
HEDLEY
PEEK
KING OF CUPS
YES
THE CHARIOT
OF THE FLESH


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Hedley Peek

The Chariot of the Flesh

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

It is nearly eleven years since Alan Sydney left England, but I have only recently been released from my promise of secrecy. So sacred to me is the memory of our friendship, that, even now, I shrink from the task of narrating his strange and curious history. A strong impulse, however, urges me to break silence.

The village of Anstead, near which we both lived, is in Surrey, possibly the best county in England to find mixed society. Here the old-fashioned farmers, the labourers who have never travelled as far as London, and a few country squires are mingled with, and influenced by, retired London shopkeepers, merchant princes--with or without H's--and a sprinkling of literary and scientific dabblers; these last are regarded with suspicion by all, but especially by the retired Army and Navy magnates.

Nobody seemed to know to which class Alan Sydney belonged, and strange to say he was admitted, chiefly, I fancy, because he was an eccentric bachelor, into all societies. As I am wealthy and have been a confirmed idler from my youth, the same privilege has been granted to me; a privilege of which, however, I am seldom inclined to take advantage.

I had known Alan Sydney for some years before we became at all intimate. He fascinated, repelled and puzzled me. "Why," I would say to myself, "is this man so confoundedly unlike other men?"

It is not easy to describe him, because, instead of having to portray an identity, I seem rather obliged to describe a number of individualities peeping out through one person. Often you would fancy when speaking to him that you were in the presence of a fool, to be sharply awakened to the unpleasant discovery that it was far more probable you were being fooled yourself. You had hardly decided that he was a liar before you were conscious that, if once able to get behind the outside spray of speech with which he was purposely blinding you, it might be possible to trust him more fully than other men. I usually left him with the unpleasant impression that instead of treating me as a man, he had been dissecting me as a mental or spiritual corpse. He seemed to have about as much regard for the opinion any one formed of his character as a surgeon would have of the views once entertained by his unconscious subject. Yet it was difficult to tell why one felt these sensations, for his manner was outwardly pleasant even at times jovial; and if there was satire in what he said it was certainly quite impossible for a third party to be conscious of it. I have heard him at a dinner-party make some trivial remark in his quiet voice to one of the guests which would cause the person addressed to flush up with annoyance and surprise as though he had been detected in a crime or stung by the lash of a whip.

I have never been able to find out why he chose me as his only confidant, but so it came about.

It was a warm summer evening, and after dinner it occurred to me that I would stroll over and consult him about an old manuscript which I had recently purchased. From something that he had once said it seemed probable that he might be able to help me with the Old English, which was more than usually difficult on account of the writer having been a North-countryman. Alan Sydney was in the garden inhaling a cigarette, a bad habit which he frequently denounced and perpetually practised. Sitting down beside him I remarked on his inconsistency.

"Consistency," he replied, smiling, "if we may believe Bacon, Emerson, and at least ten other original thinkers, is the quixotism of little minds. Inhaling cigarettes is the last infirmity of habitual smokers. The boy-child begins with a cigarette; in youth or manhood he drifts into cigars and pipes; later on, if he should be unfortunate enough once to try the experiment of inhaling, he reverts to his first love."

I turned the subject by handing to him the manuscript, which he looked over for some time with evident interest. When asked if he could make out the meaning of some of the Old English words he answered that he could not, and that there was probably no one living who could.

"You think I am conceited in making such a remark, but in that you are mistaken. It is simply that I am better acquainted with ignorance than you are. Most of these early English provincialisms, if I may use the term for want of a better, can only be guessed at. There are not sufficient local manuscripts of similar date for comparison to be of much

service. If a word cannot be traced either to Anglo-Saxon, Moeso-Gothic, or Scandinavian, you may safely translate it as you please and defy criticism. But let us come in, it is getting chilly."

We entered the house together, passing on to his study. The home was typical of the man. From outside it might easily have been mistaken for a small farm-house. It had the appearance of age, though built by its present owner. It was constructed after the model of the oldest existing style of a Surrey cottage. The walls were supported by and interlaced with massive oak beams, and the roof was entirely composed of thin slabs of rough ironstone which had served a similar purpose for many centuries, having been collected from various dilapidated and condemned buildings. The greatest care had been taken in removing these slabs not to destroy the moss and lichen attached to them, and a few years after the house was finished, an antiquarian might easily have been deceived, so perfectly had every detail, external and internal, been studied.

