that I relinquish my claim upon her without a pang, but I have other interests, and my wife and love could in any case only be a part of my life. Do you know what I should like to do more than anything else, Eustace?' 'What?' I said. 'Why,' he continued, 'to meet this young Mr. Rathbone. To tell him all that I am telling you, perfectly frankly, to shake him by the hand, and, by Jove, to be the best man at his wedding, if he'd let me. Then I shall get back to my inventions with a quiet mind, knowing that the only girl who has ever touched me in the least degree is safe and happy.'"

Rathbone pushed back his chair and jumped up.

"Why, heavens," he said, "what a noble fellow! There's a *man*, if you like. I can quite see it all, Charliewood, and you've relieved my mind of a tremendous weight. I can see it all quite distinctly. One of the most distinguished and charming men of the day sees a beautiful and intellectual girl and thinks the time has come when he must marry. Of course, he can't really know what *love* is, like a younger man or a man who has not made his mark in the world. He can't feel what I feel, for instance. And so he bows to the inevitable, and in the kindest and most chivalrous way wants to make every one happy. Charliewood! It's just like a story-book!"

"I don't read 'em myself much, the papers do for me. But, 'pon my soul, since you put it in that way, so it is."

Mr. Charliewood quite forgot to add what sort of story-book. Even the most popular novels of to-day don't always have the traditional happy ending.

"Sit down, old fellow," Charliewood said with great kindness. "You mustn't miss this chicken, it is a rather special dish, and I'm going to ring for William."

"Oh, hang chicken!" Rathbone answered, his face glowing.

"Never abuse your dinner," Charliewood answered. "Only people who are not able to dine do that. You never know when you may dine again."

As he said this the wicked exhilaration at having successfully played with sure and dexterous fingers upon this young and impressionable nature flowed over the older man. An evil joy in his own powers came to him—a devilish satisfaction in his knowledge of the horrid future. For a moment the Tenant who had lately taken up his abode within Mr. Eustace Charliewood was looking out of his host's eye.

Rathbone laughed carelessly. Then, after the waiter had once more entered and left the room, he bent over the table and began to speak more earnestly.

"I suspect," he said, "that I owe you a great deal in this matter, Charliewood, more than you would care to confess. Now tell me, don't I?"

Charliewood waved his hand.

"Oh, we won't go into that part of the question," he said. "But there's just one thing I would like to say. Your feeling in the matter has been quite splendid, Rathbone. I admire you for the way you have felt and spoken since you have been telling me about your engagement, from first to last. Such a lot of men would have congratulated themselves upon winning the girl away from the other fellow without a thought of what the other fellow would feel. Now look here, I do think you owe William this much reparation——"

"Anything in the world I can do——" Rathbone was beginning.

"Well, there's one thing you can do," Charliewood answered, "you can satisfy him that you're the sort of man to whom he would care to surrender Miss Poole. He is willing and anxious to make friends with you. In fact, I know he is most anxious to meet you. I admit that it may be rather an awkward meeting for you, but I think that you owe it to him, considering the way in which he regards the whole affair."

"Of course I will meet him," Rathbone answered. "I shall be proud to meet a man like that. Any time you like."

"Well, I don't want to press things, Rathbone; but, personally, I should say there was no time like the present. We are sure to find Goulesbrough in to-night after dinner. Suppose we walk up to

Regent's Park and call on him. I know you will be received in the kindest way, in a way you never suspected before we talked the matter over."

"We'll do it," Rathbone answered, "and I shall leave his house to-night feeling a great burden has been removed from me."

Charliewood made no answer to this last remark but merely pushed the champagne-bottle over to his guest.

An hour afterwards the two men, both with the astrachan coats which brought them so curiously together turned up about their ears, were walking briskly towards Oxford Street. The fog was very heavy and few people were about, though Charliewood said he knew exactly how to find the way.

"You needn't worry," he said, "we'll go up Portland Place, and I can find Sir William's house without the least trouble. In fact, I think it would be a mistake to take a hansom on a night like this. The roads are horribly greasy. You can't see the lights of any vehicle a few yards ahead, and we're just as likely to be run into as not. Of course, if you'd rather ride——"

"Not a bit," Rathbone answered, "exercise will do me good, and I shall feel calmer and more prepared for the interview. I'm not a sybarite like you are, and after a dinner like you've given me I should not be nearly in such good form unless I did have a walk."

"Right oh!" Charliewood replied; "then come along. We will walk fast to keep warm."

They went on, neither talking much, because of the thick fog that stung the nostrils and the eyes and poured down the throat when the mouth was opened.

In about three-quarters of an hour they had passed up Portland Place, turned to the left and were drawing near the house they sought.

"It's not very far now," Charliewood said.

He shook as he said so, and his voice had a very muffled sound.

"Don't you talk, old fellow," Rathbone answered. "I can see you're cold, and this fog plays the deuce with the lungs. Do keep quiet; there's no need to say anything. I'll follow where you lead."

They stood at last before the little door in the high wall of Sir William Gouldesbrough's house.

In the distance the faint rumble of London came to their ears, but there was not a soul about. Nobody saw them as Charliewood opened the door with a pass-key, explaining to Rathbone that Sir William had given him the key in order to save the servants coming through the garden.

"I'm always in and out of the house," he explained, still with the cold and fog in his voice.

They opened the door, and it clicked behind them.

Rathbone brushed against some laurel bushes.

"I say," he said, "how dark it is here! You must conduct me, Charliewood, up this path. Let me take your arm."

He took his friend's arm, noticing with wonder how the cold seemed to have penetrated the bones of his host; for the big man's whole body was trembling.

The gravel crunched beneath their feet as they walked for thirty yards or so. Then Rathbone saw a dim light above his head. It was the lamp which hung in the porch. His feet knocked against the step.

"Here we are," Charliewood said; "six steps, and then the front door."

Once more Charliewood produced a key, opened the massive door of the hall, and entered with his friend.

"Take off your coat," he said, as Rathbone looked round wonderingly at the big, gloomy and dimly-lit place. "This is rather miserable, but Gouldesbrough has got a little snugger down the passage, where we shall be quite comfortable. Are you ready? Very well, then, come along."

The house seemed absolutely still, save for Charliewood's echoing footsteps as he led the way towards the door on the right-hand side of the wide staircase.

Rathbone followed him. As he did so the sombre emptiness of the place began to steal over his nerves and influence them, coupled, no doubt, with the expectation of the coming interview.

He shuddered a little, and wished that he was back again in the cosy little room in Jermyn Street.

Then a green baize door opened, they passed through, and it swung back noiselessly behind them.

CHAPTER VII

ENGLAND'S GREAT SENSATION

In the course of a week or so London, and shortly afterwards the whole of England, realized that a new and absorbing sensation was dawning.

Perhaps there is nothing which more excites the popular mind than the sudden disappearance of anybody from whatever class of society.

It began to be realized, whispered and hinted at in the newspapers that a young and rising barrister of good family, named Mr. Guy Rathbone, of the Inner Temple, had suddenly vanished. It was but a year or two before that the whole of the country had been thrilled by the sad case of Miss Hickman. The event and the excitement it had raised at the time were still fresh in the public mind; and when it began to be rumoured that something even more sensational than that had taken place, the Press began to be on the alert. In ten days' time such as were known of the facts of Mr. Guy Rathbone's apparent departure from ordinary life had become the topic of the hour. The newspapers were filled with columns of surmises. Hour by hour, as the evening papers of London and the provinces appeared, new theories, clues, explanations filled the leader pages and the contents' bills. The "Rathbone Mystery," as it was called, absorbed the whole interest of the country. An announcement of war would have been momentarily disregarded by the man in the street, while he yet remained unsatisfied as to the truth about the young gentleman who seemed to have been utterly wiped out from the world of men and women, to have vanished into thin air without a trace of his movements or a single clue as to his whereabouts.

All that was accurately known was summed up again and again in the Press and in general conversation, and it amounted to just this and no more.

Mr. Guy Rathbone was in fairly prosperous circumstances; he had an income of his own, was slowly but steadily climbing the laborious ladder of the Bar, was popular in society, and, as far as could be ascertained, had no troubles of any sort whatever.

It was shown that Rathbone was not in debt, and practically owed nothing whatever, except the ordinary current accounts, which he was accustomed to settle every quarter. He had a fair balance at the bank, and his securities, which provided him with his income, were intact. His life had been a singularly open one. His movements had never suggested anything secret or disreputable. His friends were all people in good circumstances, and no one had ever alleged any shady acquaintances against him. He was in perfect health, was constantly in the habit of taking exercise at the German Gymnasium, still played football occasionally, and held a commission in the Inns of Court Volunteers. He had never been observed to be downcast or despondent in any way. In short, there was no earthly reason, at any rate upon the surface, for a voluntary withdrawal on his part from the usual routine of his life.

The idea of suicide was frankly scouted by both friends, acquaintances and business connections. People do not destroy themselves without a real or imaginary reason, and this young man had always been regarded as so eminently healthy-minded and sane, that no one was prepared to believe even that he had made away with himself in a sudden fit of morbidity or madness. It was shown that there had been no taint of insanity in his family for several generations. The theory of suicide was clearly untenable. This was the conclusion to which journalists, police, and the new class of scientific mystery experts which has sprung up during the last few years unanimously came. Moreover, in the London of to-day, or even in the country, it is a most difficult thing for a man to commit suicide without the more or less immediate discovery of his remains.

There was not wanting the class of people who hinted at foul play. But that theory was immensely narrowed by the fact that no one could have had any motive for murdering this young man, save only a member of the criminal classes, who did so for personal gain. It was quite true that he might have been robbed and his body cunningly disposed of. Such things have happened, such things do, though very rarely, happen in the London of to-day. But the class of criminal who makes a practice and livelihood of robbery with violence, of attempted or actual murder, is a small class. Every member of it is intimately known to the police, and Scotland Yard was able to discover no single suspicious movement of this or that criminal who might reasonably be concerned in such an affair. Moreover, it was pointed out that such criminals were either invariably brought to justice or that, at any rate, the *fact* that some one or other unknown has committed a murder is invariably discovered within a week or so of the occurrence.

For fourteen days the hundreds of people engaged in trying to solve this mystery had found no single indication of foul play.

Where, then, was Guy Rathbone? Was he alive? was he dead? Nobody was prepared to say.

The one strange circumstance which seemed to throw a tiny light upon the mystery was this. For a fortnight or so before his disappearance, Mr. Rathbone, usually in the habit of going a good deal to dinner-parties, dances, and so on, had declined all invitations. Many people who had invited him to this or that function now came forward and announced that their invitations had been declined, as Mr. Rathbone had said he was going out of town for a short time. Inquiries in the Temple showed that Mr. Rathbone had not been out of town at all. He had remained almost entirely in his chambers, and even his appearances in the Law Courts, where he had only done

three days' actual work for the last week or two, had been less frequent than usual.

Rathbone was in the habit of being attended to by a woman who came early in the morning, lit the fires, prepared his bath and breakfast, and then swept the chambers. The woman generally arrived at seven and left about twelve, returning again for an hour about six in the evening, to make up the fires and do anything else that might be required. Rathbone either lunched in the Inner Temple or in one of the Fleet Street restaurants. If not dining out, he generally took this meal at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, of which he was a member.

The waiters in the Temple Hall said that his attendance had not been quite as regular as usual in the fortnight or so before his disappearance, but they certainly thought that they had seen him every other day or so.

The woman who looked after the chambers stated that Mr. Rathbone had remained indoors a good deal more than usual, seeming to be engrossed in law books. On several occasions when she had arrived at six in the evening, she had found that he did not require his dress clothes put out, and had asked her to bring him in some sandwiches or some light food of that description, as he intended to work alone far into the night.

These slight divergencies from his ordinary habits were, every one agreed, significant of something. But what that something was nobody knew, and the wild suggestions made on all sides seemed to provide no real solution.

The last occasion upon which Mr. Rathbone had been seen by any one able to report the occurrence was in the early morning at breakfast. Mrs. Baker, the bed-maker, had cooked the breakfast as usual, and had asked her master if he would excuse her attendance in the evening, as she had a couple of orders for the Adelphi, in return for displaying the bills of the theatre in a little shop she kept with her daughter in a street off Holborn.

"My master seemed in his usual spirits," the good woman had said in an interview with a member of the staff of the *Westminster Gazette*. "He gave me permission at once to go to the theatre, and said that he himself would be out that evening. There was no trace of anything unusual in his manner. When I arrived in the morning and opened the outer doors of the chambers with my pass key, I went into the study and the sitting-room as usual, lit two fires, turned on the bath, made a cup of tea and took it to Mr. Rathbone's bedroom. There was no answer to my knock, and when I opened the door and went in, thinking he was over-sleeping himself, I found the bed had not been slept in. This was very unusual in a gentleman of Mr. Rathbone's regular habits. It would not have attracted my notice in the case of some gentlemen I have been in the habit of doing for, who were accustomed to stay out without any intimation of the fact. But I did think it strange in the case of Mr. Guy, always a very steady gentleman. I waited about till nearly one o'clock, and he did not return. I then went home, and did not go to the chambers again till six o'clock, when I found things in the same state as before, the fires burnt out, and no trace of anybody having entered. As I left the Inn I asked the porter if he had seen Mr. Rathbone, and he replied that he had not returned. The same thing happened for the next two days, when the porter communicated with the authorities of the Inn, and an inspector of police was called in."

The interview disclosed few more facts of importance, save only one. This was that Mr. Rathbone had dressed for dinner on the night of his disappearance. His evening clothes were not in the wardrobe, and the morning suit he had been wearing at breakfast was neatly folded and placed upon a chest of drawers ready for Mrs. Baker to brush it.

This seemed to show indubitably that the barrister had no thought of being absent from home that night.

There the matter had rested at first. Meanwhile, as no new discovery was made, and not the slightest ray of light seemed to be forthcoming, the public interest was worked up to fever heat. Rathbone had few relations, though many friends. His only surviving relative appeared to be his uncle, a brother of his mother, who was the Dean of Bexeter. The clergyman was interviewed, and stated that he generally received a letter from his nephew every three weeks or so, but nothing in the most recent letter had been unusual, and that he was as much in the dark as any ordinary member of the public.

This much was known to the man in the street. But in society, while the comment and amazement was no less in intensity, much more was known than the outside world suspected.

For some time past every one had remarked the apparent and growing intimacy between the lost man and Miss Marjorie Poole, who was engaged to the famous scientist, Sir William Goulesbrough, F.R.S. How far matters had gone between the young couple was only conjectured, but at the moment of Rathbone's disappearance it was generally believed that Miss Poole was about to throw over Sir William for his young rival—this was the elegant way in which men talked in the clubs and women in their drawing-rooms.

Nothing is hidden now-a-days, and the fierce light of publicity beats upon the doings of the countess and the coster-monger alike. The countess may, perhaps, preserve a secret a little longer than the coster-monger, and that is the only difference between them in this regard.

Accordingly, on the fifteenth or sixteenth day of the mystery, a sensational morning paper published a special article detailing what professed to be an entirely new light upon the situation. If statements affecting the private and intimate life of anybody can be called in good taste, the

article was certainly written with a due regard to proprieties, and with an obvious attempt to avoid hurting the feelings of any one. But, as it was pointed out in a prefatory note, the whole affair had passed from the regions of private life into the sphere of national interest, and therefore it was the duty of a journal to give to the world all and every fact which had any bearing upon the affair, without fear or favour.

This last article, which created a tremendous sensation, was in substance as follows:—

It hinted that a young lady of great charm, and moving in the highest circles, a young lady who had been engaged for some little time to one of the most distinguished Englishmen of the day, had lately been much seen with the vanished man. The gossip of society had hinted that this could mean nothing more or less than the young lady had been mistaken in the first disposal of her affections, and was about to make a change.

How did this bear upon the situation?

During the next day or two, though no names were actually printed, it became generally known who the principal characters in the supposed little drama of love really were. Everybody spoke freely of old Sir Frederick Poole's distinguished daughter, of Lady Poole of Curzon Street, and of Sir William Goulesbrough.

When the article first appeared everybody began to say, "Ah, now we shall have the whole thing cleared up." But as the days went on people began to realize that the new facts threw little new light upon the mystery, and only provided a possible motive for Mr. Guy Rathbone's suicide. And then once more people were compelled to ask themselves if Mr. Rathbone really was in love with Miss Poole, and had found that either she would have nothing to say to him, or that she was inevitably bound to Sir William Goulesbrough in honour. Then when, how and where did he make away with himself?

And to that question there was absolutely no answer.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHIVALROUS BARONET

Lady Poole and her daughter had been living in rooms in the great Palace Hotel at Brighton for a fortnight.

Marjorie, utterly broken down by the terrible mystery that enveloped her, and shrinking from the fierce light that began to beat upon the details of her private life, had implored her mother to take her from London.

There had been a terrible scene between the old lady and her daughter when, the day after Marjorie had written to Sir William Goulesbrough telling him that she could not marry him, she had confessed the truth to Lady Poole.

In her anger and excitement the elder woman had said some bitter and terrible things. She was transformed for a space from the pleasant and easy-going society dame into something hard, furious, and even coarse. Marjorie had shrunk in amazement and fear from the torrent of her mother's wrath. And finally she had been able to bear it no longer, and had lost consciousness.

Allowances should be made for the dowager. She was a worldly woman, good and kind as far as she went, but purely worldly and material. The hope of her life had seemed gained when her daughter became engaged to Sir William. The revelation that, after all, the engagement was now broken, was nothing more than a delusion, and that a younger and ineligible man, from the worldly point of view, had won Marjorie's affection, was a terrible blow to the woman of the world. All her efforts seemed useless. The object of her life, so recently gained, so thoroughly enjoyed, was snatched away from her in a sudden moment.

But when Marjorie had come to herself again, and the doctor had been summoned to treat her for a nervous shock, she found her mother once more the kindly and loved parent of old. Lady Poole had been frightened at her own violence, and repented bitterly for what she had said. She tended and soothed the girl in the sweetest and most motherly way. And without disguising from Marjorie the bitter blow the girl's decision was to her, she told her that she was prepared to accept the inevitable, and to re-organize all her ideas for the future.

And then had come the black mystery of Guy's utter vanishing from the world of men and women.

Lady Poole had always been fond of Guy Rathbone, and now, by a curious contradiction of nature, when she had schooled herself to realize that it was on this man her daughter's life was centred, the old lady was terribly and genuinely affected at Guy's disappearance. No one could have been more helpful or more sympathetic during these black hours, and she gladly left Curzon Street for Brighton, in order that she might be alone with her daughter and endeavour to bring her back in some measure to happiness, or, if not happiness, to interest in life.

Soon after Marjorie had written her letter to Sir William, Lady Poole had received a reply from

the scientist, enclosing a short note for her daughter.

It had been a wonderful letter. The writer said that he could not disguise from himself that he had seen, or at least suspected, the way things were going.

"Terrible," he said, "as this letter of your daughter's has been to me, it would yet ill-become me not to receive it as a man. I had hoped and believed that a very happy life was in store for me with Marjorie and for her with me. Then I saw that it was not to be, and Marjorie's letter comes as no surprise, but as only the definite and final end of my dream. Dear Lady Poole, do realize that, despite all this, it will always be my duty and my privilege to be the friend of you and of your daughter if you and she will permit me to be so. I have told her so often how I love her, and I tell her so even now. But love, as I understand it, should have the element of self-sacrifice in it, if it is true love. I will therefore say no more about my personal feelings, except in one way. Just as my whole life would have been devoted to making your daughter happy, so I now feel it is my duty to devote myself as well as I can to making her happy in another way. She has chosen a man no doubt more worthy to be her husband than I should ever be. You will forgive a natural weakness if I say no more on this point, but the great fact is that she has chosen. Therefore, I say that my only wish is for her life-long happiness, and that all my endeavours, such as they are, will be still devoted to that end. Let them be happy, let them be together. And if I can promote their happiness, even though my own heart may be broken, believe me, dear Lady Poole, it is my most fervent wish.

"Will you give Marjorie the enclosed little note of farewell? I shall not trouble her more, until perhaps some day in the future we may still be friends, though fate and her decision have forbidden me to be anything more to her than just that.

"Believe me, my dear Lady Poole,
"In great sorrow and in sincere friendship,
"WILLIAM GOULDESBOURGH."

So the two ladies had gone to Brighton, and while the press of the United Kingdom was throbbing with excitement, while hundreds of people were endeavouring to solve the terrible mystery of Guy Rathbone's disappearance, the girl more nearly interested in it than any one else in the world stayed quietly with her mother at the pleasant sea-side town, and was not molested by press or public.

Marjorie had become, even in these few days, a ghost of her former self. The light had faded out of her eyes, they had ceased to appear transparent and had become opaque. Her beautifully chiselled lips now drooped in pathetic and habitual pain, her pallor was constant and unvarying. She drank in the keen sea breezes, and they brought no colour to her cheeks. She walked upon the white chalk cliffs and saw nothing of the shifting gold and shadow as the sun fell upon the sea, heard nothing of the harmonies of the Channel winds. Her whole heart was full of a passionate yearning and a terrible despair; she was like a stately flower that had been put out of its warm and sheltered home into an icy blast, and was withered and blackened in an hour.

Kind as her mother was, Marjorie felt that there was nobody now left to lean upon, to confide in. A girl of her temperament needs some stronger arm than any woman can provide, to help and comfort, to keep awake the fires of hope within her, and nothing of the sort was hers. In all the world she seemed to have no one to confide in, no one to lean upon, no one who would give her courage and hope for the black and impenetrable future.

At the end of the first fortnight, Marjorie knew, though her mother only just referred to the matter, that letters were daily arriving from Sir William Gouldesbrough.

One evening Lady Poole, unable to keep the news from her daughter any longer, told her of these communications.

"I dare say, darling," the old lady said, "I may give you pain, but I think you really ought to know how wonderfully poor dear William is behaving in this sad affair. Though it must be terribly hard for him, though it must fill him with a pain that I can only guess at, he is moving heaven and earth to discover what has become of your poor boy. He is daily writing to me to tell me what he is doing, to inform me of his hopes, and I tell you, Marjorie, that if human power can discover what has happened to Guy, William Gouldesbrough will discover it. Do realize, dear, what a noble thing this is in the man you have rejected. Whenever I receive his letters I can't help crying a little, it seems so noble, so touching, and so beautiful of him."

Marjorie was sitting at the table. The ladies dined in their private rooms, and it was after the meal. Her head was in her hands and her eyes were full of tears. She looked up as her mother said this, with a white, wan face.

"Ah, yes, dear," she replied, "there is no doubt of that, William was always noble. He is as great in heart as he is in intellect. He is indeed one of the chosen and best. Don't think I don't realize it, mother, now you've told me, indeed I *do* realize it. My whole heart is filled with gratitude towards him. No one else would have done as much in his position."

"You do feel that, do you, dear?" Lady Poole said.

"Oh, indeed I do," she answered, "though I fear that even he, great as his intellect is, will never

disperse this frightful, terrible darkness."

Lady Poole got up and came round to where her daughter was sitting. She put her hand upon the shining coil of hair and said—

"Dear, do you think that you could bear to see him?"

"To see William?" Marjorie answered quickly with a curious catch in her voice.

"Yes, darling, to see William. Would it give you too much pain?"

"But how, why, what for?"

"Oh, not to revive any memories of the past, there is nothing further from his thoughts. But this morning he wrote me the very sweetest letter, saying that in this crisis he might be able to give you a little comfort."

"Has he discovered anything, then?" Marjorie asked.

"I fear not as yet. But he says that at this moment you must feel very much alone. As you know, he is doing all that a mortal man can. Of course, I have told him how broken you are by it all, and he thinks that perhaps you might like to hear what he is doing, might like to confide in him a little. 'If,' he says in his letter, 'she will receive me as a brother, whose only wish is to help her in this terrible trial, can I say how proud and grateful I shall be to come to her and tell her what I can?'"

Marjorie gave a great sob. It was too much. In her nervous and weak condition the gentle and kindly message her mother had given her was terribly affecting.

"How good he is!" she murmured. "Yes, mother, if only he would come I should like to see him."

"Then, my dear," Lady Poole replied, "that is very easily arranged, for he is in the hotel to-night."

Marjorie started. Her mother went to a side table on which was a little portable telephone. She held the receiver to her ear, and when the clerk from the down-stairs office replied, asked that Sir William Gouldesbrough should be told at once that Lady Poole would be very glad to see him in Number 207.

Marjorie rose and began to pace the room. A growing excitement mastered her, her hands twitched, her eyes were dilated. Perhaps she was at last going to hear something, something definite, something new, about Guy.

There was a knock at the door. A waiter opened it, and Sir William Gouldesbrough came into the room.

CHAPTER IX

GRATITUDE OF MISS MARJORIE POOLE

As the man to whom she had been engaged came into the room, Marjorie rose to meet him. She was not embarrassed, the hour and occasion were too serious for that, and she herself was too broken down for any emotions save those that were intensely real and came from an anguished heart. She went up to him, all pale and drooping, and took him by the hand.

"Thank you, William," she said in a low voice, and that was all.

But in her words Gouldesbrough realized all that she was powerless to say. He heard, with an inward thrill and leap of the pulses, an immense respect for him, which, even in the days of their engagement, he had never heard.

Always, Marjorie had revered his attainments, never had she seemed to be so near to him as a *man* as now.

He looked straight into her eyes, nor did his own flinch from her direct and agonized gaze. The frightful power of his dominating will, the horrible strength of his desire, the intensity of his purpose, enabled him to face her look without a sign of tremor.

He, this man with a marvellous intellect and a soul unutterably stained by the most merciless perfidy, was yet able to look back at her with a kind, sorrowful, and touching glance.

Gouldesbrough wore no metal helmet which should make the horror of his thoughts and knowledge plain for Marjorie to see. The man who had committed a crime as foul and sinister as ever crime was yet, the man who was responsible for the pale face of the girl he loved, the drooping form, the tearful eyes, yet smiled back at her with a mask of patient resignation, deference, and chivalry.

"I am so glad you've come, William," Lady Poole said; "and I'm sure, distressing as all these circumstances are, we cannot thank you enough for what you have done and are doing. No one else in your position would have done so much. And on Marjorie's behalf and on my own I thank

you with a full heart."

Sir William bowed.

Then Lady Poole, voluble as she usually was, and unabashed in almost every circumstance hesitated a little. The situation was certainly very delicate, almost unparalleled, indeed, and it was certainly quite outside even her wide experience. But her voice had a genuine ring of thankfulness and gratitude, and the real woman emerged from the veneer of worldliness and baffled ambition.

There was a pause for a moment, no one of the three spoke a single word. Then Lady Poole, by an intuition, said and did exactly the right thing—perhaps old Sir Frederick's "hobby of tact" had not been without its use after all! She sank into a chair.

"There's no need for any explanation, I can see that," she said with a sigh of relief. "With any other man it would have been so different, but it's all right, William, I can see it in your manner and in your presence here. Then let me say once and for all, that both Marjorie and I feel at last we have got some one with us who will help us. We have been terribly alone. We have both felt it most poignantly. After all, women do want a man in a crisis! You, dear William, are the last man we should have thought of asking to help us, and yet you are the first man who has come to do so."

"Dear Lady Poole," Gouldesbrough answered in a quiet voice, "I think perhaps I see a little of what you mean. I am not sure, but I think I do. And I regard it as the greatest privilege and honour to come to you with an offer of help and assistance in your trouble."

He turned to the younger lady.