This humble-looking abode cost probably as much as many of the surrounding mansions, and was unquestionably far more comfortable.

I thought that I was well acquainted with the interior. How far this idea was correct will shortly be seen.

We looked over the manuscript together for some time, and I was surprised to find that many words I had considered provincial were known to my friend; and it was not often that he had to own himself beaten. The matter, however, was most uninteresting, being a homily on the Roman faith.

Presently my companion leaned back in his chair, and seemed to be looking fixedly on some spot on the wall opposite him. I followed the direction of his eyes, but could see nothing likely to attract his attention. I spoke, but he did not answer. The light was rather dim, and it was not possible to see his face distinctly, as the shade from the lamp screened it, but I felt certain that something was wrong. I placed my hand upon his arm, but he took no notice, and this now thoroughly alarmed me.

My first inclination was to ring the bell; my second to move the shade from the lamp so as to be quite sure that I was not mistaken. Lifting the screen, I let the light fall brightly on Sydney's face, and turned to look more closely. For a moment his eyes still maintained their fixed and vacant expression, then turned slowly toward the light. He heaved a deep sigh, and then looked at me with a slightly dazed expression.

"I am afraid you are not well," I said.

"It is nothing," he replied. "For the moment I felt faint, but the sensation has passed."

Knowing something of fainting fits, and having noticed that he had never changed colour nor shown any of the usual signs of faintness, I presumed that he wished to deceive me, and began wondering what the attack could have been.

"You are not satisfied," he continued. "However, let it pass now. Some time I will explain."

Seeing that he wished to be alone, I said good-night.

"Can you come and dine with me to-morrow?" he asked. "I shall be alone, and should be glad to have a quiet talk

with you."

Accepting the invitation gladly, I went out into the warm summer night, little thinking how much I was to learn before that door again closed behind me.

CHAPTER II

On the following evening I dined with Alan Sydney for the first time. It was one of his peculiarities not to ask acquaintances to his house; his bachelorhood excused him from the necessity. I was therefore not a little surprised to notice the dainty epicureanism of his meal. The wines were such as it is an unexpected delight to find; the service a thing to remember, but scarcely to hope to attain. Why have some men this curious power of getting their slightest wish gratified, apparently without effort? Money cannot purchase it, and ordinary mortals, whilst they approach the semblance, miss the ease and quietude.

My host talked freely on many subjects, leaving me to suggest a topic, and seeming equally at home whatever I might choose. Sport, philosophy, science, history--I tried each subject, and seemed always the pupil of an expert. At last I started on my pet hobby, Ancient Engravings. "*Now*," I thought, "*it will be my turn*."

"I know little or nothing of the subject," he said.

I went off gaily, but even while preparing to air my wisdom, he would apparently intercept my thought and take

the very words out of my mouth.

"*This man must be deceiving me*," I mused. "*He has purposely led me on to my favourite topic, to show that even in that he is my superior!*."

My reverie was broken by his next remark--

"Why do you think me a liar?"

I turned round confused, protesting that of course I did nothing of the kind.

"I often am guilty of what people call lying," he said, "but never intentionally of deceiving a guest. That is why I so seldom indulge in the pleasure of entertaining."

As he said this he rose, and we went together into his study.

"Come," he continued, "I have a surprise for you."

He went up to one of the book-cases, touched a concealed spring, and the whole oak framework moved slowly round on a pivot, forming a doorway through which we passed.

Having gone down a few steps into what I judged must be an underground passage, we once more ascended into a large room, lined on every side with crowded book-cases.

"You are surprised," he said, "to see so large a room in so small a house. We are now in part of what are usually supposed to be my farm-buildings. There are three rooms here which I use for different purposes. I will show you the other two later on."

The library was lighted by a skylight arranged in such a way, that from outside it would not be visible. My companion sat down on a comfortable couch, and beckoning me to another, said--

"I must ask you to promise me that you will reveal nothing of what I am now going to say, or anything which I may show you until you have my permission. I have a strong opinion that for some reason or other the time has not yet come when it would be advisable to make generally known many facts which I have discovered belonging to a power which is lying dormant in all men. The world, however, is progressing quickly, and the responsibility must rest with you at some future time, when I am gone, as to the wisdom of making known part or all of the knowledge which you will gather from me."

Saying this, he got up, and going to one of the shelves in his book-case, took down a volume.

"You may judge," he continued, "by the collection here, that at one time I was an ardent lover of books. Now they have little interest for me: but this volume will always have a special value, for it was from it that I first gained the knowledge which has influenced my whole life.

"While travelling in France, and making, as was then my custom, a round of any old book-stalls that came in my way, I noticed a small shop which outwardly had little appearance of containing anything of interest to the bibliomaniac. In the window there were various ancient curiosities, but knowing that these antique dealers sometimes bought books which they did not display, it seemed worth while to make an inquiry. I was well rewarded, for the old man, after saying that he did not as a rule buy books, told me that he had at various times picked up at sales a few which he usually sent to be sold by auction in Paris. He had some by him at the time, and amongst these a curious Latin manuscript.

Though evidently a seventeenth-century work, it was not dated. I thought at first that it would probably prove of little value, until turning over the leaves, I noticed that it was by no less celebrated a writer than Descartes. This author's works were at the time little known to me, and it never occurred to my mind that this volume could be anything more valuable than a manuscript of one of his published works. However, published or unpublished, it was certainly worth a thousand times more than the dealer asked for it, so I took it back to my hotel well pleased with my morning's work, and spent the whole afternoon reading. An entirely new idea of existence seemed opening before me, and it appeared incredible that a work of this description could have been known for two hundred and fifty years without my having even heard a repetition of the views found there. Then remembering that many of Descartes' works had, owing to the opposition of the Romish Church, never been printed, I decided to find out at once whether by any chance this might be one of them. I sent immediately to Paris for a complete edition of Descartes, which had recently been published, and soon found that this volume was not among them. A little further inquiry satisfied me of the authenticity of the MS., and that it was entirely unknown.

"You may remember that Descartes, in his 'Discourse on Method,' published in 1637, says, 'It appears to me that I have discovered many truths more useful and more important than all I had before learned, or even expected to learn. I have essayed to expound the chief of these discoveries in a treatise which certain considerations prevent me from publishing.' Now we know that the chief

consideration was his fear of offending the Church, and every one who has read Descartes' published works must observe through them a perpetual veiling of what he thought to be true so as to avoid being brought in conflict with the religious opinions of his day. Notice this passage from the work just mentioned. 'It may be believed without discredit to the miracle of creation, that things purely material might in course of time have become such as we observe them at present, and their end is much more easily conceived when they are beheld coming in this manner gradually into existence, than when they are only considered as produced at once in a finished and perfect state.'

"He then applies this theory to man. He says that as yet he has not sufficient knowledge to treat of this development, and is obliged to remain satisfied with the supposition that God formed the body of man wholly like to one of ours, but at first placed in it no rational soul. Having gone thus far and apparently fearing to go further, he breaks off suddenly and never satisfactorily returns to the subject in his published works. But how different is his method when we turn to the manuscript before me, which I fancy must have been his last work, as it is unfinished! How much more lucid and complete we find his conclusions here! There is no attempt to suppress his real view. I will give you briefly a summary of the chief conclusions which interested me, and which will be enough for the present purpose.

"'All things have slowly developed.'

"'Man is the most perfectly developed being of whose existence we are conscious.'

"'The lower orders of life have a varying number of powers of perception which we term senses.'

"'The higher orders of life have five.'

"'These senses diminish in power as they increase in number, being relieved one by the other.'

"'No deterioration in sense-power is known to have taken place without causing deterioration to the possessor unless at the same time accompanied by the development of a new perceptive faculty.'

"'Man alone is credited with being an exception to this rule. He is inferior in keenness of sense to the animals below him, yet superior in power. It is also noticeable that the savage is in like manner superior to the civilized man. It is therefore probable that man is really the possessor of a sixth sense as yet imperfectly developed and unequally distributed.'

"Briefly this is the key to the remarkable conclusions at which he eventually arrives, and which are worked out with his usual mathematical exactitude and care. He has fully satisfied me that this theory explains most of the mysteries of life; but there is not time now to go more fully into the matter."

"But," I said, "he appears to have forgotten entirely the importance of intellect."

"There you are mistaken. He goes very fully into the matter and anticipates Darwin. 'Intellect,' he writes, 'is not a means of perception, but an organ for the arrangement and use of the senses, and is to be found in all animal life though in a less developed form than is noticeable in man.'"

"But," I interrupted, "is not that therefore the explanation; the higher intellect of man needs a lower standard of sensitive faculty, and he is thus enabled to produce from lesser gifts a greater gain?"