"Marjorie," he said, "you must treat me just like a brother now. You must forget all that has passed between us, and just lean on me, rely on me, use me. Nothing could make me more happy than just that."

Lady Poole rose again. Who shall say in the volatile brain of the good dame that already in the exhilaration of Sir William's presence and kindness, new hopes and ambitions were not reviving? Lady Poole was a woman, and she was an opportunist too. Woman-like, her mind moved fast into an imaginary future; it had always done so. And it is possible that upon the clouded horizon of her hopes a faint star began to twinkle once more.

Who shall blame Lady Poole?

"Now, my dears," she said in a more matter of fact voice, "I think perhaps you might be happier in discussing this matter if I were to go away. Under the circumstances, I am perfectly aware that it's not the correct thing to do, but that is speaking only from a conventional standpoint, and none of us here can be conventional at a moment like this. If you would rather have me stay, just say so. But it is with pride and pleasure that I know that I can leave you with Marjorie, William, even under these miserable circumstances and in this unhappy business."

Gouldesbrough smiled sadly.

"It is as Marjorie wishes," he said. "But I know that Marjorie knows she can trust me."

The great man saw that once more the girl lifted her eyes and looked at him with something which was almost like reverence. Never before had he seen her look at him like this. Once more the evil joy in the possibility of victory after all leapt through his blood.

No thought nor realization of the terrible thing he had done, of the horrors that he and the pink-faced man in Regent's Park were even now perfecting, came to trouble that moment of evil pride. Everybody had always said, everybody who had been brought into contact with him, always knew that Sir William Gouldesbrough was a strong man!

Lady Poole waited a moment to see if her daughter made any sign of wishing her to remain, and finding that there was none, for Marjorie was standing with drooping head and made no movement, the dowager swept out of the room with rustling skirts, and gently closed the door.

Sir William and Marjorie were left alone.

The man of action asserted himself.

"Sit down, Marjorie," he said in a commonplace tone, "and just let me talk to you on pure matters of fact. Now, my dear, we haven't seen each other since you wrote me the letter telling me that our engagement was a mistake. You know what my reply to that was, and I believe and trust you know that I shall remain perfectly true to both the spirit and actual words of that communication. That's all we need say now, except just this: I loved you dearly and I love you dearly now. I had hoped that we might have been very happy together and that I might have spent my life in your service. But that was not to be in the way that I had hoped. At the same time, I am not a man easily moved or changed, and if I cannot be yours in one way, dear girl, I will be yours in another. However, that's all about that. Now, then, let me tell you how hard I have been trying to discover the truth of this astounding disappearance of poor Mr. Guy Rathbone."

A low sob came from the girl in the chair. It was a sob not only of regret for her lost lover, but it had the same note of reverence, of utter appreciation, of her first words.

"You are too good," she said. "William, I have treated you horribly badly. You are too good. Oh, you are *too* good!"

"Hush!" he said in a sharp staccato voice. "We agreed that aspect of the question wasn't to be spoken of any more. The past is the past, and, my dear little girl, I beg you to realize it. You loved poor Guy Rathbone, and he seems to have been wiped out of ordinary life. My business is to find him again for you, so that you may be happy. I have been trying to do the utmost in my power for days. I have done everything that my mind could suggest, and as yet nothing has occurred. Now, Marjorie, let's just be business-like. Tell me what you think about the matter, and I will tell you what I think. See if our two brains cannot hit on something which will help us."

"William," she said with a full note, a chord rather, of deep pain in her voice—"William, I don't know what to think. I can't understand it. I am lost in utter darkness. There seems no possible reason why he should have gone away. I can only think that the worst has happened, and that some terrible people must have killed him."

"But why?"

"Oh," she answered almost hysterically, "he was so beautiful and so strong. They must have killed him because he was so different to other men." She did not see the tall man who sat before her wince and quiver. She did not see his face change and contort itself into malignancy. She did not realize that these innocent words, wrung from a simple distressed and loving heart, meant awful things for the man she longed for.

"But, Marjorie," the voice came steady and strong, "you know that is just a little fantastic, if you will forgive me for saying so. People don't go about injuring other people because they are better-looking or have finer natures than themselves. They only say unkind things about them, they don't kill them, you know."

"Oh, of course, you are right, William," she answered, "and I hardly know what I'm saying, the pain of it all is so great. But then, there *is* nothing to say. I can't understand, I can hardly realize what has happened."

"For my part," Sir William answered, "I have left no stone unturned to discover the truth. I have been in communication with every force or agency which might be able to explain the thing. And no one has given me the slightest hint, except perhaps——"

She leapt up from her chair, her pale face changed.

"Yes?" she cried, "What is it? What is that?"

Her breath came thick and fast. Sir William remained sitting in his chair and his head was bowed.

"Sit down, Marjorie," he answered; "I didn't mean to say that."

"But you said it," she replied. "Ah! my ears are very keen, and there was something in your voice which had meaning. William, what is it? What is it?"

"Nothing," he answered in a deep, decisive voice.

But the voice brought no conviction to her ears. She had detected, or thought she had detected, the note of an inner knowledge when he had first spoken. She crossed the room with rapid strides and laid her white hand upon his shoulder.

"You've *got* to tell me," she said imperiously. And her touch thrilled him through and through with an exquisite agony and an exquisite joy.

"It's nothing," he repeated.

Now there was less conviction than ever in his voice. She laughed hysterically. "William," she said, "I know you so well, you can't hide anything from me. There's something you can tell me. Whatever it may be, good or bad, you've just *got* to tell me."

At that he looked up at her, and his face, she saw, was drawn and frightened.

"Marjorie," he said, "don't let any words of mine persuade you into any belief. Since you ask me I must say what I have got to say. But mind you, I am in no way convinced myself that what I am going to tell you is more than mere idle supposition."

"Tell me," she whispered, and her voice hissed like escaping steam.

"Well, it's just this," he said, "and it's awfully hard for me even to hint such a thing to you. But, you know, Rathbone had recently made rather a friend of poor Eustace Charliewood. I like Charliewood; you never did. A man's point of view and a girl's point of view are quite different about a man. But of course I can't pretend that Charliewood is exactly, well—er—what you might call—I don't know quite how to put it, Marjorie."

"I know," she said with a shudder of disgust "I know. Go on."

"Well, just before Rathbone disappeared those two seemed to have been about together a good deal, and of course Charliewood is a man who has some rather strange acquaintances, especially in the theatrical world. That is to say, in the sub-theatrical world. Marjorie, I hardly know how to put it to you, and I think I had better stop."

"Go on!" she cried once more.

"Well," he said wearily, "Rathbone was a good fellow, no doubt, but he is a young man, and no girl really knows what the life of a young man really is or may be. I know that Charliewood introduced Rathbone to a certain girl. Oh, Marjorie, I can't go on, these suspicions are unworthy."

"Terribly unworthy," she cried, standing up to her full height, and then in a moment she drooped to him, and once more she asked him to go on.

He told her of certain meetings, saying that there could have been, of course, no harm in them, skilfully hinting at this or that, and then testifying to his utter disbelief in the suspicions that he himself had provoked. She listened to him, growing whiter and whiter. At last his hesitating speech died away into silence, and she stood looking at him.

"It might be," she whispered, half to herself, "it might be, but I do not think it *could* be. No man could be so unutterably cruel, so unutterably base. I have made you tell me this, William, and I know that you yourself do not believe it. He could not be so wicked as to sacrifice everything for one of those people."

And then Sir William rose.

"No," he said, "he couldn't. I feel it, though I don't know him. Marjorie, no living man could leave you for one of the vulgar syrens of the half world."

She looked at him for a moment as he put the thing in plain language, and then burst into a passion of weeping.

"I can't bear any more, William," she said between her sobs. "Go now, but find him. Oh, find him!"

CHAPTER X

A MAN ABOUT TOWN PAYS A DEBT

The people in the luxurious smoking-room of the great Palace Hotel saw a pale, ascetic-looking and very distinguished man come in to the comfortable place and sit down upon a lounge.

"Do you know who that is?" one man whispered to another, flicking the ash off a cigar.

"No; who is he?" his companion answered.

"That's Sir William Gouldesbrough."

"Oh, the great scientific Johnny, you mean."

"Yes, they say that he is going to turn the world topsy-turvy before he's done."

"The world's good enough for me," was the reply, "and if I'd my way, these people who invent things should all be taken out and shot. I'm tired of inventions, they make life move too quickly. The good old times were best, when it took eight hours to get from Brighton to London, and one could not have telegrams from one's office to worry one."

"Perhaps you're right," said the first man. "But still, people look at things differently now-a-days. At any rate, Gouldesbrough is said to be one of the leading men in England to-day."

"He doesn't look happy over it," replied his companion. "He looks like a death's-head."

"Well, you know, he's mixed up in the Rathbone mystery in a sort of way."

"Oh yes, of course; he was engaged to the girl who chucked him over for the Johnny who has disappeared, wasn't he?"

"That's it. Just watch him, poor wretch; doesn't he look pipped?"

"Upon my word, the perspiration's standing out on his forehead in beads. He seems as if——"

"As if he had been overworking and overeating. He wants a Turkish bath, I expect. Now then, Jones, what do you really think about the fall in South Africans? Will they recover in the next two months? That's what I want to know; that's what I want to be certain of."

Sir William had just left the up-stairs apartments of the Pooles. He had rung for the lift and entered, without a word to the attendant, who had glanced fearfully at the tall, pale man with the flashing eyes and the wet face. Once or twice the lift-man noticed that the visitor raised his hand to his neck above the collar and seemed to press upon it, and it may have been fancy on the lift-man's part—though he was not an imaginative person—but he seemed to hear a sound like a drum beating under a blanket, and he wondered if the gentleman was troubled with heart-disease.

Gouldesbrough pressed the little electric bell upon the oak table in front of him, and in a moment a waiter appeared.

"Bring me a large brandy and soda," he said in a quiet voice.

The waiter bowed and hurried away.

The waiter did not know, being a foreigner, and unacquainted with the tittle-tattle of the day, that Sir William Goulesbrough, the famous scientist, was generally known to be a practical teetotaler, and one who abhorred the general use of alcoholic beverages.

When the brandy came, amber in the electric lights of the smoking-room, and with a piece of ice floating in the liquid, Sir William took a small white tabloid from a bottle in his pocket and dropped it into the glass. It fizzed, spluttered, and disappeared.

Then he raised the tumbler to his lips, and as he did so the floating ice tinkled against the sides of the glass like a tiny alarm.

"Nerves gone," the stock-broking gentleman close by said to his friend, with a wink.

In five minutes or so, after he had lit a cigarette, Goulesbrough rose and left the smoking-room. He put on his coat in the hall and went out of the front door.

It was not yet late, and the huge crescent of electric lights, which seemed to stretch right away beyond Hove to Worthing, gleamed like a gigantic coronet.

It was a clear night. The air was searching and keen, and it seemed to steady the scientist as he walked down the steps and came out from under the hotel portico on to the pavement.

A huge round moon hung over the sea, which was moaning quietly. The lights in front of the Alhambra Music Hall gleamed brightly, and on the promenade by the side of the shore innumerable couples paced and re-paced amid a subdued hum of talk and laughter.

The pier stretched away into the water like a jewelled snake. It was Brighton at ten o'clock, bright, gay, and animated.

Sir William was staying at the Brighton Royal, the other great hotel which towers up upon the front some quarter of a mile away from the Palace, where Marjorie and Lady Poole were.

He strode through the crowds, seeing nothing of them, hearing nothing but the beat of his own heart.

Even for a man so strong as he, the last hour had been terrible. Never before in all his life, at the moment of realization when some great scientific theory had materialized into stupendous fact, when first Marjorie had promised to marry him—at any great crisis of his life—had he undergone so furious a strain as this of the last hour.

He came out of the Palace Hotel, knowing that he had carried out his intentions with the most consummate success. He came out of it, realizing that not half-a-dozen men in England could have done what he had done, and as the keen air smote upon his face like a blow from the flat of a sword, he realized also that not six men in England, walking the pleasant, happy streets of any town, were so unutterably stained and immeasurably damned as he.

As he passed through the revolving glass doors of his own hotel, and the hall-porters touched their caps, he exerted all the powers of his will.

He would no longer remember or realize what he had done and what it meant to him. He would only rejoice in his achievement, and he banished the fear that comes even to the most evil when they know they have committed an almost unpardonable sin.

He did not use the lift to go to his sitting-room on the second floor; he ran lightly up the stairs, wanting the exercise as a means of banishing thought.

He entered his own room, switched on the electric light, took off his coat, and stood in front of the fire, stretching his arms in pure physical weariness.

Yes! That was over! Another step was taken. Once more he had progressed a step towards his desire, in spite of the most adverse happenings and the most forbidding aspects of fate.

The unaccustomed brandy at the Palace Hotel, and the bromide solution he had dropped into it, had calmed his nerves, and suddenly he laughed aloud in the rich, silent room, a laugh of pure triumph and excitement.

Even as the echoes of his voice died away, his eyes fell upon the table and saw that there was a letter lying there addressed to him. The address was written in a well-known handwriting. He took it up, tore open the envelope and read the communication.

It was this—

"I have been down here for several days, trying to escape from London and the thoughts which London gives me. But it has been quite useless. I saw to-day, quite by chance, in the hotel register, that you have arrived here. I did not think that we were ever likely to meet again, except in the most casual way. I hope not. Since I have been here, the torture of my life has increased a thousand-fold, and I have come to the conclusion that my life must stop. I am not fit to live. I don't blame you too much, because if I hadn't been a scoundrel and a wastrel all my life, I should never have put

myself in your hands. As far as your lights go, you have acted well to me. You have paid me generously for the years of dirty work I have done at your bidding. For what I have done lately, you have made me financially free, and I shall die owing no man a penny, and with no man, save you only, knowing that I die without hope—lost, degraded and despairing. Don't think I blame you, William Gouldesbrough, because I don't. When I was at Eton, I was always a pleasure-loving little scug. I was the same at Oxford. I have been the same in all my life in town. I have never been any good to myself, and I have disappointed all the hopes my people had for me. It's all been my own fault. Then I became entangled with you, and I was too weak to resist the money you were prepared to pay me for the things I have done for you.

"But it's all over now. I have gone too far. I have helped you, and am equally guilty with you, to commit a frightful crime. Lax as I have always been, I can no longer feel I have any proper place among men of my own sort. All I can say is that I am glad I shall die without anybody knowing what I really am.

"I write this note after dinner, and, finding the number of your room from the hotel clerk, I leave it here for you to see. I am going to make an end of it all in an hour or two, when I have written a few notes to acquaintances and so on. I can't go on living, Gouldesbrough, because night and day, day and night, I am haunted by the thought of that poor young man you have got in your foul house in Regent's Park. What you are doing to him I don't know. The end of your revenge I can only guess at. But it is all so horrible that I am glad to be done with life. I wish you good-bye; and I wish to God—if there is really a God—that I had never crossed your path and never been your miserable tool.

"EUSTACE CHARLIEWOOD."

As Sir William Gouldesbrough read this letter, his whole tall figure became rigid. He seemed to stiffen as a corpse stiffens.

Then, quite suddenly, he turned round and pushed the letter into the depths of the glowing fire, pressing the paper down with the poker until every vestige of it was consumed.

He strode to the door of the room, opened it, came out into the wide carpeted corridor and hurried up to the lift.

He pressed the button and heard it ring far down below.

In a minute or two there came the clash of the shutting doors, the "chunk" of the hydraulic mechanism, and he saw the shadow of the lift-roof rising up towards him.

The attendant opened the door.

"Will you take me up to the fourth floor, please," he said, "to Mr. Eustace Charliewood's room?"

"Mr. Charliewood, sir?" the man replied. "Oh, yes, I remember, number 408. Tall, clean-shaved gentleman."

"That's him," Sir William said. "I have only just learnt that he has been staying in the hotel. He is an old friend, and I had no idea he was here."

The iron doors clashed, the lift shot upward, and the attendant and Sir William arrived at the fourth floor.

"Down the corridor, sir, and the first turning on the right," the lift-man said. "But perhaps I'd better show you."

He ran the ironwork gates over their rollers and hurried down the corridor with Sir William. They turned the corner, and the man pointed to a door some fifteen yards away.

"That's it, sir," he said. "That's Mr. Charliewood's room."

Even as he spoke there was a sudden loud explosion which seemed to come from the room to which he had pointed—a horrid crash in the warm, richly-lit silence of the hotel.

The man turned to Sir William with a white face.

"Come on," he said, forgetting his politeness. "Something has happened. Come, quick!"

When they burst into the room they found the man about town lying upon the hearth-rug with a little blue circle edged with crimson in the centre of his forehead. The hands were still moving feebly, but what had been Eustace Charliewood was no longer there.

CHAPTER XI

BEEF TEA AND A PHOSPHATE SOLUTION

Sir William Goulesbrough remained in Brighton for three days. Eustace Charliewood had died in two minutes after the lift-man and the scientist had burst into the room. The suicide had said no word, and indeed was absolutely unconscious from the moment the shot had been fired, until his almost immediate death.

Sir William had made all the necessary arrangements. He had communicated with old Sir Miles Charliewood, of Norfolk, he had expedited the arrangements for the inquest, and he was, as the newspapers said, "overcome with grief at the death of his old and valued friend."

During the three days, the demeanour of the famous scientist was reported on with great admiration in all quarters. He had known of nothing to cause Mr. Eustace Charliewood any trouble or worry, and he was struck down by the loss he had sustained.

"It shows," many of the leading people in Brighton said to each other, "that science is, after all, not the de-humanizing agency it is popularly said to be. Here is perhaps the most famous scientific man of the age, grieving like a brother for his friend, a mere society man of charming manners and without any intellectual attainments. Melancholy as the occasion is, it has served to bring out some fine and noble traits in a man whose private life has always been something of a mystery to the public."

The inquest was a short one. There were few witnesses. One or two intimate friends of the dead man came down from London—club friends these—and testified that they knew of nothing which could have prompted the suicide, though the dead man had been noticed to be somewhat depressed for the last fortnight or so.

Sir William himself, in a short but learned exposition given during the course of his evidence, pronounced it as his opinion that Eustace Charliewood had been suddenly seized by one of those unexplainable impulses of mania which, like a scarlet thread, sometimes lurk unsuspected for years in the pearly cells of the brain.

His view was accepted by the coroner and the jury, and the usual verdict of temporary insanity was returned.

"He was," Sir William had said at the close of the evidence and in a voice broken with deep feeling, "the best and truest friend I have ever had. Our walks in life were utterly different. He took no interest in, nor did he understand, my scientific work. And I, on the other hand, took very little part in the social duties and amusements which made up the greater part of Mr. Eustace Charliewood's life. Perhaps for that very reason we were the more closely drawn together. No one will ever know, perhaps, the real underlying goodness, generosity and faithfulness in my dead friend's character. I cannot go into details of his private life, I can only say that the mysterious seizure which has robbed society of one of its ornaments, has taken from the world a gentleman in every thought and deed, a type of man we can ill afford to lose in the England of today."

Young Lord Landsend, who, with Mr. Percy Alemare, had attended the inquest from London, looked at his friend with a somewhat cynical smile, as the deep voice of Sir William Goulesbrough faltered in its peroration. Mr. Percy Alemare replied to the smile with a momentary wink. Both of the young men were very sorry that Eustace Charliewood had dropped out so suddenly. They had liked him well enough, but they certainly had not discerned the innate nobility of character, so feelingly set forth by Sir William Goulesbrough, and so fully reported by the newspaper-men present.

Afterwards, in the hotel, old Sir Miles Charliewood had shaken the scientist warmly by the hand.

"What I have heard you say, Sir," he said, "comforted me very much. I wish poor Eustace's eldest brother had been here to hear you say it. But James is in India with his regiment. Eustace did not come to us at Charliewood Hall. There were family reasons of long standing, why there was a breach between his family and himself. These, Sir William, I will not enter into here. But death heals all breaches, and remembering Eustace as a bright and happy boy at Eton, before we became estranged, I feel a father's natural sorrow. But let me say, Sir William, once more, that you have lightened that sorrow somewhat. I had regarded my son as living a useless and selfish life upon the allowance I was in the habit of paying into his bank. To hear that there was an underlying strata of goodness and nobleness in his character is indeed a solace."

Sir William had bowed, and old Sir Miles, a courtly old gentleman of great age, whose grief had not prevented him from making an excellent dinner the evening before, and from passing somewhat acrid criticisms upon the hotel wine, drove away to the station, smoking a cigar, and feeling that the troublesome and unpleasant episode was well over.

Thus, Mr. Eustace Charliewood, man about town, made his sudden exit from Vanity Fair.

Thus, Sir William Goulesbrough, F.R.S., had another secret to lock up in the sombre recesses of his brain.

During the three days that he had been forced to remain in Brighton by the tragedy, Sir William had seen something of the two ladies at the Palace Hotel.

Both Lady Poole and Marjorie during that time had come insensibly to lean upon him, and to ask his advice about this or that. A terrible gap had been created in Marjorie's life, and though Goulesbrough could not fill it, he came at the right moment to comfort and sustain.

Before he returned to London, Sir William had gradually glided into a new relation with the girl to whom he had been engaged. He found his power over her had increased. She was more dependent and subservient in her great trouble than she had ever been during the time when she was promised to be his wife, and he must sue for favours.

And Goulesbrough noticed also that, though the girl's grief seemed in no way lessened her hopes of ever seeing Guy Rathbone again seemed to be dwindling. The cunning words that he had spoken, the little hint of a vulgar Circe was perhaps beginning to germinate within Marjorie's brain. She was too loyal to believe any such statement, but, nevertheless, it had an unconscious influence with her. At any rate, she began to cease discussion of the mystery, and there was the hinting of a coming resignation to the hard and impenetrable fact.

This at least was what Sir William Goulesbrough deduced.

Trained watcher of the mind and human impulse as he was, psychologist of marvellous knowledge and penetration, he began to see, or so he thought to himself, that all was not yet lost, that it might well be that the events of the last few weeks would some day—not yet or soon, but some day—place him upon a higher pedestal than ever before.

On the evening of the fourth day after his arrival, Sir William Goulesbrough returned to town. In the afternoon he had driven with Lord Landsend and Percy Alemare to the cemetery.

It had been a cold and blustering afternoon, and the plain hearse and the single carriage that followed it had trotted through the semi-deserted streets until the grave-side was reached. The shivering vicar of a neighbouring church, whose turn it was to take the cemetery duty for the week, had said the words of the burial-service, and in some half-an-hour all that was mortal of Mr. Eustace Charliewood had disappeared for ever and a day.

He would never stroll up Bond Street in his fur coat any more. Never again would he chat with the head-waiter upon the important question of a lunch. No longer would Mr. Proctor, the masseur, set the little rubber hammers to beat out the lines of dissipation upon that weak and handsome face. Mr. Eustace Charliewood had resigned his membership of the St. James's Street Clubs, and had passed out of Vanity Fair into the night.

After the funeral, Goulesbrough went to say good-bye to Lady Poole and Marjorie. His last words to them were these—

"I shall go on," he said, "doing all that I can in every possible way. And everything that I do I will let you know, and if I can discover the slightest clue to this terrible mystery, you shall hear it at once. But don't buoy yourself up with false hopes, that is all I ask. None of us can say what the future may have in store, but for my part I have not much hope. It may seem a cruel thing for me to say, Marjorie, but I think it is my duty to say it. Bear up and be brave, and remember that I am always close by to do anything I can in any and every way to help you and your mother."

And when he had gone, the two ladies, sitting in the twilight before the glowing fire in the open hearth of the hotel sitting-room, had felt that something, some one, who had become necessary to them, had departed.

Sir William Goulesbrough travelled up to Victoria in a Pullman car. He sat in his arm-chair before a little table, on which was a pile of evening papers. During the first ten minutes he had glanced through all of them, and only one part of the news' columns claimed his attention—this was the portion of the paper devoted to the "Rathbone Mystery."

He noticed that already the clamour and agitation was beginning to die down. The shrewd purveyors of news were beginning to realize that the mystery was not likely to be solved, and that the public appetite was satiated with it.

The two columns or more which had been usual in the early days of Rathbone's disappearance, had now dwindled to a single three-quarters of a column. Sir William realized that the public interest was already dying out.

For a few minutes, when he had methodically folded the papers in a pile, he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the recent incidents at Brighton.

Charliewood had killed himself. What did that mean? It simply meant that Eustace Charliewood was out of the way. The baronet had not a single regret in his mind. Despite the geniality of his manner to his late henchman, when circumstances had seemed to require that, he had regarded him as simply a servant and a tool, and as of considerably less importance in the scheme of things than, say, a delicate induction coil, or a new drum armature.

Then there was Marjorie. In his quick summarizing way, allowing no emotion to enter his brain at the moment, Sir William reviewed that aspect of his Brighton visit too. Well, that also was satisfactory. Things were going indeed far better than he had hoped. He had accomplished exactly what he had meant to do, rather more indeed, and he had done so with singular success. His position with Lady Poole and her daughter was perhaps stronger than it had ever been, even in the days when his position was, so to speak, an official one. Good again!

And with that, the cool, hard intellect dismissed personal affairs entirely, and with a sigh of relief the physical body of the man leant back in his chair, while the brain went swiftly and gladly into the high realms of science.

At Victoria, Sir William's motor brougham was waiting, and he was driven swiftly through the lighted streets of London towards his own house in Regent's Park. He smoked a cigar and bent forward, looking at the moving panorama of people under the gas-lamps, as a man sits in an arm-chair and lets the world defile before him. And as he watched the countless throngs, streams that moved and pulsed in the arteries of the great city as the blood moves and pulses in the veins and arteries of man, he was filled with a tremendous exultation and pride.

Soon, ah, soon! he would be master of every single mind and soul that, housed in its envelope of flesh, flitted so rapidly past the windows of the swift-moving machine in which he sat.

No secrets, great or small, noble or petty, worthy or evil, would be hidden from him, and he, alone, by the power of his intellect and the abnormal force of his will, had wrested from nature the most stupendous and mysterious of all her secrets.

There was but little more to be done now, before the great invention would be shown to the leading scientists of the world.

Already slight hints, thin rumours of what was being done in the laboratories of Regent's Park, were beginning to filter through the most important scientific circles. A paper read by Sir William at the British Association, a guarded article contributed to the *Nineteenth Century*, propounding some most daring theories as to the real action of the mind, had already prepared some of the shrewdest brains in Europe for a possible revelation of something stupendously startling in the realms of scientific achievement.

A few keen and brilliant brains had realized, if Sir William was right, even in these preliminary conclusions, whither the conclusions tended. Lesser scientists who could not see so far, knew nothing. The man in the street was only aware that the great scientist had been working for years upon abstruse problems which had no interest for him whatever.

But, nevertheless, in the highest circles, there was an indubitable stir and rumour.

Yes! But little now remained to be done before absolute perfection of the invention was obtained. A few more experiments, more delicate and decisive than any that had gone before, still remained to be made. The apparatus itself was completed. Its working under certain conditions was certain. It was still necessary, however, to test it by means of continuous experiments upon a living human brain.

During the last year of their work, Goulesbrough and Wilson Guest had begun to realize this last necessity with increasing conviction. They saw that the coping-stone of the marvellous edifice which they had slowly built up through the years, was now resolving itself into this, and this alone. Neither had said as much to each other in so many words, until some four months ago. Then, upon one memorable night, when, excited by drink to an unusual freedom and openness of speech, Guest had voiced the unspoken thought of his master and himself.