"I will," he answered, "as nearly as possible give you Descartes' answer to this objection. 'To say that the more highly developed a being, the less it will require its perceptive powers, and that therefore through want of use they have gradually deteriorated, would lead us to this *reductio ad absurdum:*--that in time man will become so perfectly developed that his senses must continue deteriorating until at last he will arrive at the perfection of an insensitive existence, with intellect to place in order all things which he perceives while he is unable to perceive anything.' Of course in endeavouring to give you his argument in a few words--an argument which requires close and careful reasoning, I do Descartes considerable injustice, but I hope on some future occasion to be able to go more fully into the discussion. I have said enough for my present purpose, and am not fond of argument unless satisfied that my opponent agrees with me upon the primary ground of discussion; much valuable time is otherwise wasted. For instance, if you are speaking on the subject of the colour red to a man born blind and his idea of red is some sound which resembles the blast of a trumpet, you cannot possibly hope to arrive at any very satisfactory conclusion. In the same way if man is unconscious of the power granted him through the sixth; or, as for lack of a better term we may call it, the spiritual sense, no argument on the subject would be of the least value. It will suffice at present to say that the theory

which Descartes fully works out was to me personally a revelation; a revelation, because it seemed but the perfected expression of my own dormant thought. Having therefore carefully considered the advice which the writer gives to those who are anxious to prove the value of this partially developed power, namely, to use it, I started on a course of experiments which, should you care to follow me, I will endeavour to explain. You may thus be able to judge of the truth of the theory by its results, which after all is by far the safer plan. Moreover, some of my experiences may be of interest."

I expressed my anxiety to hear him further, and he continued--

"You must endeavour to realize clearly the work to which I had decided to devote my energies and time. It was to cultivate and analyze every perception or sensation which appeared to reach me through none of the known organs of sense. The first conclusion arrived at was that I imperfectly possessed the power to read other people's thoughts; that at certain times and under certain conditions ideas were conveyed to me through no recognized organ of perception. I therefore decided for the time being to devote all my energy to following up this clue. It was not long before the truth of my idea was confirmed beyond any possibility of doubt; but the difficulty was, firstly, in being confident from whom the impression came; and secondly, in discerning truth from imagination. Many others have gone as far as this point on the road to discovery, but few have persevered much further. The story of how my path was cleared of these uncertainties is worth describing in detail.

"About this time I became engaged to be married to a girl of seventeen. It may be owing to prejudice, but I still think she possessed remarkable beauty. It is not easy to give a reason, but a girl seldom at that time seemed lovely to me after she was out of her teens. She might be more interesting intellectually; but owing to some peculiarity in my character, her chief charm was too often brushed away somewhere about the age of twenty.

"I first met Vera Soudin at her father's house in Scotland. I had gone down to stay with a friend for grouse-shooting, and the members of her family were practically our only neighbours, so that we saw a good deal of each other. She was an only child, and must have found life rather dull. Her father's thoughts were chiefly concentrated on sport; her mother was an invalid, and a decidedly uninteresting woman. It is hardly surprising that Vera found the change from previous solitude a relief. She had a remarkably weak will, though probably few outside her intimate friends were aware of the fact, for, as is often the case with such characters, she possessed a strong vein of obstinacy, which people mistook for firmness. As a matter of fact she was little more than a mirror which reflected surrounding influences. On the other hand, I may possibly possess a will of rather unusual power, more powerful, unfortunately, over others than myself. I was unconscious how great my influence over her really was, nor did I know that in cultivating her acquaintance I was allowing myself to be swayed by my affections.

"I had decided to take this opportunity of practising and perfecting, if possible, my power of thought-reading. It is

curious how often we are influenced by an unconscious motive, and how long we take to find out in ourselves an emotion which is perfectly obvious to those around us.

"Whatever the effect of our intercourse may have been in other ways, it certainly enabled me to make considerable advance in my particular study. To begin with, being often alone with her, the difficulty of deciding from whom the impression came was at these times necessarily removed. I had, therefore, only to satisfy myself as to whether these impressions were real or imaginary; and it was easy with a girl who had not yet learned the trick of hiding, or feigning emotions, to discover by her face whether I had rightly or wrongly interpreted something which was passing through her mind. A question on the subject was usually sufficient. It mattered little to me how trivial or unimportant the thought might be; I felt satisfied that there was a difference between the effect caused on my mind by a true or by an imaginary impression. The difficulty lay in defining this subtle difference.

"Before I had known the girl a week I was able, as far as she was concerned, to overcome this obstacle, and to tell with certainty whenever any thought of hers passed involuntarily through my mind. In the same way when meeting her at dinner, among other people, I was equally certain that the impression was a correct one if it came from her; and this knowledge was a great assistance, enabling me, as it were, to take the first step towards localizing the direction from which thought was transmitted.

"One evening after dinner I was sitting alone with Vera Soudin; her mother had not been well enough to come down

to dinner, and the other men had retired to the billiard-room. The light from the candles was overpowered by the brightness of the fire, and as she leant back, this ruddy glow gave an additional attraction to the delicate beauty of her face. I forgot for the moment all about my new power, and sat looking at her without speaking, the whole force of my will unconsciously exercised in a desire to gain her love. She sat silent, gazing at the burning logs as though unconscious of my presence. Then I recognized an inaudible voice speaking. I use the words 'voice' and 'speaking' because as yet our language is too imperfect to express any sensations connected with the sixth sense. The sentence was, however, unmistakable.

"'*I love him.*'

"I answered her aloud. 'Why do you?'

"Her face flushed and then lost all colour save what the firelight cast there. 'Why do I what?' she stammered.

"I cared for her too much to press my advantage. 'I love you!' I said, and getting up I went over and knelt by her side; then looking into her eyes I saw an expression that I had never seen before.

"What man who has once been brought under this influence could ever forget it--man's passion reflected upon woman's nature, the idealized counterpart of his sensations revealed on the idol of worship? In a moment such as this, reason is trampled under the feet of a hundred new emotions, hurrying forward to find expression, and the man's action will be determined by natural instincts, and not, as is more often the case, by the training and habits which have moulded them. During such times of intoxication

we become for once natural; and as all men tend by nature, if on a lower plane, to idiocy, if on a higher to madness, such moments are best kept private. An observer missing the more delicate atmosphere of pathos which ever surrounds a truly comic situation, is apt to rest his own instability more on the stick of ridicule than the crutch of pity.

"As, however, owing to the power which I have of reading other people's thoughts of myself, my nature has become impervious to scorn; and as it is better that you should have the opportunity of judging my actions impartially, I will throw off reserve as far as possible.

"We remained much in the same attitude for an indefinite period of sensations, which may probably have extended to thirty minutes, her hands clasped in mine as we talked together. As far as I can remember, the conversation rested principally with me, and her answers came back chiefly in unspoken thoughts. I will endeavour to give you an idea of what passed between us, audibly and inaudibly.

"'Beloved,' I said, 'is it possible that you can care for me? That what I have longed for, dreamed of, and despaired of ever attaining, is at last mine? I cannot realize it! I feel rather that I am in a trance, surrounded by a confusing, yet delightful mist.'

"'*I love you*.'

"'Say it again out loud that I can hear.'

"'I love you.'

"'But why--tell me why?'

"'I don't know. Why do you love me? I cannot see that there can be anything to love in me. I suppose it is only

because I am pretty!'

"'Beauty is only a veil which the soul looks through; how perfect then must be your soul, dearest!'

"Then came these unspoken words which puzzled me--

"'*What queer things men are!--but I like to hear him, and perhaps it is true; but if so, how horrid most women must be!*' Then out loud--'*I fancy you will soon get tired of me.*'

"'Tired! It makes me mad when I think of ever having an opportunity of getting tired--to have you with me always--to know that we can never be parted--to feel that death itself will only bring us closer: I almost wish that we could die now, for such great happiness makes me afraid something may come. Oh, Vera! you will always love me?'

"'Of course, dear!'

"Then this thought followed--

"'*I wish he would not talk about death; I hate death, I don't want to die. It is quite nice enough to be here having some one loving and petting me, without thinking about the future. I wonder if he is going to kiss me? I thought men always kissed girls when they proposed to them!*'

"This was enough for me. I had been afraid to venture on what seemed so great a liberty, but now I moved forward and was about to kiss her, when to my surprise she drew away saying--

"'Oh, don't! You frighten me!'

"'Why, dearest, you cannot be afraid of me? Will you not let me have just one when you know how I should prize it!'

"'No, I cannot really, not yet anyway; perhaps some day!'