A human brain, a living human brain, in a living human body was an absolute and final requirement.

There were not wanting, there never have been wanting, scientific enthusiasts who will submit themselves to experiment. But in this case a voluntary subject was impossible, for reasons which will presently appear. It became a definite problem with the two men as to how, and by what means, they should obtain a living creature who should be absolutely subject to their will.

And then chance had provided Sir William with the unique opportunity. He had seen his way to rid himself of a hated rival, and to provide a subject for experiment at one and the same time. He had not hesitated. Brains so far removed from the ordinary sphere of humanity as his never hesitate at anything.

Guy Rathbone had disappeared.

The motor stopped at the door in the great, grim wall which surrounded Sir William's house. He said good-night to the chauffeur who looked after his two cars at a garage some half-a-mile away, and opened the wicket with his key.

As he walked through the dark garden and saw the great square block of the house looming up before him, it was with a quickening sense of anticipation and pleasure. All the worries of his life were momentarily over and done with, he was coming back to his great passion, to his life work, the service of science!

It was about ten o'clock, and as he opened the front door and came into the hall, everything was silent and still. He lifted up the padded stick which hung beside the dinner-gong and struck the metal, standing still while the deep booming note echoed mournfully through the house.

The butler did not answer the summons. Sir William realized that the man must be out; Wilson Guest had probably given the servants an evening's holiday for some purpose of his own.

He crossed the dimly-lit hall, pushed open the baize door which led to the study, and entered his own room.

The fire was burning brightly, the electric lights glowed, but the place was quite empty. On his writing-table were a pile of letters, on a round table set beside the fire was a cold chicken and a bottle of claret. Obviously his first surmise had been right, and the servants were out.

He left the study, proceeded onwards down the passage and unlocked another door, a door through which no one but himself and Guest were allowed to penetrate, a door that was always kept locked, and which led to the laboratories, mechanical rooms, and invention studios, which had been built out at the back of the house over what were once the tennis lawns, and occupied a considerable area.

Locking the door behind him, Sir William went on down a short passage. The first door on the right had the letter "A" painted on it in white.

He opened this door and looked in.

The room was empty, though it was brilliantly lit. It was a place filled with large tables, on which there were drawing instruments, sheets of figures and tracings.

Guest was not there.

Closing the door again and passing onward, Sir William entered the chemical laboratory, a long, low place, lit by a sky-light in day, and by electricity at night. As he opened the door quietly, he heard sounds of movement. And then immediately, at the far end of the laboratory, he saw the man he was looking for.

The place was in entire darkness save at one end, where two incandescent bulbs glowed above an experiment table.

The assistant was bending over a Bunsen burner above which a large glass tube was clamped, in which some liquid was boiling.

Suddenly he heard Sir William's advancing footsteps, and leapt up. For a single moment the grey-pink hairless face was suffused with furtive terror at the sound. It shone out in the light of the lamps clear and distinct, though the lower part of the body was hidden by the darkness.

"Here you are then," Gouldsbrough said. "The whole house seems deserted."

Guest sighed with relief, and then began to titter in his curious, almost feminine, way—

"By Jove!" he said, "you startled me, William. I had no idea when you'd be back. My nerves are like lumps of wet velvet. He! he!"

His hand shook as he came forward to greet his chief. Sir William knew well that this man was a consistent and secret drunkard, and he never made any comment on the fact. Guest was at liberty to do exactly as he pleased, to gratify his vices to the full—because Guest, drunk or sober, was a complete and brilliant helper, and because Sir William not only could not do without him, but knew that the man was his, body and mind, so long as he was allowed to indulge himself as he would. Yet, as the greater man shook hands with the lesser, he was conscious of a sudden thrill of repulsion at the filthy fears of the sensualist.

"Yes, I'm back," Gouldsbrough answered, "and everything has gone very well. I suppose you have seen that Eustace Charliewood killed himself?"

"Yes, I did," Guest answered, "and for a few hours I was considerably troubled about it. Then I saw by the paper that you were down there, so I knew it would be all right. He never said anything, of course, or left anything behind him?"

"Only a letter to me, which I destroyed."

"Good," Guest answered, and his interest in Eustace Charliewood and his end ceased immediately. "Well, I've lots to tell you. I've gone as far as I could on my own lines, but I've been longing for you to come back. My dear William, it's simply splendid! How right you have been always! How absolutely necessary it was to have a living brain to experiment on!"

"How is the man, in good health?"

"Well, of course there's been a considerable waste of tissue, and the absolute lack of exercise has had its effect. But the cell is well ventilated with an electric fan which I keep constantly going, and I allow the subject to read two or three hours every day—such books as he may ask for. The rest of the time I turn out the light, after I have fixed on the cap. I find that the thought images thrown upon the screen in room "D" are more vivid when the subject is kept in darkness. Still, speaking as a whole, the physical health is good, and it's singular how vivid the thought pictures are, which shows that the cerebrum is in a perfectly strong and healthy condition. As you know, it is from that part of the brain we get all our voluntary and actual pictures; therefore, we are to be congratulated that there is no weakness in that regard so far. Still, when you came in, I was just preparing a phosphate solution which I'm going to mix with the subject's soup, which he will take in an hour or so. Three or four days' phosphate treatment will intensify the vibrations within the magnetic field of the cap. I was doing this in view of your return, when we shall really begin to experiment seriously."

"Have you had any trouble, physical trouble I mean, with the subject?" Gouldsbrough asked.

"Oh, no," Guest replied indifferently. "Of course he's as strong as a horse, but the aluminium fetters and the system of india-rubber cord that you suggested, have proved all that was necessary. I can render him quite helpless directly I get inside the cell and before he could possibly reach me. Then fitting the cap is a simple matter. The head is rigid in the vulcanite

depression which encloses the neck, and there is no resistance at all."

"Good," Gouldsbrough answered. "Curiously enough, I found that design in a strange old book published at the time of the Reformation, detailing some of the methods of the Holy Office in Spain, with appropriate wood cuts."

Guest chuckled horribly.

"Of course as yet," Gouldsbrough went on in calm, even tones, "the subject has not the slightest idea what the experiments mean? He doesn't know why you fit on the receiver? He is quite in the dark?"

"Entirely," Guest answered, "and he is at a loss to imagine what we are doing to him."

"Ah, well," Gouldsbrough replied, "when we do tell him——"

"It will be lovely," the assistant replied, tittering once more, "to watch the pictures that come on the screen when he knows that we are reading his inmost thoughts when he tries to control them, to alter them, and fails in his agony! When he realizes that he doesn't belong to himself any more!"

The creature rubbed its plump and delicate hands together in an ecstasy of evil enjoyment.

"I suppose," Gouldsbrough said with some slight hesitation, "you've gathered a good deal of the fellow's opinions, memories, etc., lately?"

"Never had such an amusing time in all my life," Guest answered. "I've gone down and put on the cap and tied him up, and I've come up and sat alone in front of the screen in Room "D," turned on the generating current and sat in an arm-chair with a bottle of whisky at my side, and laughed till I cried! You'll learn a few home truths about yourself, William, before very long. The curious thing is, that whenever your picture comes upon the screen, it's all distorted. You are a fairly passable-looking man, as men go, William, but you should see yourself as this man sees you in his brain."

He laughed once more, malicious and horrible laughter which echoed high up in the sky-light of this weird and empty place.

Gouldsbrough made an impatient movement.

"How do you mean?" he said.

"Well," Guest answered, intensely enjoying the situation, "I've seen a good many pictures of nasty ugly looking devils and monsters, and I've been in the Weirtz Museum at Brussels, but no artist who ever painted or drew, and no man who ever modelled in wax, ever made such a face as this man's brain makes of you, when he thinks of you!"

Gouldsbrough laughed grimly.

"Poor devil," he said indifferently, "he naturally would. But I'm glad we have got such an excellent brain for experiment. The Pons Varolii must be exceptionally active."

"I should think it was," Guest answered. "You should see the pictures that come on the screen when he is thinking of Marjorie Poole!"

Gouldsbrough started.

"How do you mean?" he said.

"Well," Guest replied, turning off the blue flame of the Bunsen burner, and stirring the mixture in the test-tube with a glass rod—"well, Marjorie Poole's a pretty girl, but when this man calls her up in his memory, she's a sort of angel. You know what a difficulty we had when we got over the Lithium lines in the ash of the muscular tissue of the blood, which had to be translated through the new spectroscope into actual colour upon the screen? Well, we did get over it, but when the subject thinks of Marjorie Poole, the colour all fades out of the picture, the actual primary colours, I mean. The girl flashes out into the dark in white light, like a sort of angel! and the first time I saw it I jumped up from my chair, shut off the connecting switch and turned up the lamps. It was so unlike any of the other pictures we have ever got, and for a moment I thought I had been over-doing it a little in the whisky line."

Gouldsbrough stopped the strange inhuman creature in his unholy amusement.

"Well, I'm going to bed now," he said. "We'll begin work to-morrow. I saw some supper put out for me in the study."

"Right oh," Guest answered. "Good-night then, William. I'm going to take the beef broth and phosphates to our Brain down below in the cell."

CHAPTER XII

THE TOMB-BOUND MAN

Mr. Guest had visited his victim and had gone.

Supper was over. Beef-tea and phosphorous! and Mr. Guest had said his mocking words of good-night.

"Sleep well, Mr. Rathbone! I shall not be compelled to ask you to wear that pretty metal cap until to-morrow, so I won't turn out the light. You have a book to read, you've had your supper, and I wish you a pleasant time alone. No doubt you will occupy your leisure in thinking of Miss Marjorie Poole. You'll recall that occasion in a certain room hung with pink, when you kissed her by the side of the piano in the white and gold case! I know you often recall that happy incident."

He had closed the heavy steel door with a last chuckle of malice and power, leaving the prisoner white and shaking with fear. How did this sinister and devilish gaoler know his intimate thoughts?

He groaned deeply, and then, as he had done a thousand times before, gazed round the place in which he was in terror-struck amazement. Where was he? *What* was this horrible prison with all its strange contrivances, its inexplicable mysteries?

He was in a large stone cell, brilliantly lit at this moment by two incandescent electric bulbs in the vaulted ceiling far above his head. A long time ago now, how long he could not have said, he was Gerald Rathbone, a man living in the world, seeing the sunlight and breathing the air of day. He had been Gerald Rathbone, moving honourably among his fellow men, seeing human faces, hearing the music of human voices, an accepted lover, and a happy man.

That was long ago, a dream, a vision which was fading away. It seemed years since he had heard any voice but that of the pink, hairless man who fed him and whose slave he had become.

Once more the prisoned thing that had been Gerald Rathbone gazed round the cell, striving with terrible intensity of thought to understand it and penetrate its mysteries. Here he had been put and here he had remained ever since that sickening moment when he had been talking to Sir William Goulesbrough. He had been standing in front of the baronet, when his arms had been gripped from behind and unseen fingers held a damp cloth, with a faint sickly and aromatic smell, over his face. A noise like the rushing of great waters sounded in his ears, there was a sense of falling into a gulf of enveloping blackness.

He had awakened in the place which he was now surveying again, with frightful and fascinated curiosity.

In the brilliant light of the electric bulbs every object in the cell was clearly seen. The place was not small. It was oblong in shape, some sixteen feet by twelve. The walls were built of heavy slabs of Portland stone cemented together with extreme nicety and care. The door of the cell was obviously new. It was a heavy steel door with a complicated system of locks—very much like the door of a safe. The whole place, indeed, suggested that it had been used as a strong-room at some time or other. There was no window of any kind in the cell. In the centre of the arched roof there was a barred ventilator, and close by an electric fan whirled and whispered unceasingly. The sound made by the purring thing as it revolved two thousand times a minute was almost the only sound Gerald Rathbone heard now.

The floor of the cell was covered with cork carpet of an ordinary pattern. The victim cast his glance on all this without interest. Then, as if he did so unwillingly, but by the force of an attraction he could not resist, he stared, with lively doubt and horror rippling over his face, at something which stood against the opposite wall. He saw a long narrow couch of some black wood, slanting upwards towards the head. The couch stood upon four thick pedestals of red rubber, which in their turn rested upon four squares of thick porcelain. The whole thing had the appearance of a shallow box upon trestles, and at the head was a curious pillow of india-rubber. At the side of this thick pad was a collar-shaped circlet of vulcanite clamped between two arms of aluminium, which moved in any direction upon ball-pivots.

He stared at this mysterious couch, trying to understand it, to realize it.

He rose from the narrow bed on which he sat, and advanced to the centre of the cell—to the centre, but no further than that.

Around his waist a circlet of light steel was welded, and from it thin steel chains ran through light handcuffs upon his wrists, and were joined to steel bands which were locked upon his ankles. And all these chains, hardly thicker than stout watch-chains, but terribly strong, were caught up to a pulley that hung far above his head and, in its turn, gave its central chain to another pulley and swivel fixed in the roof.

In the half of his cell where his little bed was fixed, the prisoner had fair liberty of movement, despite his shackles. He could sit or lie, use his hands with some freedom. But whenever he attempted to cross the invisible line which divided one part of the cell from the other, the chains tightened and forbade him.

He stood now, straining to the limit of his bonds, gazing at the long couch of black wood, with its rubber feet, its clamps and collar at the head.

Above the mysterious couch, upon a triangular shelf by the door, was something that gleamed and shone brightly. It was a cap of metal, shaped like a huge acorn cup, or a bishop's mitre. From an ivory stud in the centre of the peak, coils of silk-covered wire ran to a china plug in the wall.

Rathbone stood upright for several minutes gazing at these things. Then with a long, hopeless sigh, to the accompanying jingle of his fetters, he turned and sat down once more upon his bed.

As prisoners do, he had contracted the habit of talking aloud to himself. It was a poor comfort—this mournful echo of one's own voice!—but it seemed to make the profound solitude more bearable for a moment. He began a miserable monologue now.

"I *must* understand it!" he said. "That is the first step of all, if I am to keep my brain, if there is ever to be the slightest chance of escape, I must understand this terrible and secret business.

"What are these fiends doing to me?"

"Let me go through the whole thing slowly and in order."

He began to reconstruct the scenes of his frequent torture, with the logic and precision with which he would have worked out a proposition of Euclid. It was the only way in which he could keep a grip upon a failing mind; a logical process of thought alone could solve this horrid mystery.

What happened every day, sometimes two or three times a day? Just this. He would be lying on his bed, reading, perhaps, if the electric lights were turned on. There would be a sudden creak and rattle of the big pulleys high up in the roof, a rattle which came without any warning whatever.

Then the central chain, to which all the other thinner chains were fastened, would begin to tighten and move. Slowly, inch by inch, as if some one were turning a winch-handle outside the cell, the chain wound up into the roof. As it did so, the smaller chains, which were fixed to the steel bands upon his limbs, tightened also.

Struggle as he might, the arrangements and balance of the weights were so perfect that in less than a minute he would be swinging clear of the bed, as helpless as a bale of goods at the end of a crane.

Then the upward movement of the chain would stop, the door open with a clicking of its massive wards, and Guest would come in.

In a moment more Gerald always found himself swung on to the long black couch. His neck was encircled by the collar of thick vulcanite, his head was bent upwards by means of an india-rubber pillow beneath it, his hands and feet were strapped to the framework of the couch.

And finally Guest would take the metal cap and fix it firmly upon his head, pressed down to the very eyes so that he could in no way shake it off. The man would leave the cell, sometimes with a chuckle or a malicious sentence that seemed full of hidden meaning, sometimes in silence.

And then the electric light invariably went out.

Rathbone never knew how long he was forced to remain thus in the dark, the subject of some horrible experiment, at the nature of which he could only guess. The period seemed to vary, but there was no possible test of time. Long ago time had ceased to exist for him.

Release would come at last, release, food and light—and so the dreadful silent days went on.

"What are these devils doing to me?"

The hollow voice of reverie and self-communing cut into the silence like a knife.

"It must be that I am being made the victim of an awful revenge and hatred. Charliewood was the decoy and tool of Gouldesbrough; it was all planned from the first. Marjorie was never really relinquished by Gouldesbrough. He meant all along to get me out of the way, to get Marjorie back if he could. All this is clear enough. I thought I was dealing with an honourable gentleman, and a great man, too great to stoop even to anything petty or mean. I have been dealing with desperate and secret criminals, people who live hideous double lives, who walk the world and sit in high places and do unnameable evil in the dark. Yes! That is clear enough. Even now, perhaps, my darling is once more in the power of this monster Gouldesbrough!"

The thin voice failed and died away into a tortured whimper. The tall form shook with agony and the rattle of the steel chains mingled with the "purr," "purr" of the electric fan in the roof.

By a tremendous effort of will Rathbone clutched at his thoughts again. He wrenched his mind back from the memory of his dreadful plight to the solving of the mystery.

Till he had some glimmering of the *meaning* of what was being done to him, he was entirely hopeless and helpless.

He began to murmur to himself again.

"In the first place Gouldesbrough has got me out of the way successfully. I have disappeared from the world of men, the field is clear for him. But he has not killed me. For some reason or other, dangerous though it must be for him, he is keeping me alive. It surely would have been safer for

him to have murdered me in this secret place, and buried me beneath the stone flags here? I am forced to conclude that he is keeping me for an even worse revenge than that of immediate extinction. It is torture enough to imprison me like this, of course. But, if the man is what I feel he is—not man, but devil—would he not have tortured me in another way before now? There are dreadful pains that fiends can make the body suffer. One has read of unbearable agonies in old books, in the classics. Yet nothing of the sort has been done to me yet, and I have been long in this prison. My food has been plentiful and of good quality, even definitely stimulating I have thought at times.

"It is obvious then that I am not to be subjected to any of the horrors one has read of. What *is* being done to me? when, each day, I am fixed rigidly upon that couch, and the brass helmet is put upon my head, what is going on? I cannot feel any sensation out of the ordinary when I am tied down there. I am no weaker in body, my faculties are just as unimpaired when I am released as they were before. At least it seems so to me. I can discover no change in me either, mental or physical.

"Something is being done by means of electricity. The coils of wire that lead from the helmet to the plug in the wall show that. The way in which the couch is insulated, the vulcanite collar, the rubber pillow, all lead to the same conclusion. At first I thought that a torturing current of electricity was to be directed into the brain. That my faculties, my very soul itself, were to be dissolved and destroyed by some subtle means. But it is not so. There is no current coming to me through the wire. Nowhere does my head touch metal, the cap is lined throughout with rubber. But yesterday, as my gaoler held up the helmet to examine it before putting it on my head, I had an opportunity of seeing the whole interior for the first time.

"There was very little to see! At the top was a circular orifice which seemed to be closed by a thin disc of some shining material. That was all. It looked just like the part of a telephone into which one speaks. My brain, my body, are not being acted upon. Nothing is being slowly instilled into my being. *Can it be that anything is being taken away?*"

He bent his head upon his hands and groaned in agony. All was dark and impenetrable, there was no solution, no help. He was in the grip of merciless men, in the clutch of the unknown.

The electric light in the cell went out suddenly.

CHAPTER XIII

LORD MALVIN

If Sir William Goulesbrough represented all that was most brilliant, modern, and daring in the scientific world of Europe, Lord Malvin stood as its official figure-head. He was the "grand old man" of science, and was regarded by every one as a final court of appeal in all such matters.

He was of a great age, almost eighty, in fact, yet his health was perfect, his intellect unimpaired, and his interest in human events as keen and vigorous as that of a man but half his age and in the full prime and meridian of life.

In science, he represented what the President of the Royal Academy represents in art, or the Lord Chief Justice in the law, and although he had almost ceased independent investigations, he was always appealed to and consulted when anything new and revolutionary in science was discovered or promulgated by any of the younger men.

The younger men themselves, while allowing their chief's vast knowledge and experience, his real and undeniable eminence, were apt to call him conservative, and to hint that he was of an alien generation. They would say that his judgment was sometimes obscured by his veneration and love for the past, and because he found himself unable to leap so rapidly to conclusions as they did, they put him down as an old fogey who had done valuable and remarkable work in his time, but who ought to be content with his peerage and immense fortune and retire to the planting of cabbages or the growing of roses in the country.

In the public eye, nevertheless, Lord Malvin remained as familiar and necessary a part of the English landscape as St. Paul's; and, whenever a great man died and the newspapers enumerated the few remaining veterans of the Commonwealth, Lord Malvin was usually the first to be mentioned.

For many years there had been an antagonism between Lord Malvin and Sir William Goulesbrough. It was not personal so much as scientific, an abstract and intellectual antagonism. When Sir William's star first began to rise above the horizon—he was only Mr. Goulesbrough then—Lord Malvin had recognized his talent as an inventor, but deprecated many of his theories. These ideas, these possibilities for the future which Goulesbrough was fond of giving to the world in lectures and reviews, seemed horribly dangerous, subversive, and fantastic to the older man.

He said so in no uncertain voice, and for some years, though he was always kind and civil to Goulesbrough, he certainly did much to discount the rising star's power of illumination.

But as time went on, each daring theory put forth by Gouldesbrough passed into the realm of actual fact. Lord Malvin saw that Sir William had been almost invariably right. He saw that the new man not only told the world that some day this or that marvel would come to pass, but immediately afterwards set to work and himself made it come to pass!

Lord Malvin was a noble man as well as a nobleman—sometimes a rare combination to-day—and he confessed himself in the wrong. Directly he saw that he had been mistaken, and that Sir William was no charlatan, but one of the most daring and brilliant scientists the world had ever known, the peer gave the newer man all the weight of his support. Nevertheless, while forced by circumstance and Gouldesbrough's justification of his own ideas into a scientific brotherhood, Lord Malvin, who constantly met the other, found a new problem confronting him.

While he had not believed in Gouldesbrough's theories, Lord Malvin had rather liked him personally.

Now that he was compelled to believe in Gouldesbrough's theories, Lord Malvin found that he experienced a growing dislike for the man himself. And as he was a fair and honourable man, Lord Malvin did everything he possibly could to rid himself of this prejudice, with the result that while his efforts to do so were quite unavailing, he redoubled his kindness and attentions to the man he disliked.

All the scientific world knew that Sir William was perfecting some marvellous discovery. In Berlin, Paris, Petersburg, Vienna, and Buda Pesth, learned savants were writing to their *confrères* in London to know what this might be. The excitement was intense, the rumours were endless, and it is not too much to say that the whole scientific intellect of the globe was roused and waiting.

Now when a number of leading brains are agitated upon one subject, something of that agitation begins to stir and move in the outside world.

Already some hints had got about, and the press of Europe and America was scenting some extraordinary news.

The whole business had at length culminated in the giving of a great reception by Lord Malvin.

Everybody who mattered was asked, not only in the scientific but also in the general world.

And everybody knew, that not only was the reception given in Sir William Gouldesbrough's honour, but that he would say something more or less definite about what he had in hand.

In short, a pronouncement was to be made, and the ears of every one were tingling to hear it.

Among the idle and frivolous section of society the promised revelation had become the topic of the hour. Everything else was quite forgotten. Gerald Rathbone's disappearance was already a thing of the past. Eustace Charliewood's suicide had not lasted for the proverbial nine days as a subject of talk. But here was something *quite* new! Something all the more attractive because of its mystery.

Some people said that Sir William had invented a way in which any one might become invisible for a few pence.

This suggested delightful possibilities to every one, save only the newly rich, whose whole endeavour was to be seen.

On the other hand there was a considerable section of people who asserted that Sir William had succeeded in supplying the lesion in the brain of the ape, and that now that intelligent animal would be able to talk, own property, and become recognized as a British citizen. Every one began to read the *Jungle Book* again, and a serious proposal was made in an Imperialistic Journal that England might thus colonize and secure the unexplored forests of Central Africa, by means of drilling and civilizing the monkeys of the interior.

A Gorilla-General was to be appointed, who should know the English language, but no other, and it was thought that by this means the British dominions and population would be enormously increased. The "Smart Set" especially welcomed this recruitment of their numbers.

In city circles both these conjectures were scouted.

The well-informed insisted that Sir William had discovered a method of solidifying alcohol, so that in future one would buy one's whiskey in chunks, and one's champagne in sticks like barley sugar.

Lord Malvin lived in Portland Place, in one of those great stone houses which, however sombre without, are generally most pleasant and attractive within. He was unmarried, and his niece Dorothea Backhouse acted as hostess and generally controlled his domestic affairs.

The stately rooms were crowded with well-known people of all sorts and conditions. Yet this assembly differed from others in a marked manner. All the society people who lived solely for amusement had been invited, and were there. But mingled with the butterflies, one saw the ants and bees. By the carefully groomed, and not ill-looking face of a young and fashionable man about town, could be seen the domed forehead, and the face gashed and scored with thought, of some great savant or deep thinker.

It was indeed an unusual assemblage that passed through the large and brilliant rooms, laughing and talking. In the blue drawing-room, Kubelik had just arrived and was beginning to play. Every one rushed in to hear the young maestro. Melba was to sing a song, perhaps two, later on in the evening, and the ball-room was filled with supper-tables.

In so much Lord Malvin's party did not differ in any way from that of any other famous and wealthy London host. There was the same light and sparkle of jewels. The warm air was laden with perfume, the same beautiful and tired faces moved gracefully among all this luxury. But the men and women who worked and thought for the world were in this Portland Place palace also. They talked together in eager and animated groups, they paid little or no attention to this or that delight which had been provided for them. All these things were phantoms and unreal to these people. The real things were taking place within the brain as they conversed together. The army of intellect was massing within the citadel of thought, to wrest new territory from the old queen nature, mistress of the kingdom of the unknown.

Lord Malvin and his niece had received their guests at the head of the grand staircase. Now, when almost every one had arrived, the great scientist had withdrawn to an inner room at the end of a long series of apartments, and stood there talking with a small knot of friends.

This inner drawing-room was the culminating part of the suite, the throne room as it were; and the people standing there could look down a long and crowded vista of light and movement, while the yearning and sobbing of Kubelik's violin came to their ears in gusts and throbs of delicious sound.

Lord Malvin, a tall, upright old man with a long white beard, a high white brow beneath his velvet skull-cap, and wearing a row of orders, was talking to Sir Harold Oliver. Sir Harold was the principal of a great Northern University, a slim, hard-faced man of middle age, and the pioneer in the movement which was allowing a place to both philosophy and psychology in modern science.

A third person stood there also, a youngish man of middle height, Mr. Donald Megbie, the well-known journalist and writer on social and religious matters. Donald Megbie held rather a curious position in the literary world. He was the friend of many great people, and more often than not his pen was the vehicle chosen by them to first introduce their ideas and discoveries to the general public. When it was time to let the man in the street know of some stupendous discovery, Megbie was called in, and his articles, always brilliant and interesting, explained the matter in popular terms for the non-technical mind.

"So Goulesbrough has not yet come?" Sir Harold Oliver said.

"Not yet," Lord Malvin answered. "I have had a telegram from him, however, to say that he is compelled to be rather later than he had expected. I have told the butler to wait in the hall for him, and to bring him straight through here directly he arrives."

"A remarkable man," said Mr. Megbie, in that low and pleasant voice which had become so familiar in high places—even in the private rooms of cabinet ministers it was said—during the last few years.

"A man none of us can afford to ignore," Sir Harold answered with a slight sigh of impatience.

Megbie smiled.

"My dear Donald," Sir Harold went on, "please don't smile in that superior sort of manner. I know what you are thinking. You're thinking 'how these scientists love one another.' You are accusing me of envy, jealousy and uncharitableness. I'm not jealous of Goulesbrough, great as his attainments are, and I'm sure I don't envy him."

"Any one might be forgiven a little envy on such an occasion as this," Megbie answered. "I confess that if I thought every one of importance in London were met together in Lord Malvin's house to welcome *me*, to hear what *I* was going to do next, I should be rather more than pleased."

Lord Malvin smiled kindly, but the noble old face grew sad for a moment.

"Ah!" he said, "you are young, Mr. Megbie. I thought as you think when I was your age. But one finds out the utter worthlessness of fame and applause and so on, as one grows older. The work itself is the thing! Yes! There, and therein only, lies the reward. All else is vain and hollow. I am a very old man, and I am near my end. I suppose I may say that such honours as can be given have fallen to my share. Yet I can honestly say that I would give them all up, I would efface myself utterly if I thought that I was on the brink of the discovery which I believe William Goulesbrough has made and will tell us something of to-night!"

The other two started. A deep note of seriousness had come into the voice of the venerable old man. It portended something, something vast and far-reaching, and they all stood silent for a moment occupied with their own thoughts.

The distant music of piano and violin rose higher and higher in keen vibrating melody. There was a note of triumph in it which seemed to accentuate the gravity and importance of Lord Malvin's words. The triumphant notes of the man who was coming were singing and ringing through the halls and chambers of this great house!

The music ceased suddenly, and there was a great clapping of hands.

At that moment the three men waiting in the inner room saw a tall, black figure moving towards them, the figure of a man on whom people were beginning to press and converge, a figure that smiled, bowed, stopped continually to shake hands and receive greetings, and made a slow progress towards them.

Sir William Gouldsbrough, the man of the future, radiant, honoured and successful, was arriving to greet Lord Malvin, the man of the past.

CHAPTER XIV

DONALD MEGBIE SEES POSSIBILITIES

So Sir William Gouldsbrough passed through the crowds of friends and acquaintances who crowded round him in a welter of curiosity and congratulation, and came into the inner room, where Lord Malvin, Sir Harold Oliver and Mr. Donald Megbie were waiting to receive him.

Tall, suave, and self-contained, he bowed and shook hands. Then there was a moment's pause—they were waiting for him to speak, expectant of what he should say.

"I am sorry, Lord Malvin," he began, "that I have arrived so late at your party. But I was conducting an experiment, and when I was half-way through I found that it was going to lead me much further than I thought. You know how that happens sometimes?"

"Perfectly, Sir William, and the fact is a scientist's greatest pleasure very often. Now, may I ask you—you will excuse an old man's impatience—may I ask you if you have finally succeeded? When I last saw you the composition of the spectrum presented a difficulty."

"That I have now completely overcome, Lord Malvin."

Lord Malvin trembled, actually trembled with excitement. "Then the series of experiments is complete?"

"Quite. And more than that, I have done, not once or twice but many times, exactly what I told you I hoped to do. The thing, my lord, is an accomplished fact, indisputable—*certain!*"

Lord Malvin turned to Sir Harold Oliver and Megbie.

"Gentlemen," he said in a clear voice but full of a profound emotion. "The history of life is changed. We all must stand in a new relation to each other, to society and to the world."

Donald Megbie knew that here was a chance of his literary lifetime. Lord Malvin would never have spoken in this way without due consideration and absolute conviction. Something very big indeed was in the air. But what was it? The journalist had not an idea as yet.

He looked eagerly at the aquiline, ascetic face of the inventor, marked the slight smile of triumph that lingered round the lips, and noted how the eyes shone, brilliantly, steadily, as if they were lighted up from behind. Megbie had seen many men in many countries.

And as he looked keenly at Sir William Gouldsbrough two thoughts came into his mind. One was something like this—"You are certainly one of the most intellectual and remarkable men now living. You are unique, and you stand upon a pedestal of fame that only one man in several generations ever reaches. All the same, I shouldn't like to be in your power or to stand in your way!" And moreover the question came to the quick analytic brain of the writer whether the brilliance of those lamp-like eyes was wholly natural, was wholly sane.

These twin thoughts were born and over in a flash, and even as he thought of them Megbie began to speak.

"Now that Lord Malvin has told us so much, Sir William," he said, "won't you tell us some more? I suppose you know that all the world is waiting for a pronouncement?"

"The world will know very soon, Mr. Megbie," Gouldsbrough answered pleasantly. "In about a fortnight's time I am sending out some invitations to some of our leading people to witness the result of my experiments in my laboratories. I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you there also. But if you wish it, I will certainly give you a slight idea of the work. Since the public seem interested in what I am doing, and something seems to have leaked out, I am quite willing that they should know more. And of course there is no one to whom I would rather say anything than yourself."

Megbie bowed. He was tremendously excited. Brother writers who did not make a tenth of his income and had not a quarter of his eminence were wont to say that his ears twitched when in the presence of a great celebrity. This no doubt was calumny, but the journalist stood in an attitude of strained attention—as well a man might stand when the secret of the hour was about to be revealed to him in preference to all other men.

Gouldsbrough bowed to Lord Malvin.

"I'm going to have half-an-hour's conversation with Mr. Megbie," he said. "Meanwhile, my lord, I wonder if you would give Sir Harold Oliver a slight technical outline of my processes? And of course, as I understand this is to be in some sense a night on which your friends are to be given some general information, I shall place myself entirely in your hands as to any revelations you may think proper to make."

He moved off with the journalist, leaving the two other men already fallen into deep talk.

"Where shall we go, Mr. Megbie?" he said, as they came out into a large room hung with old Flemish tapestry and full of people.

"There is a little conservatory down a corridor here," Megbie answered. "I expect we should be quite undisturbed there. Moreover, we could smoke, and I know that you are like me, Sir William, a cigarette-smoker."

"That will do very well, then," Gouldesbrough answered, and they walked away together. Every one saw them go. Ladies nodded and whispered, gentlemen whispered and nodded to each other. The occasion was perfectly well understood. Sir William was telling Donald Megbie! By supper time it would be all over the rooms and the *Eastminster Gazette* to-morrow afternoon would have all the details.

"Megbie is always chosen in affairs of this sort." "That's Megbie, the writing Johnny, who sort of stage-manages all these things." "The ubiquitous Donald has got him in his grip, and we shall soon know all the details"—these were the remarks made upon every side as the two men strolled through the rooms.

Then an incident that was much commented on next day in society, occurred quite suddenly. It created quite a little sensation and gave rise to a great deal of gossip.

Sir William and Mr. Megbie came to a part of the room where Lady Poole and her daughter Marjorie were standing talking to General Mayne of the War Office.

Lady Poole saw the scientist.

"Ah, William!" she said, somewhat loudly, and quite in her old manner of the days when Sir William and Marjorie were engaged. "So here you are, blazing with triumph. Every one's talking of you, and every one has been asking Marjorie if she knows what it is you've invented this time!"

Megbie, who knew both Lady Poole and her daughter, but did not wish to enter into a conversation just at this important moment, bowed, smiled at the old lady and the girl, and stood a little aside.

Gouldesbrough took Lady Poole by the hand and bent over it, saying something in a low voice to her. And once more society nodded and whispered as it saw the flush of pleasure in the lady's face and her gratified smile. Again society whispered and nodded as it saw Marjorie Poole shake hands with her *ex-fiancé*, and marked the brightness of her beautiful eyes and saw the proud lips moving in words of friendship and congratulation.

What Gouldesbrough said in answer to Marjorie was this—

"It is so kind and good of you to be pleased, Marjorie. Nothing is more valuable to me than that. I am going to have half-an-hour with Donald Megbie now. I find that it's usual to tell the general public something at this stage. So I'm doing it through Megbie. He's safe, you know, and he understands one. But after that, will you let me take you in to have some supper? Do please let me! It would just make everything splendid, be the final joy, you know!"

"I should be very churlish to refuse you anything to-night, William," she answered sadly, but with great pride for him in her voice. "Haven't you done almost everything for me? You've done what no other living man would have done. I shall be very glad and feel very proud if you will come back here for me after you have talked to Donald Megbie."

Gouldesbrough went away with the journalist. In five minutes every one in Lord Malvin's house was saying that Marjorie Poole was engaged to Sir William Gouldesbrough once more.

Marjorie watched the two men go away. Her heart was full of pride and pain. She rejoiced that all this had come to the chivalrous gentleman who had been her lover and plighted husband. She felt each incident of his growing triumph with intense sympathy and pleasure. He had been so good to her! From the very first he had been splendid. If only she could have loved him, how happy would her lot have been as mate and companion to such a man as this! She was not worldly, but she was of the world and knew it well. She realized most completely all the advantages, the subtle pleasures that would belong to the wife of this great man. The love of power and dominion, the sense of a high intellectual correspondence with the finest brain of the day, the incense of a lofty and chivalrous devotion—all these, yes, all these, would be for the girl Sir William loved and wedded.

She half-wondered if such devotion as his had proved to be ought to go unrewarded.

Was it *right*? Had any girl a real excuse for making a man like William Gouldesbrough unhappy? Guy Rathbone had faded utterly out of life. The greatest skill, the most active and prolonged inquiry had failed to throw the slightest light upon his disappearance.

As a person, Guy had ceased to exist. He lived only as a memory in her heart. A dear memory,

bitter-sweet—ah, sweet and bitter!—but no more a thing of flesh and blood. A phantom, a shadow now and for evermore!

Sir William and Donald Megbie sat in a small palm house talking earnestly together. A tiny fountain sent up its glittering whip of water from a marble pool on which water-lilies were floating, while tiny iridescent fish swum slowly round their roots. There was a silence and fragrance in the pleasant remote place, the perfume of exotic flowers, the grateful green of giant cacti which rested the eye.

Concealed electric lights shed their radiance upon fern, flower, and sparkling water, and both men felt that here was a place for confidences and a fit spot in which matters of import might be unfolded.

Both men were smoking, and in the still warm air, the delicate grey spirals from the thick Turkish cigarettes rose with a fantastic grace of curve that only the pencil of a Flaxman could have given its true value.

"I am all attention, Sir William," Megbie said.

"Well, then, I will put the thing to you in a nutshell, and as simply as possible. When you come to the demonstration at my house in a few days' time, you will be able to gather all the details and have them explained to you. I am going to give you a simple broad statement here and now. For years I have been investigating the nature of thought. I have been seeking to discover what thought really is, how it takes place, what is its *mechanical* as well as its psychical value. Now, I claim that I have discovered the active principle of thought. I have discovered how to measure it, how to harness it, so to speak; how to use it, in fact, just as other investigators in the past have harnessed and utilized electricity!"

Megbie started. "I think I see," he said hurriedly. "I think I see something—but go on, Sir William, go on!"

Gouldsbrough smiled, pleased with the agitation the man who sat by him showed so plainly.

He went on—"Hitherto that which observes—I mean the power of thought, has never been able, strictly speaking, to observe itself. It can never look on at itself from the outside, or view itself as one of the multitude of things that come under its review. It is itself the origin of vision, and the eye cannot see its own power of seeing. I have altered all this. Thought is a fluid just as electricity is, or one may say that it is a peculiar form of motion just as light is. The brain is the machine that creates the motion. I have discovered that the brain gives off definite rays or vibrations which rise from it as steam rises from a boiling pot. That is the reason why one brain can act upon another, can influence another. It explains personal magnetism, hypnotism and so on. What I have done is this: I have perfected a means by which these rays can be collected and controlled. I can place an apparatus upon your head which will collect the thought vibrations as you think and produce them."

"And then, Sir William?"

"Then I can conduct those rays along a wire for any distance in the form of an electric current. Finally, by means of a series of sensitive instruments which I will show you at the forthcoming demonstration, I can transmute these vibrations into actual pictures or words, and throw them upon a screen for all the world to see. That is to say, in actual words, whatever any one is thinking is reproduced exactly as he thinks it, without his having any power to prevent it. Thought, which had hitherto been locked up in the brain of the thinker and only reaches us through his words with whatever modification he likes to make, will now be absolutely naked and bare."

There was a silence of a minute or two as Sir William stopped speaking.

The journalist was thinking deeply, his head bowed upon his hands.

He looked up at last and his face was very pale. Little beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. His eyes were luminous.

"It is too big to take in all at once," he said. "But I see some things. In the first instance, your discovery means the triumph of *TRUTH!* Think of it! the saying that 'truth shall prevail' will be justified at last!"

Gouldsbrough nodded, and the writer went on, his voice warming into enthusiasm as he continued, his words pouring out in a flood. "No one will lie any more because every one will realize that lying will be useless, when your machine can search out their inmost secrets! In two generations deceit will have vanished from the world. We shall invest in no company unless the directors submit themselves to the scrutiny of your invention. We shall be able to test the genuineness of every enterprise before embarking upon it! Again, your invention means the triumph of *JUSTICE!* There will be no more cases of wrongful imprisonment. No man will suffer for a crime he did not commit! Oh, it's wonderful, beyond thinking! The cumbrous machinery of the law-courts will be instantly swept away. The criminal will try himself in spite of himself, he will give the secret of his actions to the world! The whole of life will be changed and made bright!

We shall witness the final triumph of all—*THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE!* Man or maid will be each able to test the reality and depth of each other's affection! There will be no more mercenary marriages, no betrayals of trusting women. And from these unions of love, pure and undefiled by worldly considerations, a new and finer race will spring up, noble, free and wise! And you, you the man sitting here by my side, have done all this!"

His voice failed him for a moment, and the burning torrent of his words was still. In the rush and clamour of the new ideas, in the immeasurable vastness of the conception, speech would not go on. Then he started, and his face grew paler than before. "Forgive me," he said, "forgive me if I seem to doubt. It is all so incredibly wonderful. But you have really *done* this, Sir William? You are not merely hoping to do it some day? You are not merely advancing along the road which may some day lead to it?"

"I have actually done it, Mr. Megbie, completely, utterly, certainly. And in a few days you shall judge for yourself. But it is certain."

"But it is infinite in its possibilities!" the journalist went on. "Another thing that I see quite clearly will result is this. The right man in the right place will be an accomplished fact in the future. We shall find out early in the life of a child exactly in what direction its true power lies. To-day we find that circumstance and the mistakes of parents and guardians are constantly putting children into walks of life for which they are not in the least fitted. The result is a dreadful waste of power. We see on every side clergymen who ought to be business men, business men who ought to be painters or musicians, clerks who are bad clerks, but who would make excellent soldiers. Your marvellous discovery will change all this for ever. Every day the growing brain of the child will be tested. We shall find out exactly what its true thoughts are; children will cease to be inarticulate and unable to give us a true idea of themselves as they so often are at present. Teaching will become an exact science, because every schoolmaster will be able to find out how much his teaching is appreciated and understood, and how little, as the case may be. And we shall discover other and even more portentous secrets! We shall know what is passing in the minds of the dying who cannot speak to us! We shall know the truth about a future state, inasmuch as we shall be able to find out whether the mind does indeed receive warnings and hintings of the other world at the moment of passing! Then, also, I suppose that we shall be able to penetrate into a world that has been closed to us since the human species began! We shall know at last in what strange way animals think! The pictures that pass into the brain of the dog, the horse, the tiger, through the physical eyes, will be made clear for us to see! We shall wrest his secret from the eagle and see the memories of the primeval forest which linger in the minds of the jaguar and ape!"

The little fountain in the centre of the conservatory tinkled merrily. The electric bulbs in the glass roof shed a soft light upon the broad green leaves of the tropical plants, which seemed as if they had been cunningly japanned. Two men in modern evening dress sat talking together, while distant sounds of talk and laughter floated in to them from the great and fashionable drawing-rooms beyond. It was an ordinary picture enough, and to the superficial eye one without special significance or meaning.

Yet, at that moment and in that place, a stupendous revelation was being made. A tale which the wildest imagination would have hesitated to give a place in the mind was being poured into the ears of one who was the mouthpiece of the public. To-morrow all the world would be thinking the thoughts, experiencing the same mental disturbance, that Donald Megbie was experiencing now. The cables would be flashing the news through vast cities and over the beds of mighty oceans to the furthest corner of the habitable globe.

Megbie realized something of this. "I feel my responsibility very acutely," he said. "You have put into my hands one of the greatest chances that any writer for the public press has ever had. Before I begin to write anything, I must be alone to think things over. You may well imagine how all this has startled me. For the thinking man it almost has an element of terror. One feels an awe that may in any moment change to fear! When I first saw Mount Blanc I felt as I do now."

Sir William gazed keenly at his companion. Megbie was obviously unstrung. It was curious to see how this revelation had gripped and influenced the keen, cool-headed man of the world, curious and full of a thrill, exquisite in its sense of power and dominion. The tall figure of the scientist towered over that of the other man. Gouldesbrough had risen, the usual reserve of his manner had dropped away from him, and great tides of exultation seemed to carry him swiftly and irresistibly to the very heart of human things. During the long years of experiment and toil, Gouldesbrough had occasionally known these moments of savage ecstasy. But never had he known a moment so poignant, so supreme as this. As he stood there the thought came to him that he alone stood apart from all created men in the supremacy of intellect, in the majesty of an utter sovereignty over the minds of mankind.

The rush of furious emotion mastered him for a moment, so terrible was it in its intensity and strength.

"Yes," he cried, with a wild gesture of his arm and in a high vibrating voice. "Yes! You are right! You have said what all the world is about to say. I have stormed the heights of the unknown! The secrets of all men's hearts are mine, and I claim an absolute knowledge of the soul, even as God claims it!"

Megbie started from his reverie. He stared at the tall, swaying figure with fascinated eyes as he heard the bold and terrible words. Was it not thus that Lucifer himself had spoken in Milton's

mighty poem?

And how had the star of the morning fallen?

Once more the thought flashed into his mind that there was something of madness in those blazing eyes. However great things this man had done, were not these words of tremendous arrogance the symptom of a brain destined to blaze up for a moment in mighty triumph and then to pass into the dark?

Who could say? Who could tell?

Suddenly Megbie realized that Sir William was speaking in an ordinary voice.

"Forgive me," he was saying quietly, and with a half laugh. "I'm afraid I let myself go for a moment. It's not a thing I often do, you know; but you were so appreciative. Now you will please let me run away. I am afraid I have already been here too long. I have promised to take Miss Poole in to supper."

He shook hands and walked hurriedly away.

Megbie sat where he was for a few moments longer. He intended to leave the house quietly and go home to his chambers in the Temple, perhaps looking in at one of his clubs on the way. He did not want the innumerable questions, the pressure of the curious, which he knew would be his lot if he remained any longer in Portland Place. His mind was in a whirl, entire solitude would alone enable him to collect his thoughts.

He rose to leave the conservatory, when he saw something bright upon the chair on which Sir William Gouldesbrough had been sitting. It was a cigarette-case.

Megbie realized that Gouldesbrough had forgotten it. Being unwilling to seek out the scientist, Megbie put the case into his pocket, meaning to send it round to Sir William's house in the morning. Then he went swiftly into the hall, and managed to get away out of the house without being questioned or stopped.

It was a clear, bright night. There was less smoke about in the sky than usual, and the swift motion of the hansom cab was exhilarating. How fortunate Sir William was! so the journalist thought, as he was driven through the lighted streets. He stood upon a supreme pinnacle of fame, and beautiful Marjorie Poole—a girl to make any man happy—was being kind to him again. The romantic and mysterious Rathbone incident was over and done with. Miss Poole's fancy for the young barrister must have only been a passing one. But what a dark and mysterious business it had all been!

Megbie had known Guy Rathbone a little. He had often met him in the Temple, and he had liked the bright and capable young fellow.

For a moment the writer contrasted the lot of two men—the one he had just left, great, brilliant, and happy; the other, whom he had known in the past, now faded utterly away into impenetrable dark.

He sighed. Then he thought that a cigarette would be refreshing. He found he had no cigarettes of his own, but his fingers touched the case Sir William had left behind him in the conservatory.

Good! there would be sure to be cigarettes in the case.

He drew it out and opened it. There were two cigarettes in one of the compartments.

But it was not the sight of the two little tubes of paper that made the writer's eyes dilate and turned his face grey with sudden fear. Cut deeply into the silver he saw this—

GUY RATHBONE,
INNER TEMPLE,
LONDON, E.C.

CHAPTER XV

HAIL TO THE LOVERS!

When he had left Donald Megbie, Sir William Gouldesbrough went back to the room in which he had last seen Marjorie Poole.

He found her the centre of a circle of friends and acquaintances. Lady Poole was sitting by her daughter's side, and was in a high good humour.

Gouldesbrough saw at once that while he had been talking with Donald Megbie in the conservatory, Lord Malvin had done as Gouldesbrough had asked him. Every one knew, with more or less accuracy, of what the new invention consisted.

If the excitement and stir of expectation had been noticeable at the beginning of the evening, it was now doubly apparent. The rooms hummed like a hive with excited talk, and it was obvious

that society considered it had received a remarkable sensation. Sir William knew that things were moving in the direction he wished, when he saw Marjorie Poole holding a little court in this manner. She was always a very popular girl and knew everybody. But to-night was not ordinary. It was plain that both Marjorie and Lady Poole were being courted because of their relationship to Sir William Goulesbrough. Of course everybody knew the past history of the engagement. But now it seemed almost certain that it would be renewed. Goulesbrough realized all this in a moment, and with intense satisfaction. The assumption that he and Marjorie were once more engaged, or on the verge of being so, could not but contribute towards the fact.

Yes, it was a propitious hour. Everything was in his favour; this was his grand night, and he meant that it should be crowned by the renewal of the promise of the girl he loved.

As he went up to the group he seemed wonderfully strong and dominant. Marjorie's eyes fell upon him and brightened as they did so. Certainly there was no one else like this man!

Goulesbrough wanted to carry Marjorie away to the supper-room at once, but he was not to escape so easily. He was surrounded at once, and congratulations were fired at him from every side.

The old Duchess of Marble Arch, an ancient dame painted to resemble a dairy-maid of one and twenty, laid a tremulous claw-like hand, blazing with rings, upon Goulesbrough's arm. She was a scandal-monger who had ruined homes, a woman who had never done an unselfish action or ever had a thought that was not sordid, malevolent or foul. Yet she was a great lady, a Princess in Vanity Fair, and even Sir William could not disregard her, so great and important was this venerable hag.

"Well," she began in her high impertinent voice, "so you have outdone Aladdin, I hear, Sir William. Really I congratulate you on your thought-trap or whatever it is. I suppose we shall have you in the Upper House soon! I wish you could manage to catch some thoughts for me on the Stock Exchange. Couldn't you have your machine taken down to Capel Court? I should very much like to know what some of the gentlemen who deal in South Africans are thinking just now. The market is really in the most abominable state. And do please bring the machine to one of my At Homes. It would give me intense pleasure to know what is going on in the minds of some of my friends. We could install it in one of the smaller drawing-rooms, behind a screen. No one would know, and we could catch thoughts all the evening—though I expect the machine would want disinfecting after the first half-hour. I will see that there is some Condy's fluid ready."

She moved away chattering shrilly. Young Lord Landsend succeeded her.

That nobleman showed very evident traces of living as hard as his purse and his doctor would let him, and his pale countenance was stamped with a congratulatory grin. "'Pon my soul, Sir William," he said, "this thing you've made is really awfully jolly, you know. Topping idea really. Hope you wont go fishin' round for my thoughts!"

There was a general laugh at this, and some one was heard to remark that they didn't think that Sir William Goulesbrough would make any very big hauls in that quarter!

"But how splendid of you, Sir William!" said Mrs. Hoskin-Heath, a pretty dark-haired woman with beautiful eyes. "It is really marvellous. Now there will be a real meaning in the saying 'a penny for your thoughts!' Shall you have penny-in-the-slot machines on all the stations of the Twopenny Tube? So nice while one is waiting for a train. Just imagine how nice it will be to let your *cher ami* know how much you like him without having to say any actual compromising words! You are a public benefactor, Sir William."

Another voice broke in upon Goulesbrough's impatient ear.

"How do you do, Sir William? It is a great pleasure to meet you on such an occasion as this, an occasion which, if I may say so, is really historic! You may not remember me, but I had the privilege of meeting you at Brighton not long ago. My name is Charliewood, Sir Miles Charliewood; we met on the melancholy occasion of my poor second son's—er—death. You were very kind and helpful."

Goulesbrough shook hands with the old baronet. A shadow passed over his face as he did so, and he would have given much to have avoided the sight of him—not to have known at all that Sir Miles was in Portland Place on this night of triumph.

Goulesbrough was one of those men who had solved the chief problem of life. Like Napoleon, he was master of his own mind. His mind did not dominate him, as the minds of most of us do. He controlled it absolutely and never allowed thoughts of one part of his life to intrude upon those of another.

And now, with the frightful egotism of supreme self-will, he actually felt aggrieved at this sudden meeting. It was, he thought, hard at this radiant, happy moment! He did not want to be reminded of the past or of the terrible and criminal secret of the present. Why should the pale ghost of Eustace Charliewood come to trouble him now? His partner in an unspeakable infamy, the tool he had used for the satisfaction of his devilish desires was dead. Dead, gone away, no longer in existence. That he, Goulesbrough, was morally the murderer of the distracted man whom he had forced into crime troubled him not at all. It never had troubled him—he had learned to be "Lord of Himself." And now, in this moment of unprecedented triumph, the wraith of the dead man rose up swiftly and without warning to be a spectre at the feast. It was hard!

But he turned to Sir Miles Charliewood and was as courteous and charming as ever. His marked powers of fascination did not desert him. That strange magnetism that was able to draw people to him, to make them his servants and slaves, surrounded him now like the fabled "aura" of the Theosophists.

He bent over the pompous little man with a smile of singular sweetness.

"Forget?" he said. "My dear sir, how could I forget? It is charming to see you again. I hadn't an idea you knew Lord Malvin or were interested in scientific affairs. Your congratulations are very welcome to me, though you have said far more than I deserve. I hope we shall meet again soon. I am generally at home in Regent's Park in the afternoons. It would have made me very happy if poor Eustace could have been with us to-night. He was one of my most intimate friends, as you know. And I may tell you that he took a great interest in the experiments which have now culminated so satisfactorily for me. Poor dear fellow! It is a great sorrow to me that he is not with us. Well, well! I suppose that these things are arranged for us by a Power over which we have no control, a Force beyond our poor power of measuring or understanding. Good-night, Good-night, Sir Miles. Do come and see me soon."

He bowed and smiled, with Marjorie upon his arm, and then turned away towards the supper-room. And he left Sir Miles Charliewood—who had not cared twopence for his son during his lifetime—full of a pleasing melancholy and regret for the dead man.

Such is the power of success to awake dormant emotions in flinty hearts.

Such is the aroma and influence which "doth hedge a king" in any sphere of modern life!

Sir William walked away with the beautiful girl by his side. He felt the light touch of her fingers upon his arm, and his blood raced and leapt with joy. He felt a boy again, a happy conquering boy. Yes, all was indeed well upon this night of nights!

As they entered the supper-room and found a table, Lord Landsend saw them. He was with Mrs. Pat Argyle, the society actress, and his cousins the young Duke and Duchess of Perth.

Landsend was a fast young man of no particular intellect. But he was kind, popular, and not without a certain personal charm. He could do things that more responsible and important people couldn't do.

As he saw the hero of the occasion and the night come in with Marjorie Poole, an inspiration came to the rickety young fellow.

He jumped up from his chair and began to clap loudly.

There was a moment's dead silence. Everybody stopped talking, the clink and clatter of the meal was still.