"I was so afraid of offending her that I moved back, puzzled and discomfited, when once again I was conscious

she was thinking.

"'*How foolish he is!--it would have been much nicer to have been forced to give him one; he is so strong he could easily have held me back in the chair and made me do it.*'

"This came as a whip for my inclinations, and I did as suggested under a storm of protests which soon died down, for I now found her thoughts were wandering between the condition of her hair and the probability of some one coming in from the billiard-room.

"I think I have now described sufficiently our first moments of happiness, but I will own that before we were eventually disturbed I had begun to get not a little annoyed with my new power of perception, and began to wonder if after all we had arrived at a sufficient state of perfection to be always happily employed when using it.

"The next half-hour which I spent with Vera's father convinced me that often it might be useful in the cause of humility.

"I asked to speak with him alone, a request that he readily granted, though, if I interpreted his thoughts aright, he used strong language internally. I felt horribly nervous, and at first he did nothing to help me, but what was far worse, he kept on transmitting thoughts that made me every moment more wretched and uncomfortable; they must have been his, as I feel sure they would never otherwise have occurred to me as being likely to proceed from the smiling old gentleman sitting opposite. This is something of what I made out of them, but they were disjointed and confused, for you must remember I had not

as yet had an opportunity of studying him as perfectly as his daughter.

"'*Confound it! I wish he had not been in such a hurry. I must delay things in some way. I meant to make inquiries, but have been so busy. Besides there is ... coming, and I quite fancy that when he sees her, he ... But after all, Sydney is an only son; I did find that out, and I must not choke him off. I wonder how much longer he will stand there like a fool and say nothing!*'

"You may well imagine that this kind of thing was hardly helpful to me. I began at once to wonder who my rival might be. And here I may as well mention that even now, when my thought-reading power has been developed very nearly to perfection, I can seldom read the name of a person passing through another's mind, unless that person is also known to me. This is probably owing to the fact that in thinking of an acquaintance we disregard usually the name and are conscious only of the individuality, for in the few cases when I have had a name conveyed distinctly, it has been where the person referred to was comparatively a stranger to the one whose thoughts I was studying.

"The silence was eventually broken by Mr. Soudin.

"'You wish to speak to me. I hope that you know me well enough to be certain that if there is any service I can do for you I shall be delighted!'

"'It is more than an ordinary service,' I answered. 'I wish to take from you your greatest treasure, and consequently you must excuse my embarrassment in asking. I love your daughter, and would beg her from you.'

"'*Young ass! Now he has once started he talks like a book bound in morocco with gilt edges*,' was his thought. His words--'You have taken me greatly by surprise, Mr. Sydney. I have always looked upon my daughter as a child, and it would be quite impossible for me to think of allowing her at present to be disturbed by any question of marriage. Hers is a sweet and delicate nature, influenced as yet but by the dreams of childhood. I trust that nothing you have said to her can possibly have ruffled the calm of innocence.'

"At this point I should have been placed in a position of difficulty had not his thoughts continued--

"'*I would stake twenty to one the young cub has been sitting spooning for the last half-hour. I wonder how he will try to get out of it.*'

"I did not, therefore, try at all, but quietly told him the fact, ignoring, however, the details. His anger was so well assumed, that whilst it lasted his thoughts almost followed his words, or else the latter so upset me that I missed the accompanying reflections.

"'It was, he said, a most unpardonable action thus to take advantage of an innocent child who, he felt quite certain, had not even realized the very meaning of the situation, etc., etc.'

"At last he cooled down a little, and when this happened, his thoughts and words became mixed up in my mind somewhat in the following manner. 'You must realize, Mr. Sydney, that in speaking to you in this manner, I am actuated by no unfriendly feeling--*it would be unwise to go too far*--Personally from what I have seen of you, there are few young men whom I could welcome more cordially into

my family--*If only I were certain that he possessed a safe five thousand a year*--But she is too young, and I am quite sure that you will agree with me when you think it over in a calmer mood, that it would be unfair to bind my daughter to an engagement before she is fairly out of the nursery--*That ought to smooth him down and keep up the romance at the same time. I must have a good talk with Vera and see what is best to be done. I feel certain that I shall have indigestion to-night. It always upsets me having to think and bother about things after dinner.*'

"I eventually agreed not to see Vera for a week, and at the end of that time I was to be granted another interview with her father for the purpose of arriving at some plan for the future.