Then the little Duchess of Perth—she was Miss Mamie Q. Oildervan, of New York—took Landsend up. She began to clap too. As she had three hundred thousand a year, was young, cheeky and delightful, she was a leader of society at this moment.

Every one followed suit. There was a full-handed thunder of applause.

Lord Landsend lifted a glass of champagne high in the air.

"Here's to the wizard of the day!" he shouted merrily. "Here's to the conqueror of thought!"

There was another second of silence. During it, the Duke of Perth, a boy fresh from Oxford, caught the infection of the moment. He raised his glass also—"And to Miss Poole too!" he said.

People who had spent years in London society said that they had never experienced anything like it. A scene of wild excitement began. Staid and ordinary people forgot convention and restraint. There was a high and jocund chorus of congratulation and applause. The painted roof of the supper-room rang with it.

Society had let itself go for once, and there was a madness of enthusiasm in the air.

Sir William Goulesbrough stood there smiling. He entered into the spirit of the whole thing and bowed to the ovation, laughing with pleasure, radiant with boyish enjoyment.

He felt Marjorie's hand upon his arm quiver with excitement, and he felt that she was his at last!

She stood by his side, her face a deep crimson, and it was as though they were a king and queen returning home to the seat and city of their rule.

It was so public an avowal, chance had been so kind, fortune so opportune, that Sir William knew that Marjorie would never retrace her steps now. It was an announcement of betrothal for all the world to see! It was just that.

Lady Poole, who was supping with Sir Michael Leeds, the great millionaire who was the prop and mainstay of the English Church, pressed a lace handkerchief to her eyes.

The bewildering enthusiasm of the moment caught her too. She rose from her seat—only a yard or two away from the triumphant pair—and went up to them with an impulsive gesture.

"God bless you, my dears!" she said in a broken voice.

Marjorie bowed her head. She drooped like a lovely flower. Fate, it seemed to her, had taken everything out of her hands. She was the creature of the moment, the toy of a wild and exhilarating environment.

She gave one quick, shy glance at Sir William.

He read in it the fulfilment of all his hopes.

Then old Lord Malvin came down the room, ancient, stately and bland.

"My dears," he said simply, "this must be a very happy night for you."

Sir William turned to the girl suddenly. His voice was confident and strong.

"My dear Marjorie," he said, "how kind they all are to us!"

A little group of four people sat down to the table beneath the crimson-shaded light.

Lord Malvin, the most famous scientist and most courtly gentleman of his time. Sir William Goulesbrough, the hero of this famous party—to-morrow, when Donald Megbie had done his work, to be the hero of the civilized world.

Lady Poole. Sweet Marjorie Poole, in the grip of circumstances that were beyond her thinking.

And no one of the four—not even Sir William Goulesbrough, F.R.S.—gave a thought to the man in the living tomb—to Guy Rathbone who was, even at that moment, tied up in india-rubber and aluminium bonds for the amusement of Mr. Guest, the pink, hairless man of Regent's Park. Mr. Guest was drunk of whisky, and sat happy, mocking his prisoner far down in the cellars of Sir William's house.

Other folk were drunk of success and applause in Portland Place.

But Donald Megbie was awake in the Inner Temple, and his thoughts were curious and strange.

Donald Megbie had left the party too early in the evening. He was drunk of nothing at all!

CHAPTER XVI

STRANGE OCCURRENCE IN THE TEMPLE

Like most writers, Donald Megbie was of a nervous and sensitive temperament. Both mental and physical impressions recorded themselves very rapidly and completely upon his consciousness.

He arrived at the Inner Temple with every nerve in a state of excitement, such as he had hardly ever known before.

He walked down the dim echoing ways towards the river, his chambers being situated in the new buildings upon the embankment.

A full moon hung in the sky, brilliant and honey-coloured, attended by little drifts of amber and sulphur-tinted clouds.

But the journalist saw nothing of the night's splendour. He almost stumbled up the stairs to the first floor.

A lamp was burning over the door of his rooms, and his name was painted in white letters upon the oak. He went in and turned on the electric light. Then, for a moment, he stood still in the hall, a richly-furnished place surrounded on all sides by doors painted white. His feet made no sound upon the thick Persian carpet, and the whole flat was perfectly still.

He felt uneasy, curiously so, as if some calamity was impending. The exhilaration of his stirring talk with Sir William Goulesbrough—so recent, so profoundly moving—had now quite departed. His whole consciousness was concentrated upon a little box of metal in the pocket of his overcoat. It seemed alive, he was acutely conscious of its presence, though his fingers were not touching it.

"By Jove!" he said to himself aloud, "the thing's like an electric battery. It seems as if actual currents radiated from it." His own voice sounded odd and unnatural in his ears, and as he hung up his coat and went into the study with the cigarette-case in his hand, he found himself wishing that he had not given his man a holiday—he had allowed him to go to Windsor to spend a night at his mother's house.

A bright fire glowed in the grate of red brick. It shone upon the book-lined walls, playing cheerily upon the crimson, green and gold of the bindings, and turned the great silver inkstand upon the writing-table into a thing of flame.

Everything was cheerful and just as usual.

Megbie put the box down on the table and sank into a huge leather arm-chair with a sigh of relief and pleasure.

It was good to be back in his own place again, the curtains drawn, the lamps glowing, the world shut out. He was happier here than anywhere else, after all! It was here in this beautiful room, with its books and pictures, its cultured comfort, that the real events of his life took place, those splendid hours of solitude, when he set down the vivid experiences of his crowded life with all the skill and power God had given him, and he himself had cultivated so manfully and well.

Now for it! Tired as his mind was, there lay a time of deep thinking before it. There was the article for to-morrow to group and arrange. It was probably the most important piece of work he had ever been called upon to do. It would startle the world, and it behoved him to put forth all his energies.

Yet there was something else. He must consider the problem of the cigarette-case first. It was immediate and disturbing.

How had this thing come into Sir William's possession? What communication had Gouldsbrough had with Guy Rathbone? That they were rivals for the hand of Miss Poole Megbie knew quite well. Every one knew it. It was most unlikely that the two men could have been friends or even acquaintances. Indeed Megbie was almost certain that Rathbone did not know Sir William.

Was that little shining toy on the table a message from the past? Or was it rather instinct with a present meaning?

He took it up again and looked at it curiously.

Immediately that he did so, the sense of agitation and unrest returned to him with tremendous force.

Megbie was not a superstitious man. But now-a-days we all know so much more about the non-material things of life that only the most ignorant people call a man with a belief in the supernatural, superstitious.

Like many another highly educated man of our time, Megbie knew that there are strange and little-understood forces all round us. When an ex-Prime Minister is a keen investigator into the psychic, when the principal of Birmingham University, a leading scientist, writes constantly in dispute of the mere material aspect of life—the cultured world follows suit.

Megbie held the cigarette-case in his hand. All the electric lights burned steadily. The door was closed and there was not a sound in the flat.

Then, with absolute suddenness, Megbie saw that a man was standing in front of him, at the other side of the fireplace, not three yards away. He was a tall man, clean-shaven, with light close-cropped hair and a rather large face. The eyes were light blue in colour and surrounded by minute puckers and wrinkles. The nose was aquiline, the mouth clean-cut and rather full. The man was dressed in a dark blue overcoat, and the collar and cuffs of the coat were heavily trimmed with astrachan fur.

The room was absolutely still.

Something like a grey mist or curtain descended over Megbie's eyes. It rolled up, like a curtain, and Megbie saw the man with absolute clearness and certainty. He could almost have put out his hand and touched him.

Measured by the mere material standard of time, these events did not take more than a second, perhaps only a part of a second.

Then the writer became aware that the room was filled with sound—sudden, loud and menacing. It was a sound as of sudden drums at midnight, such a sound as the gay dances in Brussels heard on the eve of Waterloo, when the Assembly sounded in the great square, and the whole city awoke.

In another moment, Megbie knew what the sound in his ears really was. His own heart and pulses were racing and beating like the sudden *trailerie* of drums.

In a flash he recognized the face and form of his visitor—this outward form and semblance of a man which had sprung up and grown concrete in the night! The phantom—if indeed it was a phantom—wore the dress and aspect of Eustace Charliewood, the well-known man about town who had killed himself at Brighton a few years ago!

Megbie had never spoken to Charliewood—so far as he could remember—but he knew him perfectly well by sight, as every one in the West End of London had known him, and he was a member of one of the clubs to which the dead man had belonged.

The Thing that stood there, the Thing or Person which had sprung out of the air, wore the earthly semblance of Eustace Charliewood.

Megbie shouted out loud. A great cry burst from his lips, a cry of surprise and fear, a challenge of that almost dreadful *curiosity* that men experience now and then when they are in the presence of the inexplicable, the terrible and the unknown.

Then Megbie saw that the face of the Apparition was horribly contorted.

The mouth was opening and shutting rapidly in an agony of appeal. It seemed as though a torrent

of words must be pouring from it, though there was not a sound of human speech in the large warm room.

Great tears rolled down the large pale cheeks, the brow was wrinkled with pain. The hands gesticulated and pointed, flickering rapidly hither and thither without sound. And continually, over and over again, the hands pointed to the gleaming silver case for cigarettes which Donald Megbie clasped tightly in his right hand.

The silent agitated Thing, so close—ah, so close! was trying to tell Donald something.

It was trying to say something about the cigarette-case, it was trying to tell Megbie something about Guy Rathbone.

And what? What was this fearful message that the agonized Thing was so eager and so horribly impotent to deliver?

Megbie's voice came to him. It sounded thin and muffled, just like the voice of a mechanical toy.

What is it? What is it? What are you trying to say to me about poor Guy Rathbone?

And then, as if it had seen that Megbie was trying to speak to it, but it could not hear his words, the figure of Eustace Charliewood wrung its hands, with a gesture which was inexpressibly dreadful, unutterably painful to see.

Megbie started up. He stepped forward. "Oh, don't, don't!" he said. As he spoke he dropped the cigarette-case, which, up to the present he had clutched in a hot wet hand. It fell with a clatter against the fender—that at any rate was a real noise!

In a moment the mopping, mourning, weeping phantom was gone.

The room was exactly as it had been before, still, warm, brilliantly-lit. And Donald Megbie stood upon the hearth-rug dazed and motionless, while a huge and icy hand seemed to creep round his heart and clutch it with lean, cold fingers.

Donald Megbie stood perfectly motionless for nearly a minute.

Then he knelt down and prayed fervently for help and guidance. At moments such as this men pray.

Much comforted and refreshed he rose from his knees, and went to one of the windows that looked out over the Thames.

He pulled aside the heavy green curtain, and saw that a clear colourless light immediately began to flow and flood into the room.

It was not yet dawn, but that mysterious hour which immediately presages the dawn had come.

The river was like a livid streak of pewter, the leafless plane-trees of the embankment seemed like delicate tracery of iron in the faint half-light. London was sleeping still.

The writer felt very calm and quiet as he turned away from the window and moved towards his bedroom.

The fire was nearly dead, but he saw the silver cigarette-case upon the rug and picked it up. He went to bed with the case under his pillow, and this is what he dreamed—

He saw Guy Rathbone in a position of extreme peril and danger. The circumstances were not defined, what the actual peril might be was not revealed. But Megbie knew that Rathbone was communicating with his brain while he slept. Rathbone was living somewhere. He was captive in the hands of enemies, he was trying to "get through" to the brain of some one who could help him.

The journalist only slept for a few short hours. He rose refreshed in body and with an unalterable conviction in his mind. The events of the last night were real. No chance or illusion had sent the vision and the dream, and the innocent-looking cigarette-case that lay upon the table, and which had come into his hands so strangely, was the pivot upon which strange events had turned.

The little silver thing was surrounded by as black and impenetrable a mystery as ever a man had trodden into unawares.

And in the broad daylight, when all that was fantastic and unreal was banished from thought, Megbie knew quite well towards whom his thoughts tended, on what remarkable and inscrutable personality his dreadful suspicions had begun to focus themselves.

He sat down and wrote his article till lunch-time. It was the best thing he had ever done, he felt, as he gathered the loose sheets together, and thrust a paper-clip through the corners.

He rose and was about to ring for his man—who had returned at breakfast-time—when the door opened and the man himself came in.

"Miss Marjorie Poole would like to see you, sir, if you are disengaged," he said.

Donald Megbie's face grew quite white with surprise.

Once more he felt the mysterious quickenings of the night before.

"Ask Miss Poole to come in," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

MARJORIE AND DONALD MEGBIE

The valet showed Marjorie Poole into Donald Megbie's study.

She wore a coat and skirt of dark green Harris Tweed with leather collar and cuffs, and a simple sailor hat.

Megbie, who had never met Miss Poole in the country, but only knew her in London and during the season, had never seen her dressed like this before. He had always admired her beauty, the admirable poise of her manner, the evidences of intellectuality she gave.

At the moment of her entry the journalist thought her more beautiful than ever, dressed as if for covert-side or purple-painted moor. And his quick brain realized in a moment that she was dressed thus in an unconscious attempt to escape observation, to be incognito, as it were.

But why had she come to see him? She was in trouble, her face showed that—it was extraordinary, altogether unprecedented.

Megbie showed nothing of the thoughts which were animating him, either in his face or manner. He shook hands as if he had just met Miss Poole in Bond Street.

"Do sit down," he said, "I think you'll find that chair a comfortable one."

Marjorie sat down. "Of course, Mr. Megbie," she said, "you will think it very strange that I should come here alone; when I tell you why, you will think it stranger still. And I don't want any one to know that I have been here. I shall tell mother, of course, when I get back."

Megbie bowed and said nothing. It was the most tactful thing to do.

"I feel you will not misunderstand my motives," the girl went on, "when I explain myself. In certain cases, and among certain persons, conventions are bourgeois. We don't know each other very well, Mr. Megbie, though we have sometimes had some interesting talks together. But in a sense I know you better than you know me. You see, I have read your books and other writings. In common with the rest of the world I can gather something of your temper of mind, and of your outlook upon life."

Megbie once more inclined his head. He wondered furiously what all this might mean. At the moment he was absolutely in the dark. He stretched out his hand towards a tin of cigarettes that stood on a bracket by the side of the fireplace, and then withdrew it suddenly, remembering who was present.

"Oh, do smoke," she said, instantly interpreting the movement. "Now let me just tell you exactly why I am here, why I *had* to come here. Of all the men I know, you are the most likely to understand. You have made a study of psychical affairs, of what the man in the street calls 'spooks'—you know about dreams."

At that Megbie started forward, every muscle in his body becoming rigid and tense, his hands gripping the knobs of his chair arms.

"Of course!" he said, in a voice that rippled with excitement. "Go on, please. I might have known your coming here this morning is all part of the wonderful and uncanny experiences I had last night. You've come about Guy Rathbone!"

It was the girl's turn to start. Fear came creeping into eyes which were not wont to show fear, the proud mouth grew tremulous.

Marjorie stretched out her hands—little hands in tan-coloured gloves. "Ah!" she cried, in a voice that had become shrill and full of pain, "then it is true! Things have happened to you too! Mr. Megbie, you and I have become entangled in some dark and dreadful thing. I dare not think what it may be. *But Guy is not dead.*"

Megbie answered her in the same words.

"No," he said, "Guy Rathbone is not dead." His voice had sunk several tones. It tolled like a bell.

"Miss Poole," he went on, "tell me, tell me at once what happened to you last night."

With a great effort of control, Marjorie began her story.

"It was very late when we got home last night after the party," she said. "I was in a curious state of nerves and excitement. I must touch upon a personal matter—this is no time for reticence or false shame. I had been with William Goulesbrough. You know that we were at one time engaged—oh, this is horribly difficult for me to say, Mr. Megbie."

"Go on, Miss Poole. I know, I know. But what does it matter in such a time as this?"

"Nothing at all," she answered in a resolute voice. "I was engaged to Sir William when I found out that my affection was going elsewhere—Guy, Mr. Rathbone——"

"You needn't go into the past, Miss Poole," Donald broke in, "tell me about last night."

"I was with Sir William at supper-time. There was a remarkable scene. It was a sort of triumph for him, and I was with him, every one included me in it. It was, obviously, generally assumed that we had become engaged once more. On the way home, Sir William again asked me to be his wife. I told him that I could not give him an answer then. I said that I would tell him to-night. He is coming to Curzon Street to-night."

"I beg you, I implore you to wait."

Megbie's words were so grave, he seemed so terribly in earnest, that the girl shrank from them, as one would shrink from blows.

The same thought began to lurk in the eyes of the woman and the man, the same incredible and yet frightful thought.

Marjorie's cheeks were almost grey in colour. To Megbie, as he watched her, she seemed to have grown older suddenly. The lustre seemed to him to have gone out of her hair.

"I reached home," she said. "Mother made me take a cup of beef-tea, and I went to my room. I was preparing for bed, indeed I was brushing my hair before the mirror, when a curious sense of disturbance and almost of fear came over me. I felt as if there was another presence in the room. Now my looking-glass is a very large one indeed. It commands the whole of the room. The whole of the room is reflected in it without any part left out, except of course which I could see where I sat. When this strange feeling of another presence came over me, I thought it was merely reaction after a terribly exciting night. I looked into the glass and saw that the room was absolutely empty. Still the sensation grew. It became so strong at last that I turned round. And there, Mr. Megbie, I tell you in the utmost bewilderment, but with extreme certainty, there, though the mirror showed nothing at all, a figure was standing, the figure of a man. It was not three feet away."

Megbie broke in upon her narrative.

"The figure," he said in a hushed voice, "was the figure of Mr. Eustace Charliewood, who shot himself at Brighton some little time ago."

She cried out aloud, "Yes! But how did you know?"

"He came to me also, last night. He came to me out of the other world, which is all round us, but which we cannot see. He was trying to tell me something about Guy Rathbone."

Marjorie Poole began to sob quietly.

"I knew it," she answered. "Mr. Charliewood in another state sees more than we see, he knows where Guy is. Oh, my love, my love!"

Megbie went up to her. He had some sal-volatile in his dressing-case, and he made her take it.

"Be brave," he said; "you have more to tell me yet, as I have more to tell you. Guy is alive, we are certain of that. But he is in some one's power. The spirit of this man, Eustace Charliewood, knows where he is. He is trying to tell us. He is trying to make amends for something. He must have had something to do with Guy's disappearance."

"Mr. Charliewood," Marjorie said in a whisper, "was William Gouldesbrough's intimate friend. He was always about the house. When Guy Rathbone disappeared, Eustace Charliewood killed himself. William was at Brighton at the time. He was trying to help me and my mother to find Guy."

"Go on with your story, if you can," Megbie said. "One more effort!"

"I knew that the figure was trying to tell me about Guy. Something told me that with absolute certainty. But it couldn't tell me. It began to weep and wring its hands. Oh, it was pitiful! Then suddenly, it seemed to realize that it was no use. It stood upright and rigid, and fixed its eyes upon me. Mr. Megbie, such mournful eyes, eyes so full of sorrow and terrible remorse, were never in a human face. As those eyes stared down at me, a deep drowsiness began to creep over me. Sleep came flooding over me with a force and power such as I had never known before. It was impossible to withstand it. People who have taken some drug must feel like that. Just as I was, in the chair in front of the dressing-table, I sank into sleep."

"And your dream?" Megbie said quietly.

She started. "Ah, you know," she said. "The spirit of Eustace Charliewood could not tell me while I was conscious. But in sleep he could influence my brain in some other mysterious way. I dreamed that Guy was in a sort of cell. By some means or other I knew that it was underground. A man was there, a man whom I have met, a man—a horrible creature—who is a fellow-worker of Sir William Gouldesbrough. The man was doing something to Guy. I couldn't see what it was. Then the picture faded away. I seemed to be moving rapidly in a cold empty place where there

was no wind or air, sound, or, or—I can't describe it. It was a sort of 'between place.'"

"And then?"

"Then I saw you standing by the side of William Gouldesbrough. It was at the party—Lord Malvin's party, which we had just left. I saw this as if from a vast distance. It was a tiny, tiny picture, just as one could see something going on under a microscope. William was talking to some one whom I couldn't see. But I knew it was myself, that I was looking at the exact scene which had happened at the party, when you were going away with William, and he had stopped on the way to ask me to go into supper with him. And, strangely enough, in another part of my mind, the sub-conscious part I suppose, I knew that I was looking at an event of the past, and that this was the reason why it seemed so tiny and far-off. The picture went away in a flash—just like an eye winking. You've been to one of those biograph shows and seen how suddenly the picture upon the screen goes?—well, it was just like that. Then a voice was speaking—a very thin and very distant voice. If one could telephone to the moon, one would hear the voice at the other end just like that, I should think. And though the voice was so tiny, it was quite distinct, and it had a note of terrible entreaty. 'Go to Donald Megbie,' it said. 'Go at once to Donald Megbie, the writer. He will help. There is still time. Go to Donald Megbie. I have been able to communicate with him. He has the silver—Guy——' And then, Mr. Megbie, the voice stopped suddenly. Those were the exact words. What they meant, I did not know. But when I awoke they remained ringing in my ears like the echo of a bell heard over a wide expanse of country. In the morning I resolved to come to you. I didn't know where you lived, but I looked you up in 'Who's Who.' And as soon as I could get away without any one knowing, I came here."

Donald Megbie rose from his chair. He realized at once that it was necessary to keep the same high tension of this interview. If that were lost everything would go.

"I know what the poor troubled spirit—if it is a spirit—of the man, Charliewood, meant by his last words. There is a thing called psychometry, Miss Poole. In brief, it means that any article which belongs, or has belonged, to any one, somehow retains a part of their personality. It may well be that the mysterious thought-vibrations which Sir William Gouldesbrough has discovered can linger about an actual and material object. Last night, when Sir William left me to take you in to supper at Lord Malvin's, he left his cigarette-case behind him in the conservatory where we had been sitting. I didn't want to bother him then, so I put it in my pocket, intending to send it to him to-day; here it is. It belonged to Guy Rathbone. I found it in Sir William's possession, and I believe that it has been the means—owing, to some law or force which we do not yet understand—of bringing us together this morning." He handed her the cigarette-case.

Neither of them could know that this was the case which Eustace Charliewood had found in the pocket of Rathbone's fur coat, when he had taken it from the Bond Street coiffeur in mistake.

Neither of them could see how it had been restored by Charliewood to Rathbone, and had been appropriated by Mr. Guest, when the captive had been taken to his silent place below the old house in Regent's Park.

And even Sir William Gouldesbrough did not know that he had seen the thing in his study, just as he was starting for Lord Malvin's house, and had absently slipped it into his pocket, thinking it was his own.

CHAPTER XVIII

PLANS

Sir William Gouldesbrough stood in the large laboratory. The great room was perfectly dark, save only for a huge circle of bright light upon one of the walls, like the circle thrown upon a screen by a magic-lantern.

A succession of dim and formless figures moved and slid over the illuminated space in fantastic silence. Now and then the face of part of the dress of one of the figures would suddenly glow out into colour and absolute distinctness. Then it would fade away into mist.

There was a "click," and the circle of light vanished, another, and the vast laboratory glowed out into being as Sir William turned on a hundred electric bulbs.

Mr. Guest was sitting upon a long, low table swinging his legs. His great pink face was blotched and stained by excess, and his hand shook like an aspen leaf.

He jerked his head towards the opposite wall upon which the huge screen was stretched—an enormous expanse of white material stretched upon rollers of hollow steel.

"Rathbone's getting about done," he said. "I give him another month before his brain goes or he pegs out altogether. Look at those results just now! All foggy and uncertain. He's losing the power of concentrating his thoughts. Continuous thinking is getting beyond him."

Sir William was sitting in an arm-chair. By the side of it was a circular table with a vulcanite top, covered with switch-handles and controlling mechanism. His long thin finger played with a little

brass button, and his face was set in lines of deep and gloomy thought. His eyes were fixed and brooding, and sombreness seemed to surround him like an atmosphere. He showed no signs of having heard his assistant for a moment or two. Then he turned his face suddenly towards him.

"My friend," he said, "you yourself will not last another month if you go on as you are going. That is quite certain. You ought to know it as well as I do. Another attack of delirium and nothing can save you."

Mr. Guest smiled horribly. "Very possibly, William," he said, "I have thought that it may be so myself. But why should I care? I'm not like you. I have no human interests. Nothing matters to me except my work."

"And if you die in delirium tremens you won't be able to go on with your work."

"My dear William, there is nothing left for me to do. In this new discovery of ours, yours has been the master-mind. I quite admit that. But you could not have done without me. I know, as you know, that there is no one else in Europe except myself who could have helped you to bring the toil of years to such a glorious conclusion. Well, there is the end of it. I am nearly fifty years old. There is no time to start again, to begin on something new. Life will not be long enough. I have used up all my powers in the long-continued thought-spectrum experiments. I have no more energy for new things. I rest upon my laurels, content that I have done what I have, and content from the purely scientific point of view. I've fulfilled my destiny. My mind is not like the minds of other men I meet. It is not quite human. It's a purely scientific mind, a piece of experimental apparatus which has now done its work."

He laughed, a laugh which was so mirthless and cold that even Goulesbrough shuddered at the soulless, melancholy sound. Then he got down from the table and shambled over the floor of the laboratory towards a cupboard. He took a bottle of whisky from a shelf, half filled a tumbler with the spirit, and lifted it towards his chief in bitter mockery.

"Here's luck, William," he said, "luck to the great man, the pet of Europe, the saviour of the race! You see I have been reading Mr. Donald Megbie's articles in the papers." He drank the whisky and poured some more into the glass. "Yet, William, most fortunate of living men! you seem unhappy. 'The Tetrarch has a sombre air,' as the play says. What a pity it is that you are not like me, without any human affections to trouble me! I don't want to pry into your private affairs—I never did, did I?—but I presume something has gone wrong with your matrimonial affairs again? I'm right, am I not? Can't Miss Marjorie make up her mind? Tell me if you like. I can't give you any sympathy, but I can give you advice."

Goulesbrough flushed and moved impatiently in his chair. Then he began to speak.

"If what you say is true, Guest, then you must be a happy man. Your life is complete, you have got what you wanted, you have done what you wanted to do. And if you choose to kill yourself with amyl alcohol, I suppose that's your affair. What you say is quite right. I am terribly worried and alarmed about the success of *my* great desire, the one wish remaining to me. I don't expect or want sympathy from you, but your advice is worth having, and you shall give it to me if you will."

Wilson Guest nodded. "Tell me what is worrying you," he said.

"You know that I have had great hopes of obtaining Miss Poole's consent to our re-engagement. Everything has been going on well. Miss Poole believes—or did believe—that the man Rathbone is dead. I used your suggestion and hinted at a vulgar intrigue. At Brighton, when Charlewood shot himself, I was constantly with Miss Poole and her mother. My pretended efforts to solve the mystery of Rathbone's disappearance told. I saw that I was winning back all the ground I had lost. I had great hopes. These seemed to culminate the other night at Lord Malvin's reception. Miss Poole promised to receive me the next day and give me a definite answer. I knew what that meant; it meant yes. I was prepared to stake everything upon it. When I called at Curzon Street in the evening I was told that she was unwell, and could not see me. The next day I succeeded in seeing her. I was taken aback. There was a distinct change in her manner. The old intimacy and freedom which I had been able to re-establish had gone. There was almost a shrinking in her attitude—she seemed afraid of me."

"Well, that is easily accounted for. You have done something hitherto beyond human power. Naturally she regards you as a person apart—some one who can work miracles. But what did she say?"