"My feelings were of a mixed character as I walked away from the house over the crisp, frozen ground. I felt excited, but neither satisfied nor happy. I had tasted the sweets of love, and a little of the acidity of disenchantment. I began to meditate somewhat after this fashion. How lovely she looked with that expression on her face as I knelt down by her side and took her hands in mine. 'Is it possible that the physiognomists are correct when they tell us that the eye never changes, and that the eyelids alone work those miracles of varying expression; that a few slight wrinkles can convey such a world of meaning, and have often the power to change the destiny of thousands? Is it not more probable that some subtle influence passes from eye to eye that no scientist can detect, owing to the fact that as yet science confines its observations only to those influences which are discernible by animal sense organs? But,

whatever the cause, the fact is most remarkable, and one must needs have loved to realize the full significance of its power.' However, I did not, after all, feel satisfied that I had awakened quite the same feeling in Vera as that which I myself experienced, and I began to think of another partially developed power which Descartes attributes to this sixth sense, and to which I have not hitherto referred.

"He maintains that the will-force is always unconsciously transmitted, and that if this power were cultivated it would lead to surprising results. We can now have no doubt that his theory is partially correct, as it has been satisfactorily demonstrated through recent experiments in hypnotism; but his views also convince me that the modern methods which have been adopted for the transmission of this will-power are likely to prove both dangerous and inadequate, as they are based on totally false premises. As, however, I shall have occasion to go into all this matter more fully later on, as well as to show you the light which Descartes throws on theosophy, spiritualism, and many other modern mysteries, I shall only refer now to the subject so far as I find it necessary in order to make my story intelligible.

"The probability that this theory of transmitted will-power might have been experimentally proved in my late interview with Vera sent a shock of anxiety to my heart. What if after all she had been little better than a semi-conscious mirror reflecting my newly-awakened sensations? I argued, however, against my fear, that it could not be so, for I had read in her thoughts sensations not only differing from my own, but even foreign to a man's inclinations. Yet even as I recalled these instances with relief, a passage from

Descartes flashed through my mind which brought a painful reaction.

"'It must not be supposed,' he writes, 'that the will-power, however strong, can absolutely take possession of an alien mind. A person of tender susceptibility cannot be induced to commit a murder, or a man of brutal instinct be made, even for the time being, pure or lovable. That part of the brain on which the will either of ourselves or others is brought to bear, may be compared to a musical instrument on which this force plays. A tune may be the same whether practised on a pipe or upon a full organ, but there will be a considerable difference in the effect produced, owing to the numerous variations, etc. of which the more complex instrument is capable; so also on different natures a similar impulse will produce totally different results. This difference of effect is most noticeable in the actions of men and women who, if willed by one influence, often act dissimilarly, singing, as it were, the same melody to an accompanying music which flows forth from their complex dispositions and sensibilities.'

"Having by this and similar reflections thoroughly unsettled my belief, not only in the girl I loved, but in myself and in nearly everything else, I went to bed wretched, and after tossing about for some hours, at last fell into a troubled sleep, during which I had the following rather curious dream.

"It seemed that I was walking hurriedly along a winding path, though for what purpose, or whither, I thus hastened was hidden. On my left, through its setting of ferns and pleasant flowers, there flowed a stream, the waters of which

cast back many fair reflections; yet so great was my wish to gain some unknown object, that I was scarcely conscious of the beauty around. As I turned a corner, however, I saw across my path an object lying, and coming nearer found it to be a woman; the face turned upwards bore all the traces of degradation which dissipation and misery had engraved upon the image of one who in youth might have been beautiful. My feelings, supersensitive to the slightest coarseness, revolted at the spectacle before me, and crushing through the undergrowth which grew beside my path, I strove to avoid getting in closer contact with it, but I had not gone many paces forward before I became hopelessly entangled. Then looking round I noticed an old man standing near, who it seemed must have followed me unobserved. His hair was of silvery whiteness, and though his face was lined with age, each furrow seemed but the imprint of an habitual expression of kindliness. He might have stood as a sculptor's model for love that has outlived passion.

"'Why have you wandered from the path?' he said. 'It is not possible for man to reach the place whither you are bound save by the way appointed.'

"'But,' I answered, 'He who called me is pure, and in the footpath lies that which is abhorrent both to my Master and to me.'

"'Who then is thy master?' he asked.

"Then I looked at him in surprise and said--

"'We have but one Master; He who ruleth all things, and is Father of all.'