"It wasn't that sort of shrinking, Guest. I know Miss Poole well. I understand the real strength and brilliancy of her mind. She is not a foolish, ordinary girl to be frightened as you suggest. I told her that I had come for my answer. I think I spoke well. My heart was in what I said, and I urged my cause as powerfully as I could. Miss Poole absolutely refused to give me any answer at all."

"Well, that is no very terrible thing, William. I know little of women, but one is told that is their way. She will not yield at once, that is all."

"I wish I could think so, Guest. It did not strike me in that way at all. And she said a curious thing also. She said that I might re-open the question after the public demonstration. She wouldn't pledge herself to give an answer even then. But she said that I must say nothing more to her on the subject until after the demonstration."

Wilson Guest laughed.

"What a powerful drug this love is!" he said. "It's as unexpected in its action as ether! My dear William, you are worrying yourself about nothing. I'm sure of it. Remember that you can't look at the thing with an unprejudiced eye. It's all quite clear to me. Miss Poole simply wants to wait until she has seen your triumph with her own eyes. That is all, believe me. You are in too much of a hurry. How curious that is! It is the strangest thing in the world to find *you*—you of all men—in a hurry. It is only by monumental and marvellous patience that you have succeeded in discovering a law, and applying that law with my help, which makes you the greatest man of science the world has ever known. And yet you leap at the fence of a girl's hesitation and reserve as if everything depended on breaking a record for the jump!"

Gouldesbrough smiled faintly and shook his head. He was not convinced, but it was plain that he was comforted by what Guest had said.

His smile was melancholy and gently sad; and in the electric radiance of the huge mysterious room he seemed like some eager and kindly priest or minister who bewailed the sins of his flock, but with a humorous and human understanding of mortal frailty.

And there he stood, the greatest genius of modern times, and also one of the most cruel and criminal of living men. Yet so strange and tortuous is the human soul, so enslaved can conscience be by the abnormal mind, that he thought of himself as nothing but a devoted lover.

His passion and desire for this girl were horrible in their egotism and their intensity alike. But the man with the marvellous brain thought that the one thing which set him apart from the herd and redeemed him for his crime was his love for Marjorie Poole. He really, honestly and truly, believed that!

It was not without reason that Donald Megbie had seen the blaze of insanity in Sir William's eyes. A supreme genius is very seldom sane. Professor Lombroso has said so, Max Nordau agitated scientific Europe by saying it a few years ago.

Yet some one more important said it many years before—

"Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

"So the matter rests there?" Guest asked.

"Yes," Sir William answered; "but I have altered the day of the demonstration. There is no need to wait after all! Everything is prepared. I have sent out cards for Friday next, three days from now."

Guest poured out some more of the spirit. He laughed rather contemptuously.

"Can't wait, then!" he said. "I'm glad I'm free from these entanglements, William. Of course it doesn't matter when the people come to see the thing at work. As you say, everything is quite ready. But there is another thing to be considered. What about Rathbone? He's no more use to us now, and he must be got rid of. Shall I go down-stairs and kill him?"

He said it with the indifference with which he might have proposed to wash his hands.

CHAPTER XIX

A DEATH-WARRANT IS PRESENTED TO A PRISONER

When Wilson Guest spoke of the final extinction of the wretched subject of their experiments, Sir William Gouldesbrough did not answer. He began to pace the long room, his head was sunk upon his breast, and his face was like the face of Minos, inscrutable and deadly calm.

Suddenly the whistle of a speaking tube sounded in the wall. All the laboratories and experimental rooms were thus connected with the house proper. None of the servants were allowed to pass the connecting door, unless by special leave.

Guest went to the speaking-tube and placed it against his ear—an ear that was pointed like a goat's ear.

Then he looked at the tall figure which was pacing the laboratory. "William," he called out with an impish giggle, "a lady has called to see you. A lady from Curzon Street!"

Gouldesbrough stopped short in his walk and raised his head. His face suddenly became a mask of eager attention and alertness.

Guest tittered with amusement at the effect which his words had produced. "Don't be agitated," he said, "and don't look like Henry Irving when he played Romeo. It isn't the young lady. It's the old one. It's Lady Poole. The butler has shown her into the study, and she's waiting to know if you can see her."

Gouldsbrough did not reply, but left the laboratory at once. Guest could hear his hurried footsteps echoing along the corridor. Then the pink-faced man turned to the whisky bottle again. He poured out a four-finger peg and sat down in the arm-chair which stood by the vulcanite table which controlled the vast and complicated apparatus of the thought spectrum. He sipped the whisky and looked at his watch. "Rathbone's had the cap on for an hour," he said. "Well, he can go on wearing it for a bit. If William agrees when he comes back it will be the last time Rathbone will have the pleasure of helping in our experiments. I may as well take a peep at his thoughts now. Lord! what a fascinating game it is!" He turned a switch, and all the lights in the place went out suddenly. Then his fingers found the starting lever of the machines.

He moved it, and immediately a low humming sound, as of a drum or fan revolving at immense speed was heard, far away at the other end of the laboratory. Then, immediately in front of where the scientist sat, the great white disc of light, full twelve feet in diameter, suddenly flashed into view.

Images and pictures began to form themselves upon the screen.

Sir William found old Lady Poole in his study, not sitting placidly in the most comfortable chair she could find, her usual plan wherever she might be, but standing upon the hearth-rug and nervously swinging a thin umbrella, the jewelled handle of which sparkled in the firelight.

"Ah, William," she said at once in an agitated voice, letting him lead her to a chair while she was speaking. "Ah, William, I am upset about Marjorie. I am very upset about the girl. I thought over what was best to be done, and I determined that I would take the bull by the horns and come and talk things over with you. That is right, isn't it?"

There was a little anxiety in the good lady's voice, for, however much she desired Sir William for a son-in-law and liked him personally, she was considerably afraid of him in certain of his moods.

"My dear Lady Poole," he replied with one of his rare and charming smiles, "there is no one whom I would rather see than you. And I'm sure that you know that. Tell me all about it."

His tone was gentle and confidential, and Lady Poole's face brightened at once.

"Dear William!" she said. "Well, I've come to you to talk about Marjorie. Our interests are absolutely identical in regard to her. You can't want to marry my daughter more than I want to see my daughter married to you. Lately things have been going well between you both. I saw that at once; nothing escapes me where Marjorie is concerned. She was quite forgetting her foolish fancy for that wretched young Rathbone, owing to his perfectly providential disappearance or death or whatever it was. Then I made sure that everything had come right at Lord Malvin's party, and especially when I heard that you were going to call next day. I went out. I thought it better. And when I came home my maid told me that Marjorie had not seen you after all. And since then I've kept an eye on all that was going on, and I'm very seriously disturbed. Anything I say seems to have no effect. Marjorie will hardly let me mention your name to her; I cannot understand it at all. Her manner is changed too. She seems expecting something or some one. My firm conviction is that she has another fit of pining for young Rathbone. I told her as much one evening. In fact, I'm afraid I rather lost my temper. 'Guy Rathbone is most certainly dead,' I told her. 'I was as kind and sympathetic as I could be,' I said, 'when Mr. Rathbone first disappeared. I very much disapproved of him, but I recognized you had a certain right to choose your own future companion, within limits. But now you're simply making yourself and me miserable and ridiculous, and you're treating one of the best-hearted and distinguished men in England in a way which is simply abominable. It's heartless, it's cruel, and you will end by disgusting society altogether, and we shall have to go and live among the retired officers at Bruges or some place like that.'"

Lady Poole paused for breath. She had spoken with extreme volubility and earnestness, and there were tears in her voice.

It is a mistake to assume that because people are worldly they are necessarily heartless too. Lady Poole really loved her daughter, but she did earnestly desire to see her married to this wealthy and famous man who seemed to have no other desire.

Sir William broke in upon the pause. "All you tell me, dear Lady Poole," he said, "is very chilling and depressing to my dearest hope. But difficulties were made to be overcome, weren't they? and to the strong man there are no fears—only shadows. But what answer did Marjorie make when you said all this to her?"

"A very strange one, William. She said, 'Guy is not dead, mother. I know it. I feel it. I feel certain of it. And when I feel this how can I say anything to Sir William!' Then I asked her if she proposed to keep you waiting for the rest of both your lives before she said anything definite. She burst into tears and said that she was very miserable, but that she intended to say something definite to you after the coming reception here when you are going to show every one your new invention."

"Yes," Sir William answered. "She has promised that, but I fear what her answer will be. Well, we must hope for the best, Lady Poole. If I were you I shouldn't worry. Leave everything to me. I have everything at stake."

"Well, I felt I must come and tell you, William," Lady Poole said. "I felt that it would help you to know exactly how things stand. Perhaps all will come well. Girls are very difficult to manage. I wanted Marjorie to go out a great deal in order to occupy her mind and to keep her from brooding over this absurd fancy that Guy Rathbone is alive. But she seems to shun all engagements. However, she's fortunately thought that she would like to try her hand at writing something, she was always interested in books, you know. So she's spending a good deal of time over it—a story I think—and Mr. Donald Megbie is helping her. He calls now and then and makes suggestions on what she has done. A nice, quiet little man he seems, and a fervent admirer of yours. I sounded him on that point the other day. So even this little fancy of Marjorie's for writing may turn out to be a help. Mr. Megbie is sure to become enthusiastic if your name is mentioned in any way, and it will keep the fact of how the world regards you well before Marjorie. Now, good-bye. It's a relief to have come and told you everything. I must fly, and I know you will want to get back to your electricity and things."

Sir William went with her to the garden-gate in the wall, where her carriage was waiting. Then he went back to the study and took down the speaking-tube that communicated with the large laboratory. He asked Wilson Guest to come to him at once.

In a few minutes the assistant shambled in. His eyes were bright with the liquid brightness of alcoholic poisoning; his speech was much clearer and more decided than it had been earlier in the day. It had tone and *timbre*. The crimson blotches on the face were less in evidence. Guest had drunk a bottle of whisky since breakfast-time, a quantity which would hopelessly intoxicate three ordinary men and probably kill one. But this enormous quantity of spirit was just sufficient, in the case of this man, to make him as near the normal as he could ever get. A bottle of whisky in the morning acted upon the drink-sodden tissues as a single peg might act upon an ordinary person who was jaded and faint.

Gouldesbrough knew all the symptoms of his assistant's disease very well. He recognized that the moment in the day when Guest was most himself and was most useful had now arrived. The effects of yesterday's drinking were now temporarily destroyed.

"I want your help, Wilson," he said, with a strange look in his eyes. "I want to resume the discussion we were beginning when Lady Poole called. You are all right now?"

"Oh yes, William," the man answered without a trace of his usual giggle, with the former sly malice of his manner quite obliterated. "This is my good hour. I feel quite fit—for me—and I'm ready. About Rathbone you mean?"

"Exactly. Lady Poole has given me to understand that her daughter is still pining after this person."

"Call him a *thing*, William. He isn't a person any more. He is just a part of our machinery, nothing more. And moreover a part of our machinery that is getting worn out, that we don't want any more, and that we ought to get rid of."

"You think so?"

"I'm certain of it. We must not lose sight of the fact that while there is life in that body there is always danger for us. Not much danger, I admit—everything was managed too well in the first instance. But still there is danger, and a danger that grows."

"How grows?"

"Because at the present moment the newspapers of the civilized world are full of your name. Because the eyes of the whole world are directed towards this house in Regent's Park."

"There is something in that, Wilson. Now my thought is that if the body could actually be found, then Miss Poole would know, with the rest of the world, that the fellow was actually dead. Could that be managed?"

Guest lit a cigarette. "I suppose so," he said, thoughtfully. "But that would be giving up an experiment I had hoped to have had the opportunity of performing. Human vivisection would give us such an enormous increase of scientific knowledge. It is only silly sentiment that does not give the criminal to the surgeon. But have it your own way, William. I will forego the experiment. It is obvious that if the body is to be found, there must be no traces of anything of that sort. There would be a post-mortem of course."

"Then what do you propose, Guest?"

"Let me smoke for a moment and think."

He sat silent for two or three minutes with the heavy eyelids almost veiling the large bistre-coloured eyes.

Then he looked up. His smile was so horrible in its cunning that Gouldesbrough made an involuntary shrinking movement. But it was a movement dictated by the nerves and not by the conscious brain, for, dreadful as was the thing Guest was about to say, there was something in Sir William Gouldesbrough's mind which was more dreadful still.

"The body shall be found," Guest said, "in the river, somewhere down Wapping way, anywhere in the densely-populated districts of the Docks. It shall be dressed in common clothes. When it is

discovered and identified—I know how to arrange a certain identification—it will be assumed that Rathbone simply went down to the slums and lost himself. There have been cases known where reputable citizens have suddenly disappeared from their surroundings of their own free will and dropped into the lowest kind of life for no explainable reason. De Quincey mentions such a case in one of his essays."

"Good. But how can it be done? We can't carry a body to Wapping in a brown paper parcel."

"Of course not. But has it not occurred to you that we are close to the Regent's Canal? I haven't worked out details. They will shape themselves later on. But there are plenty of barges always going up and down the canal. Certainly we can do the thing. It is only a question of money. We have an unlimited command of money. But, listen. Our body is alive still. It will be quite easy for us—with our knowledge—to treat this living body with certain preparations, and in such a way that when it is dead it will present all the appearance of having been killed by excess in some drug. The post-mortem will disclose it. If we keep it alive during a month from now, we can make it a morphia maniac to all appearance. We can inject anything we like into this Rathbone and make him a slave to some drug, whether he likes it or not!"

"No, Guest. The really expert pathologist would discover it. It couldn't be done in a month. It might in six."

"The really expert pathologist won't perform the post-mortem, William. There are only ten in London! Some local doctor of the police will apply the usual tests and discover exactly what we wish him to discover. He will analyze a corpse. He won't synthesize a history of the corpse. Only ten men in England could do that with certainty, and you and I are two of those ten, though it is many years ago since we gave up that sort of work for physics. So you see your object will be doubly served. The actual death will be proved, and the fellow's life be discredited while the apparently true reason of his disappearance will be revealed."

Sir William looked steadily at his assistant. "Your brain is wonderfully sufficient," he said. "It is extraordinary how it withstands the ravages of alcohol. Really, my dear Wilson, you are a remarkable man. All you say is quite excellent. And, meanwhile, I have a proposal to make."

He suddenly rose from his chair, and his eyes began to blaze with insane passion. He shook with it, his whole face was transformed. In his turn he became abnormal.

And just as the famous man had thought of the lesser, a moment or two ago—had regarded him coldly and spoken of him, to him, as a mind diseased—so now the lesser, stimulated to spurious sanity for the moment, saw the light of mania in his chief's eyes.

Two great forces, two great criminals, two horrid egotists, and both lost men! Lost far more certainly and irrevocably than the prisoned and dying gentleman far below in the strong room, where the electric fans whispered all day and night, where the fetters jingled and the heart was turning to salt stone!

The man was changed utterly. The grave courtly ascetic vanished as a breath on glass vanishes. And in his stead stood a creature racked with evil jealousy and malice, a gaunt inhuman figure in whose eyes was the glitter of a bird of prey.

Guest saw the swift and terrible drop into the horrible and the grotesque. He realized that for a brief moment he was master of the situation.

"Tell me, William," he said. "And what is your idea?"

Gouldesbrough stopped. He turned towards his questioner and shook a long, threatening arm at him.

"Why," he said, "all this time the man Rathbone has never known why we are keeping him in prison. He has never seen me, but day by day you have descended to his cell, caught him up in the toils of the chains which he wears, and hoisted him on to the couch. And all this time, when you have fitted the cap upon his head, the man has known nothing of the reasons. He is in the dark, mentally, as he is so often in the dark from a physical point of view, when you, his jailer, see fit to turn off the light. But now he shall know what we are doing with him. I am going down to tell him that every thought which has been born in his brain has been noted and recorded by you and by me. I am going to tell him what we are going to do with his wretched body. He shall know of your proposals, how that we, his lords and masters, will simulate in his tissues the physical appearances of protracted vice. He shall know to-day how his body will be discovered, and how his memory will be for ever discredited in the eyes of the world. And I shall tell him to-day, that as he lies bound and in my power, wearing the helmet of brass which robs him of his own power of secret thought, that I am going up-stairs to watch his agony in pictures, and that Marjorie will be with me—that she is utterly under my influence—and that we shall laugh together as we see each thought, each agony, chasing one another over the screen. We shall be together, I shall tell him, my arms will be round her, her lips will seek mine, and for the first time in the history of the world...."

He stopped for a moment. His hand went up to his throat as if the torrent of words were choking him. Then Guest cut in to his insane ecstasy.

"You are a fool, William," came from the pink-faced man, in an icy titter. "Of course when you tell him why and how we have used him, he will believe it. But I don't think that he will believe in

your pleasant fiction of you and the girl as a sort of latter-day Lacoön in one arm-chair, laughing together as you take your supreme revenge."

Gouldesbrough strode up to Guest. He clutched him by the shoulder. "Give me the keys," he said, "the keys, the keys."

Guest was not at all dismayed. Laughing still, he put his hand into his pocket and took out the pass-key of the strong-room.

"There you are, William," he said; "now go down and enjoy yourself. Our friend is still tied down on the couch—he's been like that for several hours, because I've forgotten to go and loose him. I'm going to have some more whisky, and then I shall go to the big laboratory and switch on the current. If I'm not very much mistaken, our friend's brain will provide a series of pictures more intense and vivid, more sharply defined in both outline and colour, than I have ever seen before, during the whole course of our experiments."

Gouldesbrough took the key and was out of the room in a flash. Guest groped for the decanter.

His hair was quite grey now. All the gold had gone from it, just as the youth had passed from his face—his face which was now the colour of ashes, and gashed with agony.

And he lay there, trussed and tied in his material fetters of india-rubber and aluminium. On his head the gleaming metal cap was clamped. He was supine and an old man. All the sap had gone from the fine athlete of a few weeks ago, and the splendid body that had been, was just a shell, a husk.

But the soul looked through the eyes still, tortured but undaunted, in agony but not afraid.

In the lower silence of that deep cellar where Guy suffered there were but two sounds. One was the insistent whisper of the electric fan, the other was the voice which came from Sir William Gouldesbrough as he bent over the recumbent figure—the broken, motionless figure in which, still, brave eyes were set like jewels.

"So now you know! You know it all, you realize, dead man, all that I have done to you, and all that I am going to do. Down here, in this little room, you have thought that you were alone. You have imagined that whatever had happened to you, you were yet alone with the agony of your thoughts, and with God! But you were not! Though you never knew it until now, you never were! Each prayer that you thought you were sending up to the unknown force that rules the world, was caught by me. For weeks I have daily seen into your soul, and laughed at its irremediable pain. I have got your body, and for the first time in the history of the world, your mind, your soul, are mine also."

The voice stopped for a moment. It had become very harsh and dry. It clicked and rang with a metallic sound in this torture-chamber far underground.

And still the bright eyes watched the body of the man who was possessed, very calmly, very bravely.

The horrid voice rose into an insane shriek.

"She is up-stairs now, the girl you presumed to love, the rose of all the roses that you dared to come near, is sitting, laughing as she sees all that you are thinking now, vividly before her in pictures and in words. In a moment I shall be with her, and together we shall mock your agonies, twined in each other's arms."

Perhaps a vault in the dungeons of the Inquisition or in some other place of horror where merciless men have watched the agonies of their brethren, has echoed with pure merriment. Who can say, who can tell?

Such a thing may have happened, but we do not know. But to-night, at this very moment, from the prone figure stretched on its bed of pain, from the heart of a man who had just heard that he was doomed to a cruel death, and robbed of his very individuality, there came a bright and merry laugh which rang out in that awful place as the Angelus rings over the evening fields of France, and all the peasants bow in homage to their Maker.

And then the voice. "I know now why I am here, and what has been done to me during these long, leaden hours. I am now at the point of death. But, with all your devilish cleverness, with all your brilliancy, you are but as a child. I suppose I shall not see you again, but I forgive you, Gouldesbrough, forgive you utterly. And it is easier for me to do this, because I know that you are lying. In this world she still loves me, in the next she is mine, as I am hers. And it is because you know this that you come and rant and laugh, and show yourself as the fearful madman that you are. Good-bye, good-night; I am happier than you as I lie here, because I know that, for ever and a day, Marjorie loves me and I love Marjorie. And it won't be any time at all before we meet."

And once again the laugh that echoed from stone wall to ceiling of stone, was blithe and confident.

CHAPTER XX

THOUGHTS OF ONE IN DURANCE

Once more the cell was only tenanted by the victim. Sir William had gone, the great door had clanked and clicked, and Guy Rathbone still lay upon his couch of torture.

The electric light still shone, as Gouldesbrough had forgotten to turn it off, or perhaps did not know that this was the invariable custom of his assistant when Rathbone was clanked and bolted down to his bed of vulcanite. It was the first visit that Sir William had paid to the living tomb to which he had consigned his rival.

Rathbone had laughed indeed, and his laugh was still echoing in the frenzied brain of the scientist as he mounted upwards to the light of day. But the laugh, though it had indeed been blithe and confident, had been a supreme effort of will, of faith and trust, was merely the echo and symbol of a momentary state which the tortured body and despairing mind could not sustain.

Rathbone could not move his head, fixed tight as it was in its collar. But two great tears rolled from the weakened and trembling eyelids down the gaunt, grey cheeks. The supreme ecstasy of belief and trust in the girl he loved, the hope of meeting her again in another world where time was not and where the period of waiting would be unfelt, passed away like a thing that falls through water. Once more a frightful emptiness and fear came down over him like a cloud falls.

From where his couch was placed, though he could not turn his head, he could see nearly the whole interior of his cell. There were the concrete walls, each cranny and depression of which he knew so well. There was the other, and scarcely less painful, bed upon which he slept, or tried to sleep at such times when exhausted nature mercifully banished the pain of his soul. It was not day when he slept, it was not night, for day and night are things of the world, the world with which he was never to have any more to do, and which he should never see again with material eyes.

There was the little table upon which was the last book they had let him have, a book brought to him in bitter mockery by Wilson Guest a child's picture book called "Reading without Tears." And he could see the network of ropes and india-rubber attachments which went up to the pulley in the roof, and which rendered him absolutely helpless by means of the mechanism outside the cell which was set in motion before his jailor entered.

There was hardly any need for these ingenious instruments any longer. The athlete was gaunt and wasted, his skin hung upon him in grey folds. The gold had faded out of his hair and it was nearly white. The firm and manly curve of the lips was broken and twisted. The whole mouth was puckered with pain and torture. It was almost a senile mouth now. Very little physical strength remained in the body—no, there was hardly any need for the pulley and ropes now, and soon there would be no need for them at all, until, perhaps, some other unhappy captive languished in the grip of these monsters.

His tired eyes gazed round the cell, and his thoughts were for a moment numbed into nothingness. There was just a piece of lead at the back of his brain, that was all. He was conscious of it being there, drowsily conscious, but no more than that.

Quite suddenly something seemed to start his mental lethargy, his brain resumed its functions instantaneously. There was a roaring in his ears like the sound of a wind, and he awoke to full consciousness and realization of what Sir William had told him, of the unutterable terror and frightfulness of his coming doom. All over his face, hands, and body, beads of perspiration started out in little jets. Then he felt as if a piece of ice were being slid smoothly down his spine—from the neck downwards. His hands opened and shut convulsively, gripping at nothing, and the soles of his feet, in their list slippers, became suddenly and strangely hot. The collar round his neck seemed to be throttling him, and his mouth opened, gasping for air.

Then that deep and hidden chamber was filled with a wail so mournful, melancholy and hopeless, so dismal and inhuman that the very concrete walls themselves might also have melted and dissolved away before the fire of such agony and the sound of such despair.

He knew the dark and more sinister reason of his captivity, he knew what they had made him and for what dreadful purpose.

Ah! It was a supreme revenge. They had stolen him from his love and they had stolen his very inmost soul from him. All the agonized prayers which had gone up to God like thin flames had been caught upon their way like tangible and material things, caught by the devilish power of one man, and thrown upon the wall for him to see and laugh over. All his passionate longing for Marjorie, all the messages he tried to frame and send her through the darkness and the walls of stone, all these had been but an amusement and a derision for the fiend whose slave he had become. And all his hatred, his deep cursings of his captor, all his futile half-formed plans for an escape were all known to the two men. And still worse, his very memories, his most sacred memories, had been taken from him and used as a theatre by William Gouldesbrough and Wilson Guest. He understood now the remarks that the assistant had sometimes made, the cruel and extraordinary knowledge he seemed to display of things that had happened in Rathbone's past. It was all quite plain, all terribly distinct.

And worst of all, the sacred moments when he had avowed his love for Marjorie, and she, that peerless maiden, had come to him in answer, these dear memories, which alone had kept his cooling mind from madness, were known and exulted over by these men. They had seen him kiss Marjorie; all the endearments of the lovers had passed before them like tableaux in a pantomime. Yes; this indeed was more than any brain could bear.

Rathbone knew now that he was going mad.

Of course, God never heard his prayers, they could not get up to God. Those beasts had caught them in a net and God never heard them. There had always been that one thought, even in the darkest hour—that thought that God knew and would come to his aid.

The face, the rigid face, worked and wrinkled horribly. Ripples of agony passed up and down it like the ripples upon the wind-blown surface of a pool. It was not human now any longer, and the curious and lovers of what is terrible may see such faces in the museum of the mad painter of pictures at Brussels.

Then, as a stone falls, consciousness flashed away, though the face still moved and wrinkled automatically.

Presently the door of the cell was unlocked, and Wilson Guest came in. He was rather drunk and rather angry also.

Sir William had come back from telling Rathbone the truth about what had been done to him and what they proposed to do. Guest had been waiting in the study with great expectation. He congratulated himself on having worked up his patron sufficiently to make him visit Rathbone himself and inform him of his fate. He had not thought that Gouldsbrough could have been brought to do any such thing, and he had awaited his chief's arrival with intense and cynical expectation.

When at last Sir William did enter the room, his face was very pale, but the passion of hideous anger had quite gone from it, and it was calm and quiet. The eyes no longer blazed, the lips were set in their usual curve.

"Have you told him, William?" Guest asked in his malicious voice. "Have you told him everything? Come along, then, let's go into the laboratory at once and see what he thinks about it."

There was no response. Sir William seemed as a man in a dream. When at length he did answer his voice appeared to come from a long distance, and it was sad and almost kindly.

"Yes," he said, in that gentle mournful voice; "yes, my friend, I have told him. Poor, poor fellow! How terrible his thoughts must be now. I wish I could do something for him. The spectacle of such agony is indeed terrible. Poor, poor fellow!"

He sank into a chair, his head fell upon his breast, his fingers interlocked, and he seemed to be sleeping.

Guest looked at him for a moment stupidly. The assistant was fuddled with drink, and could not understand these strange symptoms and phenomena of a great brain which was swiftly being undermined.

All he noticed was that Sir William certainly seemed sunk in upon himself like an old man.

With a gesture of impatience he left the room and traversed the corridor until he came to the largest laboratory, where the Thought Spectroscope instruments were. He turned up the electric light, found the switch which controlled part of the machinery, moved the switch and turned down the electric light once more, looking expectantly at the opposite wall. There was no great circle of light such as he waited for.

With an oath he stumbled out of the laboratory, not forgetting to lock it carefully. And then, unlocking another door, a door which formed the back of a great cupboard in No. C room, a door which nobody ever saw, he went down a flight of stone steps to those old disused cellars, in one of which Rathbone was kept. He opened the door and found the captive still lying upon the vulcanite couch, his face still working like the face of a mechanical toy, and in a deep swoon.

Guest hastily unbuckled the straps and released the neck from the collar. He carried Rathbone to the bed, locked the thin steel chains, which hung from the roof, upon the anklets and the handcuffs, and then dashed water repeatedly in his face.

In his pocket, Mr. Guest invariably carried a supply of liquor. It sometimes happened that in going from a room where he had exhausted all the liquor, into another room where he knew he would find more, the two rooms would be separated by a corridor of some little length, and it sometimes happened that Mr. Guest needed a drink when he arrived in the middle of the corridor. So he always carried a large, silver-mounted flask in the pocket of his coat. He unscrewed this now and poured some whisky down the captive's throat. In a minute or two a faint tinge of colour appeared upon the cheekbones, and with a shudder and sob the tortured soul came back to the tortured body, which even yet it was not to be suffered to leave.

"That's better," Mr. Guest remarked. "I thought you had gone off, I really did. Not yet, my dear boy, not yet. Would not do at all. Would not suit our purpose. I'm sure you won't be so disobliging as to treat us in such a shabby way after all we have done for you. I understand William has told

you of the delicate attentions by which we propose to make your exit as interesting and as valuable to science as possible."

Rathbone looked at him steadily. He spoke to him in a weak, thin voice.

"Yes," he said, "I know now, I know everything. But have you no single spark of pity or compassion within you, that you can come here to mock and gloat over a man who is surely suffering more than any one else has ever suffered in the history of the world? Is it impossible to touch you or move you in any way?"

Mr. Guest rubbed his hands with huge enjoyment.

"Ah!" he said chuckling, while the pink, hairless face was one mask of pleasure. "Ah, that is how I have been wanting to hear you talk for a long, long time. I thought we should break you down at last, though. For my part I should have told you long before, only William thought that you would not give yourself away about Miss Marjorie Poole if you knew that we saw it all. However, we know now, so it don't matter. Dear little girl she is, Mr. Rathbone. Sir William sees her every day. She thinks you have gone off with a barmaid and are living quite happily, helping her to manage a pub. in the East. Sir William sees her every day, and she sits on his knee, and they kiss each other and laugh about being in love. Charming, isn't it? Fancy you talking to me like that. Pity? Pity? Aren't I your best friend? Don't I bring you your food every day? And didn't I give you a drink just now? That's more than William did. And besides to-morrow aren't I going to begin the injections that in a month's time or so will make you appear a confirmed dipsomaniac, just before I come down here and hold your head in a bucket of water until you are drowned? Then, dress your body in nice, dirty clothes and have you dropped in the Thames just above Wapping. Oh, Mr. Rathbone, how could you say such cruel things to your good friend, Mr. Wilson Guest? Well, I must be going. I don't think you will want anything more to-night, will you? Good night. Sleep pleasantly. I am going to go to bed myself, and I shall lie awake thinking of the fun there will be at the inquest when the Doctor reports after the post-mortem that you were a confirmed drunkard, and all the world, including Miss Marjorie Poole, will know the real truth about Guy Rathbone's disappearance."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THEY ALL WENT TO THE HOUSE IN REGENT'S PARK

The little door in the wall of Sir William Gouldesbrough's old Georgian house stood wide open. Carriages were driving up, and the butler was constantly ushering visitors into the vast sombre hall, while a footman kept escorting this or that arrival up the gravel path among the laurel bushes.

It was afternoon, a dull and livid afternoon. Clouds had come down too near to London, and thunder lurked behind them. Never at any time a cheerful place, the old walled house of the scientist to-day wore its most depressing aspect.

The well-known people, who were invited to the demonstration of a stupendous and revolutionary discovery, looked with ill-concealed curiosity at the house, the garden, and the gloomy dignity of the hall.

There has always been a great deal of surmise and curiosity about Sir William's home and private life. That so distinguished a man was a bachelor was in itself an anomaly; and, though Gouldesbrough went continually into society, when he himself entertained it was generally at restaurants, except in very rare instances. So the world of London had come to regard the house in Regent's Park as a sort of wizard's cave, a secret and mysterious place where the modern magician evolved wonders which were to change the whole course of modern life.

About forty people had been invited to the demonstration.

Lord Malvin was there, of course. He came in company with Donald Megbie and Sir Harold Oliver.

All three men seemed singularly grave and preoccupied, and, as the other guests noted the strange, and even stern, expression upon Lord Malvin's face, they whispered that the leader of the scientific world felt that on this day he was to be deposed and must resign his captaincy for ever.

But in this case, as it generally is, gossip was at fault. Nobody knew of the strange conference which had been held by Donald Megbie with Lord Malvin and Sir Harold Oliver. Nobody knew how Miss Marjorie Poole had driven up to Lord Malvin's house in Portland Place one afternoon with Donald Megbie. Nobody would have believed, even if they had been told, how the two grave scientists (who realized that, however many truths are discovered, there still lie hidden forces which we shall never understand this side of the Veil) had listened to the extraordinary story the journalist and the society girl had to tell.

Therefore, on this important afternoon, though Lord Malvin's seriousness was commented upon, it was entirely misunderstood.

Various other scientists from France, Germany and America were present. Donald Megbie, the editor of the *Eastminster Gazette*, and a famous novelist represented the press and the literary world.

The Bishop of West London, frail, alert, his grey eyes filled with eagerness, was one of the guests. Dean Weare came with him, and the political world had sent three ambassadors in the persons of Mr. Decies, the Home Secretary, Sir James Clouston and Sir William Ellrington. There was an academician who looked like a jockey, and a judge who looked like a trainer. The rest of the guests were all well-known people, who, if they were not particularly interested in science, were yet just the people who could not be ignored on an important occasion. That is to say, they belonged to that little coterie of men and women in London who have no other *metier* than to be present at functions of extreme importance! For no particular reason they have become fixtures, and their personalities are entirely merged in the unearned celebrity of their name and the apparent necessity for their presence.

The men in their black frock coats passed over the great galleried hall like ghosts, and the white furs of the ladies, and the grey plumes and feathers of their hats, did little to relieve the general note of sadness, or to bring any colour into Sir William Goulesbrough's house. Among the last arrivals of all were Lady Poole and her daughter.

The guests had congregated in the hall where servants were handing about tea, and where two great fires warmed the air indeed, but could not destroy the sense of mental chill.

Sir William had not yet made his appearance, and it was understood that when the party was complete the butler was to lead them straight to the laboratories. The fact marked the seriousness of the occasion.

This was no social party, no scientific picnic, at which one went to see things which would interest and amuse, and to chatter, just as one chatters at an exhibition of water-colours in Pall Mall. Everybody felt this, everybody knew it, and everybody experienced a sense of awe and gravity as befitted people who were about to witness something which would mark an epoch in the history of the world and change the whole course of human life.

As Marjorie Poole came into the hall with her mother, every one saw that she looked ill. Her face was pale, there were dark rings under her eyes; and, as she stepped over the threshold of the door, one or two people noticed that she shivered. It was remarked also, that directly the two ladies entered, Lord Malvin, Sir Harold Oliver, and Mr. Megbie went up to them in a marked manner, and seemed to constitute themselves as a sort of bodyguard for the rest of the stay in the hall.

"She does not look much like a girl who is engaged to the most successful man of the day, does she?" Mrs. Hoskin-Heath said to Lord Landsend.

"No, you are right," Lord Landsend whispered. "She is afraid Sir William's machine won't work, and that the whole thing won't come off, don't you know. And, for my part, though I don't profess to understand exactly what Sir William is going to show us, I bet a fiver that it is not more wonderful than things I have seen scores of times at Maskelyne and Cook's. Wonderful place that, Mrs. Hoskin-Heath. I often go there on a dull afternoon; it makes one's flesh creep, 'pon my word it does. I have been there about fifty times, and I have never yet felt safe from the disappearing egg."

The butler was seen to come up to Lord Malvin and ask him a question. The peer looked round, and seemed to see that every one was prepared to move. He nodded to the man, who crossed the hall, bowed, and opened a door to the right of the great central staircase.

"My master tells me to say, my lord," he said, addressing Lord Malvin, but including the whole of the company in his gaze—"my master tells me to say that he will be very much obliged if you will come into the laboratory."

A footman went up to the door and held it open, while the butler, with a backward look, disappeared into the passage, and led the way towards the real scene of the afternoon's events.

As that throng of famous people walked down the long corridor, which led past the study door, not a single one of them knew or could surmise that all and severally they were about to experience the emotion of their lives.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DOOM BEGINS

The visitors found themselves in the laboratory, a large building lit by means of its glass roof.

Sir William Goulesbrough, dressed in a grey morning suit, received them. He shook hands with one or two, and bowed to the rest; but there was no regular greeting of each person who came in.

At one side of the laboratory were three long rows of arm-chairs, built up in three tiers on

platforms, much in the same way as the seats are arranged for hospital students in an operating theatre.

The guests were invited to take their places, and in a minute or two had settled themselves, the more frivolous and non-scientific part of them whispering and laughing together, as people do before the curtain rises at a play. This is what they saw.

About two yards away from the lowest row of seats, which was practically on the floor level, the actual apparatus of the discovery began. Upon specially constructed tables, on steel supports, which rose through the boarding of the floor, were a series of machines standing almost the whole length of the room.

Upon the opposite wall to the spectators was a large screen, upon which the Thought Pictures were to be thrown.

Save for the strange apparatus in all its intricacy of brass and vulcanite, coiled wire and glass, there was more than a suggestion of the school-room in which the pupils are entertained by a magic-lantern exhibition.

Marjorie Poole and her mother sat next to Lord Malvin, on either side of him, while Donald Megbie, Sir Harold Oliver, and the Bishop of West London were immediately to their right and left.

Gouldesbrough had not formally greeted Marjorie, but as he stood behind his apparatus ready to begin the demonstration, he flashed one bright look at her full of triumph and exultation. Megbie, who was watching very closely, saw that the girl's face did not change or soften, even at this supreme moment, when the unutterable triumph of the man who loved her was about to be demonstrated to the world.

Amid a scene of considerable excitement on the part of the non-scientific of the audience, and the strained tense attention of the famous scientists, Sir William Gouldesbrough began.

"My Lord, my illustrious *confrères*, ladies and gentlemen, I have to thank you very much for all coming here this afternoon to see the law which I have discovered actually applied by means of mechanical processes, which have been adapted, invented and made by myself and my brilliant partner and helper, Mr. Wilson Guest."

As he said this, Sir William turned towards the end of the room where his assistant was busy bending over one of the machines.

The man, with the large hairless face, was pale, and his fingers were shaking, as they moved about among the screws and wires. He did not look up as Gouldesbrough paid him this just tribute, though every one of the spectators turned towards him at the mention of his name.

Truth to tell, Mr. Wilson Guest was, for the first time for many years, absolutely bereft of all alcoholic liquor since the night before. For the first time in their partnership Gouldesbrough had insisted upon Guest's absolute abstention. He had never done such a thing before, as he pointed out to his friend, but on this day he said his decision was final and he meant to be obeyed.

The frenzied entreaties of the poor wretch about mid-day, his miserable abasement and self-surrender, as he wept for his poison, were useless alike. He had been forced to yield, and at this moment he was suffering something like torture. It was indeed only by the greatest effort of his weakened will that he could attend to the mechanical duties of adjusting the sensitive machines for the demonstration which was to follow.

"I cannot suppose that any of you here are now unaware of the nature of my experiments and discovery. It has been ventilated in the press so largely during the last few days, and Mr. Donald Megbie has written such a lucid account of the influence which he believes the discovery will have upon modern life, that I am sure you all realize something of the nature of what I am about to show you.

"To put it very plainly, I am going to show you how thought can be collected in the form of vibrations, in the form of fluid electric current, and collected directly from the brain of the thinker as he thinks.

"I am further going to demonstrate to you how this current can be transformed into a visible, living and actual representation of the thoughts of the thinker."

He stopped for a moment, and there was a little murmur from his guests. Then he went on.

"Before proceeding to actual experiment, it is necessary that I should give you some account of the means by which I have achieved such marvellous results. I do not propose to do this in extremely technical language, for were I to do so, a large portion of those here this afternoon would not be able to follow me. I shall proceed to explain in words, which I think most of you will understand.

"My illustrious *confrères* in Science will follow me and understand the technical aspect of what I am going to put into very plain language, and to them especially I would say that, after the actual experiment has been conducted, I shall beg them to examine my apparatus and to go into the matter with me from a purely scientific aspect.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, let me begin.

"That light is transmitted by waves in the ether is abundantly proved, but the nature of the waves and the nature of the ether have, until the present, always been uncertain. It is known that the ultimate particles of bodies exist in a state of vibration, but it cannot be assumed that the vibration is purely mechanical. Experiment has proved the existence of magnetic and electric strains in the ether, and I have found that electro-magnetic strains are propagated with the same speed as that of which light travels.

"You will now realize, to put it in very simple language, that the connection between light and what the man in the street would call currents, or waves of electricity, is very intimate. When I had fully established this in my own mind, I studied the physiology of the human body for a long period. I found that the exciting agents in the nerve system of the animal frame are frequently electric, and by experimenting upon the nerve system in the human eye, I found that it could be excited by the reception of electro-magnetic waves.

"In the course of my experiments I began more and more frequently to ask myself, 'What is the exact nature of thought?'

"You all know how Signor Marconi can send out waves from one of his transmitters. I am now about to tell you that the human brain is nothing more nor less than an organism, which, in the process of thought, sends out into the surrounding ether a number of subtle vibrations. But, as these vibrations are so akin in their very essence to the nature of light, it occurred to me that it might be possible to gather them together as they were given off, to direct them to a certain point, and then, by means of transforming them into actual light, pass that light through a new form of spectroscope; and, instead of coloured rays being projected upon a screen through the prism of the instrument, the actual living thought of the brain would appear for every one to see.

"This is, in brief, precisely what I have done, and it is precisely what I am going to show you in a few minutes. Having given you this briefest and slightest outline of the law I have discovered and proved, I will explain to you something of the mechanical means by which I have proved it, and by which I am going to show it to you in operation."

He stopped once more, and moved a little away from where he had been standing. Every one was now thoroughly interested. There was a tremulous silence as the tall, lean figure moved towards a small table on which the shining conical cap, or helmet of brass, lay.

Sir William took up the object and held it in his right hand, so that every one could see it distinctly. From the top, where the button of an ordinary cap would be, a thin silk-covered wire drooped down to the floor and finally rose again and disappeared within a complicated piece of mechanism a few feet away.

"This cap," Sir William said, "is placed upon the head of a human being. You will observe later that it covers the whole of the upper part of the head down to the eyes, and also descends behind to the nape of the neck and along each side of the neck to the ears.

"A person wearing this cap is quite unconscious of anything more than the mere fact of its weight upon his head. But what is actually going on is, that every single thought he secretes is giving off this vibration, not into the ether, but within the space enclosed by the cap. These vibrations cannot penetrate through the substance with which the cap is lined, and in order to obtain an outlet, they can only use the outlet which I have prepared for them. This is placed in the top of the cap, and is something like those extremely delicate membranes which receive the vibrations of the human voice in a telephone and transmit them along a wire to the receiver at the other end of it."

He put down the cap, and looked towards his audience. Not a single person moved in the very least. The distinguished party, tier upon tier, might have been a group of wooden statues painted and coloured to resemble the human form. Sir William moved on.

"Here," he said, "is a piece of apparatus enclosed in this box, which presented the first great difficulty in the course of the twenty years during which I have been engaged upon this work. Within this wooden shell," he tapped it with his fingers, "the thought vibrations, if I may call them so, are collected and transformed into definite and separate *electric* currents. Every single variation in their strength or quality is changed into a corresponding electric current, which, in its turn, varies from its fellow currents. So far, I have found that from between 3,000 to 4,000 different currents, differing in their tensity and their power, are generated by the ordinary thoughts of the ordinary human being.

"You may take it from me, as I shall presently show my scientific brethren, that within this box Thought Vibrations are transformed into *electric* currents."

He passed on to a much larger machine, which was connected by a network of wires covered with crimson and yellow silk, to the mahogany box which he had just left.

The outside of the new piece of apparatus resembled nothing so much as one of those enormous wine-coolers which one sees in big restaurants or hotels. It was a large square case standing upon four legs. But from the lid of this case rose something which suggested a very large photographic camera, but made of dull steel. The tube, in which the lens of an ordinary camera is set, was in this case prolonged for six or seven feet, and was lost in the interior of the next machine.

And now, for the first time, the strained ears of the spectators caught a note of keen vibration

and excitement in Sir William Goulesbrough's voice. He had been speaking very quietly and confidently hitherto; but now the measured utterance rose half a tone; and, as when some great actor draws near in speech to the climax of the event he mimics, so Sir William also began to be agitated, and so also the change in tone sent a thrill and quiver through the ranks of those who sat before him.

"Here," he said, "I have succeeded in transforming my electric currents into light. That is nothing, you may think for a moment, the electric current produces light in your own houses at any moment; but you must remember that in your incandescent bulbs the light is always the same in its quality. Light of this sort, passed through the prism of a spectroscope will always tell the same story when the screen presents itself for analysis. My problem has been to produce an infinite variety of light, so that every single thought vibration will produce, when transformed, its own *special* and *individual* quality of light, and that," he concluded, "I have done."

Sir Harold Oliver, who had been leaning forward with grey eyes so strained and intent that all the life seemed to have gone out of them and they resembled sick pearls, gave a gasp as Sir William paused.

Then Goulesbrough continued.

He placed his hand upon the thing like a camera which rose from the lid of the larger structure below it.

"Within this chamber," he said, "all the light generated below is collected and focussed. It passes in one volume through this object."

He moved onwards, as he spoke, running his fingers along the pipe which led him to the next marvel in this stupendous series.

"I have now come," he began again, "to what Mr. Guest and myself might perhaps be allowed to think as our supreme triumph. Here is our veritable Thought Spectroscope within this erection, which, as you will observe, is much larger than anything else I have shown you. The light which pours along that tube is passed through, what I will only now designate as a prism, to keep the analogy of the light spectroscope, and is split up into its component parts.

"You will see that, rising out of this iron box," he ran his hand over the sides of it as if he loved it, "the lens projects just like the lens of a bioscope. This lens is directed full upon that great white screen which is exactly opposite to you all; and this is my final demonstration of the mechanism which I am now about to set in motion to prove to you that I have now triumphed over the hitherto hidden Realm of Thought. From this lens I shall pour upon the screen in a minute or two for you all to see, without doubt and in simple view, the thoughts of the man or woman on whom I shall place the cap."

He ceased. The first part of the demonstration was over.

Lord Malvin rose in his seat. His voice was broken by emotion.

"Sir," he said, "I know, none better perhaps in this room, of the marvellous series of triumphs which have led you to this supreme moment. I know how absolutely and utterly true all you have told us is, and I know that we are going to witness your triumph."

He turned round to the people behind him.

"We are going to see," he said, "the human soul laid bare for the first time in the history of the world."

Then he turned once more to Sir William, and his voice, though still full of almost uncontrollable emotion, became deep and stern.

"Sir William Goulesbrough," he said, "I have to salute you as the foremost scientist of all time, greater than Newton, greater than Darwin, greater than us all. And I pray to God that you have used the great talent He has given you in a worthy way, and I pray that, if you have done this, you will always continue to do so; for surely it is only for some special reason that God has allowed you this mastery."

He ceased, and there was rustle and hum of movement among all the people, as this patriarch lifted his voice with almost a note of warning and menace in it.

It was all so unusual, so unexpected—why did this strange prophetic note come into the proceedings? What was hidden in the old man's brain?

Every one felt the presence, the unseen presence of deep waters and hidden things.

Marjorie Poole had bowed her head, she was absolutely motionless. There was a tension in the air.

Sir William Goulesbrough's head was bowed also, as he listened with courteous deference to the words of one whose name had been chief and most honoured in the scientific world for so many years. Those who watched him remarked afterwards that he seemed to be stricken into stone for a moment, as words which were almost a veiled accusation pealed out into the great room.

Then they saw Sir William once more himself in a swift moment. His eyes were bright and there

was a look of triumph on his face.

"I thank you, Lord Malvin," he said, in a voice which was arrogant and keen, "I thank you for your congratulations, your belief, and for your hopes for me; and now my lord, ladies, and gentlemen, shall we not proceed to the actual demonstration?"

"I am going to ask that one of you come down from your seat and allow me to place the cap upon your head. I shall then darken the laboratory, and the actual thoughts of the lady or gentleman who submits herself or himself to the experiment will be thrown upon the screen."

There was a dead silence now, but most of the people there looked at each other in doubt and fear.

It might well be that, confronted for the first time in their lives with the possibility of the inmost secrets of their souls being laid bare, the men and women of the world would shrink in terror. Who of us, indeed, is able to look clearly and fairly into his own heart, and realize in very actual truth what he is! Do we not, day by day, and hour by hour, apply the flattering unction to our souls that we aren't so very bad after all; that what we did last week, and what, sub-consciously we know we shall do again in the week that is coming, is only the result of a temperament which cannot be controlled in this or that particular, and that we have many genial virtues—not exactly specified or defined—which make it all up to a high level of conduct after all?

Yes! There was a silence there, as indeed there would have been in any other assembly when such a proposal was made.

They were all ashamed, they were all frightened. They none of them dared submit themselves to this ordeal.

And as they looked at their host they saw that a faint and mocking smile was playing about his mouth, and that the eyes above it flamed and shone.

Then they heard his voice once more, and the new and subtle quality of mockery had crept into that also.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am waiting for one of you to give me an opportunity of proving all that I have told you."

"My lord, will not you afford me the great privilege of being the first subject of the new experiment?"

Lord Malvin looked very straightly and rather strangely at Sir William Goulesbrough.

"Sir," he said, "I am not afraid to display my thoughts to this company, but shall I be the first person who has ever done so? Of course not. You have had other subjects for experiment, whether willing or unwilling—I do not know."

Once again the guests saw Sir William's face change. What strange and secret duel, they asked themselves, was going on before them? How was it that Lord Malvin and Sir William Goulesbrough seemed to be in the twin positions of accuser and accused?

What was all this?

Lord Malvin continued—

"I am ready to submit myself, Sir William, in the cause of Science. But I would ask you, very, very earnestly, if you desire that the thoughts that animate me at this moment should be given to every one here?"

Goulesbrough stepped back a pace as though some one had struck him. There was a momentary and painful silence. And then it was that the Bishop of West London rose in his place.

"Sir William," he said, "I shall be highly honoured if you will allow me to be the first subject. I shall fix my thoughts upon some definite object, and then we shall see if my memory is good. I have only just come back from a holiday in the Holy Land, and it will give me great pleasure to sit in your chair and to try and construct some memories of Jerusalem for you all."

With that the Bishop stepped down on to the floor of the laboratory, and sat in the chair which Sir William indicated.

The spectators saw the brass cap carefully fitted on the prelate's head.

Then Sir William stepped to the little vulcanite table upon which the controlling switches were—there was a click, shutters rolled over the sky-lights in the roof, already obscured by the approach of evening, and the electric lights of the laboratory all went out simultaneously. The darkness was profound. The great experiment had begun.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DOOM CONTINUES

They were all watching, and watching very intently. All they could see was a bright circle of light which flashed out upon the opposite wall. It was just as though they were watching an ordinary exhibition of the magic-lantern or the cinematograph.

And suddenly, swiftly, these world-worn and weary people of society, these scientists who lived by measure and by rule, saw that all Sir William Goulesbrough had said was true—and truer than he himself knew.

For upon this white screen, where all their eyes were fixed, there came a picture of the Holy City, and it was a picture such as no single person there had ever seen before.

For it was not that definite and coloured presentment of a scene caught by the camera and reproduced through the mechanical means of a lens, which is a thing which has no soul. It was the picture of that Holy City to which all men's thoughts turn in trouble or in great crises of their lives. And it was a picture coloured by the imagination of the man who had just come back from Jerusalem, and who remembered it in the light of the Christian Faith and informed it with all the power of his own personality.

They saw the sharp outlines of the olive trees, immemorially old, as a fringe to the picture. The sun was shining, the white domes and roofs were glistening, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre loomed up large in this vista, seen through a temperament, and through a memory, and seen from a hill.

For a brief space, they all caught their breath and shuddered at the marvellous revelation of the power and magnificence of thought which was revealed to them at that moment. And then they watched the changing, shifting phantom, which was born from the thought of this good man, with a chill and shudder at the incredible wonder of it all.

The afternoon, as it has been said, was thunderous and grim. While the representatives of the world that matters had been listening to Sir William, the forces of nature had been massing themselves upon the frontier-line of experience and thought. And now, at this great moment, the clouds broke, the thunder stammered, and in that darkened place the white and amethyst lightning came and flickered like a spear thrown from immensity.

The gong of the thunder, the crack and flame of the lightning, passed. There was a dead silence. Still the spectators saw the mapped landscape of the Holy City shining before them, glad, radiant and serene.

And then, old Lady Poole dropped her fan—a heavy fan made of ebony and black silk. It clattered down the tier of seats and brought an alien note into the tension and the darkness of the laboratory.

Everybody started in the gloom. There was a little momentary flutter of excitement. And, as they all watched the gleaming circle of light upon which the brain of the Bishop had painted his memories so truthfully and well, they saw a sudden change. The whole, beautiful picture became troubled, misty. It shook like a thing seen through water at a great depth.

Then the vision of the City where God suffered went straight away. There was no more of it. It vanished as a breath breathed upon a window clouds and vanishes.

The concentration of mind of the Bishop must then—as it was said afterwards—have been interrupted by the sudden sound of the falling fan, for all those celebrated men and women who sat and watched saw dim grey words, like clouds of smoke which had formed themselves into the written symbols of speech, appear in the light.

And these were the words—

"God will not allow——"

At that moment the silence was broken by a tiny sound. It is always the small sound that defines blackness and silence.

Sir William, who perhaps had realized where the thoughts of the Bishop were leading him, who had doubtless understood the terror of the naked soul, the terror which he himself had made possible, switched on the light. The whole laboratory was illuminated, and it was seen that the people were looking at each other with white faces; and that the folk, who were almost strangers, were grasping each other by the wrist. And the Bishop himself was sitting quietly in the chair, with a very pale face and a slight smile.

At that moment the people who had come to catch the visual truth of this supreme wonder, rose as one man. Voices were heard laughing and sobbing; little choked voices mingled and merged in a cacophany of fear.

It was all light now, light and bright, and these men and women of the world were weeping on each other's shoulders.

The Bishop rose.

"Oh, please," he said, "please, my dears, be quiet. This is wonderful, this is inexplicable, but we have only begun. Let us see this thing through to the very, very end. Hush! Be quiet! There is no reason, nor is there any need, for hysteria or for fear."

The words of the Churchman calmed them all. They looked at him, they looked at each other with startled eyes, and once more there was a great and enduring silence.

Then Sir William spoke. His face was as pale as linen; he was not at all the person whom they had seen half-an-hour ago—but he spoke swiftly to them.

"His Lordship," he said, "has given us one instance of how the brain works, and he has enabled us to watch his marvellous memory of what he has so lately seen. And now, I will ask some one or other of you to come down here and help me."

Young Lord Landsend looked at Mrs. Hoskin-Heath and winked.

"I shall be very pleased, Sir William," he said in the foolish, staccato voice of his class and kind, "I shall be very pleased, Sir William, to think for you and all the rest of us here."

Lord Landsend stumbled down from where he sat and went towards the chair. As he did so, there were not wanting people who whispered to each other that a penny for his thoughts was an enormous price to pay. The cap was fitted on his head; they all saw it gleaming there above the small and vacuous face; and then once more the lights went out.

The great circle of white light upon the screen remained fixed and immovable. No picture formed itself or occurred within the frame of light and shadow. For nearly a minute the circle remained unsullied.

Then Mrs. Hoskin-Heath began to titter. Every one, relieved from the tension of the first experiment, joined her in her laugh. They all realized that young Lord Landsend could not think, and had not any thoughts at all. In the middle of their laughter, which grew and rose until the whole place was filled with it, the young man, doubtless spurred on by this unaccustomed derision, began to think.

And what they all saw was just this—some one they had all seen before, many times, after dinner.

They simply saw, in rather cloudy colour, Miss Popsy Wopsy, the celebrated Gaiety girl, alertly doing things of no importance, while the baton of the conductor made a moving shadow upon the chiffon of her frock.

And so here was another brain, caught up, classified and seen.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. WILSON GUEST MAKES A MISTAKE

Mr. Wilson Guest had seen all this many times before. The actual demonstration would have given him amusement and filled him with that odd secret pride which was the only reward he asked from that science which he had followed so long under different conditions than the present.

If Sir William Gouldsbrough had not absolutely prohibited the use of any alcohol upon that day, Guest might have been normal and himself. It was in this matter that Sir William made a great mistake. In his extreme nervousness and natural anxiety, he forgot the pathology of his subject, and did not realize how dangerous it is to rob a man of his drug, and then expect him to do his work.

Guest's assistance had been absolutely necessary in the first instance, in order to prepare the various parts of the Thought Spectrum, and to ensure the proper working of the machinery.

But now, when all that was done, when the demonstration was actually going on and everything was working smoothly and well, there was no immediate need at the moment for Guest's presence in the laboratory.

Accordingly, while Lord Landsend was vainly trying to secrete thought, Wilson Guest slipped out by the side-door in the dark. He was in a long passage leading to the other experimental rooms, and he heaved a great sigh of relief. High above in the air, the thunder could still be heard growling, but the corridor itself, lit by its rows of electric lights and softly carpeted, seemed to the wretched man nothing but an avenue to immediate happiness.

He shambled and almost trotted towards the dining-room in the other part of the house, where he knew that he would find something to drink quicker than anywhere else. He crossed the big hall and went into the dining-room. No one was there.

It was a panelled room with a softly glowing wood fire upon the hearth, and heavy crimson curtains shutting out the dying lights of the day. On a gleaming mahogany sideboard were bottles of cut-glass, ruby, diamond, and amber; bottles in which the soft firelight gleamed and was repeated in a thousand twinkling points.

A loud sob of relief burst from the drunkard, and he went up to the sideboard with the impish greed and longing that one sees in some great ape.

And now, as his shadow, cast upon the wall in the firelight, parodied and distorted all his movements, there seemed *two* obscene and evil creatures in the rich and quiet room. It was as though the man with his huge hairless face were being watched and waited for by an ape-like ambassador from hell.

Guest clutched the mahogany sideboard and, his fingers were so hot that a greyness like that of damp breath on frosted glass glowed out upon the wood—it seemed as if the man's very touch brought mildew and blight.

Guest ran his eye rapidly along the decanters. His throat felt as though it was packed with hot flour. His mouth tasted as if he had been sucking a brass tap. His tongue was swollen and his lips were hard, cracked, and feverish. He snatched the brandy bottle from a spirit-case, and poured all that was in it into a heavy cut-glass tumbler. Then, looking round for more, for the tantalus had not been more than one-fourth part full, he saw a long wicker-covered bottle of curaçao, and he began to pour from it into the brandy. Then, without water, or mineral water, he began to gulp down this astonishing and powerful mixture, which, in a fourth of its quantity, would probably have struck down the ordinary man, as a tree snaps and falls in a sudden wind.

It had been Guest's intention to take enough alcohol to put him into something like a normal condition, and then to return to the laboratory to assist at the concluding scenes of the demonstration, and to enjoy it in his own malicious and sinister fashion. But as the liquor seemed to course through his veins and to relieve them of the intolerable strain, as he felt his whole body respond to the dose of poison to which he had accustomed it, thoughts of returning to the laboratory became very dim and misty.

Here was this large comfortable room with its panelled walls, its old family portraits in their massive gilt frames, this fire of wood logs in a great open hearth, sending out so pleasant and hospitable an invitation to remain. Every fibre of the wretch's body urged him to take the twilight hour and enjoy it.

Guest sat down in a great arm-chair, padded with crimson leather, and gazed dreamily into the white heart of the fire.

He felt at peace, and for five minutes sat there without movement, looking in the flickering firelight like some grotesque Chinese sculpture, some god of darkness made by a silent moon-faced man on the far shores of the Yang-tze-Kiang.

Then Mr. Guest began to move again; the fuel that he had taken was burning out. The man's organism had become like one of those toy engines for children, which have for furnace a little methyl lamp, and which must be constantly renewed if the wheels of the mechanism are to continue to revolve.

Mr. Guest rose from the arm-chair and shambled over to the sideboard again. The bottle of curaçao was still almost full, though there did not appear to be any more brandy.

That would do, he thought, and he poured from the bottle into his glass as if he had been pouring beer. The wretched man had forgotten that, in his present state—a state upon the very verge of swift and hidden paroxysm and of death—the long abstention of the morning and afternoon had modified his physiological condition. Moreover, the suddenness of these stealthy potations in the dining-room began to have their way with him. He was a man whom it was almost impossible to make intoxicated, as the ordinary person understands intoxication. When Guest was drunk, his mind became several shades more evil, that was all.

But at this moment the man succumbed, and in half-an-hour his brain was absolutely clouded and confused. He had forgotten both time and occasion, and could not think coherently.

At last he seemed to realize this himself. He rose to his feet and, clutching hold of the dining-room table, swayed and lurched towards the dining-room door. There was a dim consciousness within him of something which was imminently necessary to be done, but which he had forgotten or was unable to recall.

"What was it?" he kept asking himself with a thick indistinctness. "I knew I had somethin' to do, somethin' important, can't think what it was."

At that moment his hand, which he had thrust into his pocket, touched a key.

"I've got it," he said, "course, I know now. I must go down and put the cap on Rathbone, after I have injected the alcohol preparation. William and I want to sit in front of the screen and follow his thoughts; they are funnier than they ever used to be before we told him what we were doing to him. I'll just take one more drink, then I'll go down-stairs to the cellars at once."

CHAPTER XXV

AT LAST!

When the sounds of amused laughter at Lord Landsend's unconscious revelation had passed

away, and that young nobleman, slightly flushed indeed, but still with the imperturbability that a man of his class and kind learns how to wear on all occasions, had regained his seat, a fire of questions poured in upon Sir William Gouldsbrough.

The famous scientists of the party had all risen and were conferring together in a ripple of rapid and exciting talk, which for the convenience of the foreign members of their number, was conducted in French.

Marjorie Poole, who had not looked at Sir William at all during the whole of the afternoon, was very pale and quiet.

Gouldsbrough had noticed this, and even in the moment of supreme triumph his heart was heavy within him. He feared that something irrevocable had come between him and the girl he loved, and her pallor only intensified his longing to be done with the whole thing, to be alone with her and to have the explanation which he desired so keenly and yet dreaded so acutely. For what Lord Malvin had said to him had stabbed him with a deadly fear, as each solemn, significant word rang through the room.

"Could it be," he asked himself, "could it possibly be that these people suspected or knew anything?"

His quick brain answered the question in its own swift and logical fashion. It was utterly impossible that Lord Malvin *could* know anything. His words were a coincidence and that was all. No, he need not fear, and possibly, he thought, the long strain of work and worry had had its influence upon his nerves and he had become morbid and unstrung. That fear passed, but there was still in his heart the fear, and strangely enough an even greater fear, that he would never now make Marjorie his own.

His outward face and demeanour showed nothing of the storm and riot within. He was calm, self-possessed, and smiling, quick to answer and to reply, to explain this or that point in his discoveries, to be adequate, confident and serene.

In reply to a question from Dean Weare, Sir William leant upon one of the cases which covered the thought-transforming mechanism and gave a little lecture.

"Quite so, Mr. Dean," he said; "it is exactly as you suppose, the form, power, and vividness of the pictures upon the screen correspond exactly with the strength of the intellect of the person whose thoughts are making these pictures. You will find your strongly imaginative man, or your man whose brain is much turned inward upon himself, and who, for this very reason takes little part in the action or movement of life, will give a far more complete and vivid picture than any other. For example, assuming that the Bishop's valet is an ordinary servant and accompanied his Lordship to Palestine a few months ago, and saw exactly what his Lordship saw, that man's memories would not be thrown upon the screen with such wonderful vividness as his Lordship's were. He would not be able, in all probability, to produce a picture, a general impression, which is a real picture and not a photograph, and which so conveys the exact likeness of a place far more than any photograph could ever do. His thoughts would probably be represented by some special incident which had struck his fancy at the time and assumed a proportion in his mind which a cultured and logical faculty of thought would at once reject as being out of due proportion. And finally, in a precise ratio to the power of the brain—I do not mean to its health, or ill-health, its weight or size, I mean its pure *thinking* power—so are the thoughts, when transformed into light, vivid or not vivid, as the case may be."

Mrs. Hoskin-Heath turned to Lord Landsend, who was sitting beside her. Her pretty face wore a roguish smile as she whispered to him.

"Billy, what an awful donkey *you* must be."

Lord Landsend looked at her for a moment. Then he answered—

"Well, you know, I am not at all sure that it is not a jolly good thing to be sometimes. I would not be that fellow Gouldsbrough for anything."

She looked at him in amusement. There was something quite serious in the young man's face.

"Why," she said, in a whisper, "what do you mean, Billy?"

"I may not be clever," said Lord Landsend, "but I prefer to spend my life doing what amuses me, not what other people think I ought to do. At the same time I know men, and I know that scientific Johnny over there has got something on his mind which I should not care to have. Poor Tommy Decies had that look in his eyes the night before Ascot last year, poor Eustace Charliewood had it just before he went down to Brighton and shot himself; and you may take it from me, Mrs. Hoskin-Heath, that I know what I am talking about."

"And now," said Sir William, looking up and down the rows of faces opposite him. "And now, which of you will submit himself to the next experiment?"

Then Lord Landsend spoke. He was determined to "get his own back," as he would have put it, if possible.

"Why don't you have a try yourself, Sir William," he said, with a not very friendly grin; "or won't what d'you call 'em work for its master? You had my thoughts for nothing, I'll give you twopence

for yours."

There was an ill-suppressed titter from the more frivolous portion of the spectators; but Lord Malvin turned round and looked at the young man with a frown of disapproval. There was something in that leonine head and those calm wise eyes which compelled him to silence.

Then Herr Schmoulder, a famous savant from Berlin, spoke.

"It would an interesting demonstration make," he said, "of der statement of der relative power that the strong and weak brain possesses if we could see der apparatus in operation upon der thought vibrations transformed of an intelligence which not equal to our own is."

Mrs. Hoskin-Heath chimed in, her beautiful, silvery notes coming, after the deep, grave, guttural, like a peal of bells heard in the lull of a thunderstorm.

"What a *good* idea, Sir William!" she said. "I wish you would let me send for my footman. He is sure to be in the servants' hall. It would be so interesting to know his real opinion of me and my husband; and he certainly is a most consummate fool, and would be a thoroughly good subject for such an experiment. I brought him out of Gloucestershire. You know, he was one of the under-footmen at my brother's place, and I have been trying to train him, though with little success. I mean that he is too stolid to be shy, and, therefore, won't object at all, as some men would, to put the cap on and sit down here in the dark. He won't be frightened, I am sure."

"By all means, Mrs. Hoskin-Heath," Gouldesbrough said with a smile. "No doubt one could not have a better subject, and I really shall be able to illustrate the difference between the relative values of brain-power by this means. You will all be able to notice the difference in the vividness and outline of the pictures or words that will appear."

Sir William turned round for Wilson Guest, whom he proposed to send upon the mission, but could not find him.

"I will ring for the butler," he said, "and tell him to fetch your man, Mrs. Hoskin-Heath."

"Oh! don't do that," a voice said upon the second tier. "I—I—am—er—not feeling very well, Sir William, and I was going to ask your permission to go and sit down in the hall for a few minutes; I will tell one of your servants, they are sure to be about."

The voice was the voice of Donald Megbie. He did not look at all ill, but he stepped down with a smile and went out of the laboratory, while everybody waited for the advent of Mrs. Hoskin-Heath's footman.

Once more Sir William looked round to see if Wilson Guest had returned.

The actual projecting apparatus by which the transformed light rays were thrown upon the screen required some attention. The delicate apparatus which focussed the lens of the projector, in order to bring it into the nearest possible co-ordination with the light which it had to magnify and transmit, needed some little care.

"Will you excuse me for a moment," he said to everybody there, "if I leave you in darkness again, until the man comes? I wish to attend to a portion of the mechanism here, and I can only do so by turning off the lights."

There was a chorus of "Oh, please do so, Sir William," and suddenly the laboratory was once more plunged into utter blackness.

Nobody talked much now, curiously enough. For a moment there was nothing heard but the regular beating of Lady Poole's fan, and one whispering conversation which might, or might not, have been carried on between Lord Landsend and Mrs. Hoskin-Heath.

Then the thunder, which had been quiet for a little time, began to mutter once more. The dark air became hot and full of oppression. And in the dark Lord Malvin took the hand of Marjorie Poole in his own. "Be brave," he said into her ear. "I know what you must suffer, believing what you believe."

She whispered back to him.

"I have known it ever since I have been in this place," she said. "Oh! Lord Malvin, I have known it quite certainly, *Guy is in this house!*"

"Donald Megbie has gone out, as you saw just now," he answered. "Be brave! be strong! I believe that God is guiding you. I too have felt the psychic influence of something strange and very, very terrible in the air of this house."

In a moment more the beginning of the end came. The great twelve-foot circle of light flashed out upon the screen, but now with an extraordinary brightness and vividness, such as the spectators had not seen before during the course of the experiments. For a space of, perhaps, ten seconds, there was no sound at all. Nobody quite realized that anything out of the ordinary was happening, except possibly the scientists, who had a complete grasp of the mechanical methods of the experiments and realized that in this room, at any rate, no one was wearing the cap.

There was a loud cry of astonishment, and, so it seemed, of alarm.

Sharply outlined against the brilliant circle, sharply outlined in a gigantic shape, and standing

full in the screen of the light that streamed from the lens of the projector, the spectators saw that Sir William Goulesbrough was standing. They caught a glimpse of his face. It was a face like the face of a dead man. His arms were whirling in the air like mills, and then as a cry died away in mournful echoes in the high roof of the laboratory, there was a dead sound as the figure of the scientist disappeared and fell out of the circle of light upon the floor.

Upon the screen itself there came a picture. It was the picture of a girl, but of a girl with a face so sweetly tender and compassionate, so irradiated with utter confidence and trust, so pained and yet so tender, that no painter had ever put so wonderful a thing on canvas, and no Madonna in the galleries of the world was more beautiful or more kind.

And the face was one that they all knew well and recognized in a moment. It was the face of one of them, the face of Marjorie Poole, and it was so beautiful because it was painted by an artist whose pictures have never before appealed so poignantly to human eyes—it was painted by despairing Love itself.

At that marvellous sight, a sight which none of those present ever forgot in after life, a strange cry went up into the high-domed roof. It was a cry uttered by many voices and in many keys. There was a gasp of excitement and of fear, shrill women's tones, the guttural of the Teuton, the bass of the startled Englishmen, the high, staccato cry of the Latin, as the French savants joined in it.

But in whatever key the exclamations were pitched, they all blended into something like a wail, a composite, multiple thing, the wail of a company of people who had seen something behind the Veil for the first time in their lives.

The picture glowed and looked out at them in all its ineffable tenderness and glory, and then grew dim, trembled, dissolved, and melted away.

Then upon the screen came words, terrible, poignant words—

"MARJORIE, MARJORIE DEAR, I KNOW THAT YOU ARE NEAR ME, NOW IN BODY AS YOU ARE ALWAYS NEAR ME IN THOUGHTS. I FEEL IT, I KNOW IT, AND EVEN IN THIS CRUEL PRISON, THIS HOPELESS PRISON, WHERE I AM DYING, AND SHALL SHORTLY DIE, I KNOW THAT YOU ARE NEAR ME IN BODY, AND IN THAT SPIRIT YOU ARE ALWAYS MINE AND I AM ALWAYS YOURS. LOVE, IF THE THOUGHTS THAT THEY ARE ROBBING ME OF, IF THE THOUGHTS THAT FILL MY MIND, AND WHICH THOSE TWO FIENDS ARE PROBABLY LOOKING AT AND LAUGHING OVER, HAVE ANY POWER AT ALL, THEN I SEND THEM TO YOU WITH MY LAST EFFORT, IN ONE LAST ATTEMPT TO REACH YOU AND TO SAY THAT I LOVE YOU AND TO SAY GOOD-BYE."

The circle of white light grew dimmer. Faint, eddying spirals of something that seemed like smoke rose up and obscured the words. They saw an ashen vapour of grey creep over the circle, as the shadow of the moon creeps over the sun at an eclipse. Then the circle disappeared finally, and they were left once more in the dark.

In the dark, indeed, but not in silence. A tumult of agonized voices filled the laboratory. And over them all a brave voice beat in upon the sound with the strong and regular assurance of a great bell, a bell like the mighty mass of metal which hangs in the ancient belfry of Bruges.

Lord Malvin was calling to them to be calm and silent, was telling them that he knew what all this meant and that they must be of courage and good cheer.

Then some one struck a match. It was Lord Landsend, his face very white and serious. He held it up above his head and called to Lord Malvin.

"Here you are, Sir," he said. "I will get down to you in a second. Then we can find the switch to turn on the electric light."

He stumbled down to where Lord Malvin sat,—showing the value of the practical man and polo player in a crisis—and together the two peers, the famous and honoured scientist and the wealthy young man whom the world flattered and called *dilettante* and a fool, went their way to the switch-table in the guiding light of this small torch.

Suddenly a blaze of light dispelled the darkness and showed a company of ghosts looking at each other with weeping faces.

It showed also the figure of a girl sunk upon its chair in a deadly swoon. And it showed also the body of Sir William Goulesbrough lying upon the floor between the series of machines and the screen upon the opposite wall. The dead face was so horrible that some one ran up immediately and covered it with a handkerchief.

This was Lord Landsend.

The tumult was indescribable, but by sheer power of authority and wisdom Lord Malvin calmed them all. His hand was raised as the hand of a conductor holds the vehemence of a band in check.

In a few short trenchant sentences he told them the history of the strange occurrence which Donald Megbie and Mrs. Poole had brought to his notice; and even as he told them, Sir Harold

Oliver and Lady Poole were bringing back the unconscious girl to life and realization.

"The man is here," Lord Malvin said, "the man is here. Guy Rathbone lies dying and prisoned in this accursed house. Sir Harold Oliver, I will ask you to remain with these ladies while I will go forth and solve this horrid mystery."

He looked round with a weary, questioning eye, seeking who should be his companion, and as he did so young Lord Landsend touched him on the arm and smiled.

"Come, my dear boy," the old man said with a melancholy smile of kindness, "you are just the man I want; come with me."

Then, before he left the laboratory, he spoke a few rapid words in French to one or two of the foreign scientists.

Upon that, these gentlemen went down among the strange and fantastic apparatus upon the tables and lifted up That which but a few minutes ago had held the soul and the personality of Sir William Goulesbrough. They carried the long, limp, terrible dead Thing to the other end of the room, where there was a screen.

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO FINAL PICTURES

There are two things to record—

(1)

His hair was quite grey, his face was old and lined. His body was beginning to be ravaged by the devilish drugs with which it had been inoculated.

But he lay upon a couch in the study, and Marjorie bent over him kissing him, calling to him and cooing inarticulate words of belief and of love.

Lady Poole was there also, motionless and silent, while Lord Malvin and the doctor, who had been hastily summoned from Baker Street, watched by the head of the couch.

The doctor looked at Lord Malvin and nodded his head.

"He will be all right," he whispered. "Those devils have not killed him yet. He will live and be as strong as ever."

The tears were rolling down Lord Malvin's face and he could not speak, but he nodded back to the doctor.

And then they saw the face of Guy Rathbone, who lay there so broken and destroyed, begin to change. The gashes, which supreme and long-continued agony had cut into it, had not indeed passed away. The ashen visage remained ashen still, but a new light came flickering into the tired eyes, and in an indescribable way youth was returning.

Youth was returning, youth!

It came back, summoned out of the past by a supreme magic—the supreme magic of love.

The girl who loved him was kissing him, he was with her at last, and all was well.

(2)

"It is a grave thing and much considered to be," said Herr Schmoulder.

It was late at night.

They had taken Wilson Guest to the hospital, where the doctors were holding him down, as he shrieked and laughed, and died in delirium tremens.

Lord Malvin, Sir Harold Oliver, and the other scientists were gathered together in the laboratory, that recent theatre of such terrible events.

"It is a very grave thing indeed, Herr Schmoulder," Lord Malvin answered; "but I have not ventured to propose it without a consultation in the highest quarters. Decies will be here at any moment, and then upon his decision we shall act. He has been to see the King."

The distinguished men waited there silent and uneasy. All round them stood the marvellous instruments by which the late Sir William Goulesbrough had obtained a triumph unknown before in the history of the world.

The yellow radiance of the electric light poured down upon the gleaming mahogany, brass,

vulcanite and steel.

On the opposite wall was the great white screen—just an ordinary stretch of prepared canvas upon steel rollers, a dead, senseless thing, and no more than that. Yet as the least imaginative of them there chanced to turn his head and see that great white sheet, he shuddered to think of the long agony it had pictured while the two monsters had sat and taken their amusement from it, as a man takes a glass of wine.

There was a rap upon the principal door of the laboratory. Lord Malvin strode to it and opened it. The butler, a portly man on the morning of this day, but now seeming to have shrunk into his clothes, and to have lost much of his vitality, stood there.

Beside him was a gentleman in evening dress, with a keen clean-shaven face and grey hair which curled.

The gentleman stepped quickly into the laboratory. It was the Home Secretary.

He shook Lord Malvin by the hand, and his face was very troubled.

"You are quite right, my Lord," he said. "I may say that His Majesty is at one with you and with me in this matter. His Majesty is much disturbed."

Then Lord Malvin turned round to the other gentlemen.

"Come, my brethren," he said in a sad voice, "come and let us do what we have to do. The Bishop of West London was wiser than any of us when he said that God would never allow this thing to continue, and he was right."

Lord Malvin turned to the frightened servant.

"Go into the kitchens," he said, "or send one of the other men, and fetch a large hammer, such a hammer as you use for breaking up coal."

In a minute or two the butler returned, and handed a formidable implement with a wedge-shaped iron head on a long ash shank to Lord Malvin.

The Home Secretary stood by, and the great men of science clustered round him, watching Lord Malvin's actions.

The peer went to the silent, soulless machines, which had been the medium through which such wonder and terror had passed, and raising the hammer about his head, he destroyed each one severally, with a sort of ritual, as some priest carries out the ritual of his Faith.

This old man, whose name and personality stood so high, so supreme indeed, in the modern world, was like some ancient prophet of the Lord, who, fired with holy zeal, strode down the pagan avenues of the ancient world and tore and beat the false idols from their pedestals in the frenzy of one who kills and destroys that truth may enter and the world be calm.

It was done, over. The politician shook hands with Lord Malvin, and resumed his dry, official manner, perhaps a little ashamed or frightened at the emotion which he had exhibited.

"Good-bye, Lord Malvin," he said. "This terrible business is now over. I have to return to the palace to tell His Majesty that this—this *devilish* invention is destroyed. Good-night, good-night."

Then a tall man with a pointed beard came into the laboratory, saluting the Home Secretary as he was leaving, with several of the other scientists who had witnessed the whole thing from first to last and now felt that they must go home.

The man with the beard was the man who had been sent from Scotland Yard.

He walked up to Lord Malvin and saluted.

"I think, my Lord," he said, "that everything requisite has now been done. I have all the servants in my charge, and we have fifteen or twenty men in the house, seeing that nothing is disturbed until official inquiry is due."

By this time nobody was left in the laboratory but the detective inspector, Lord Malvin, and Herr Schmoulder.

"Oh! and there is one other thing, my Lord, I have to ask you. Mr. Donald Megbie, the writing gentleman is here, and begs that he may be allowed to see you. Should I be right in admitting the gentleman?"

"Certainly, certainly," Lord Malvin replied. "Bring him in at once, please inspector."

In less than a minute a plain-clothes policeman ushered Donald Megbie into the laboratory.

He went up to Lord Malvin, and his face was bright and happy.

"It is all right, my Lord," he said, "Rathbone is recovering swiftly. Miss Poole is with him, and the doctors say, that though they feared for a short time that his reason would go, they are now quite satisfied that he will recover. He is sleeping quietly in a private room at Marylebone Hospital, and Marjorie Poole is sitting by his side holding his hand."

Then Megbie looked at the wreck upon the floor.

"Ah!" he said, "so you have destroyed this horrid thing?"

"Yes," Lord Malvin answered; "I discussed it with Decies, and Decies went to see the King. It was thought to be better and wiser for the safety of the commonwealth—for the safety of the world indeed—that Sir William Gouldesbrough's discovery should perish with Sir William Gouldesbrough."

"Ah!" Donald Megbie answered; "I felt sure that that was the best course. It would have been too terrible, too subversive. The world must go on as it has always gone on. I have thought, during the last few hours, that Sir William Gouldesbrough was not himself at all. Is it not possible that he himself might have died long ago, and that *something* was inhabiting his body, something which came out of the darkness behind the Veil?"

"That, Mr. Megbie," said Lord Malvin, "is the picturesque thought of the literary man. Science does not allow the possibility of such sinister interferences. And now, I am going home. You will realize, of course, that your supreme services in this matter will be recognized, though I fear that the recognition can never be acknowledged publicly."

Donald Megbie bowed.

"My Lord," he said, "they have been recognized already, because I have seen how love has called back a soul into life. I have seen Marjorie Poole sitting by the bedside of Guy Rathbone. And, do you know, Lord Malvin," he continued in a less exalted tone, "I never wish to see anything in my life here more utterly beautiful than that."

"Come," said Lord Malvin, "it is very late; we are all tired and unstrung."

The two men, arm in arm, the young writer and the great man, moved towards the door of the laboratory.

The detective inspector stood watching the scene with quiet and observant eyes.

But Herr Schmoulder surveyed the wreckage of the Thought-Spectroscope, and as he turned at length to follow Lord Malvin and Donald Megbie, he heaved a deep Teutonic sigh.

"It was der most wonderful triumph that ever der unknown forces occurred has been," he muttered.

Then the three men crossed the vast, sombre hall, now filled with frightened servants and the stiff official guardians of the law, and went out through the path among the laurel bushes to the gate in the wall, where their carriages were waiting.

And Donald Megbie, as he drove home through the silent streets of the West End, heard a tune in his heart, which responded and lilted to the regular beat of the horse's feet upon the macadam. And the burden of the tune was "*Love*."

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