**The Mystics**

*Katherine Cecil Thurston - (Volume 177 - 1905)*

**CHAPTER 1**

OFall the sensations to which the human mind is a prey, there is none so powerful in its finality, so chilling in its sense of an impending event, as the knowledge that Death — grim, implacable Death — has cast his shadow on a life that custom and circumstance have rendered familiar. Whatever the personal feeling may be, — whether dismay, despair, or relief, — no man or woman can watch that advancing shadow without a quailing at the heart, an individual shrinking from the terrible, natural mystery that we must all face in turn — each for himself and each alone.

In a gaunt house on the loneliest point where the Scottish coast overlooks the Irish Sea, John Henderson was watching his uncle die. In the plain whitewashed room where the sick man lay, a fire was burning, and a couple of oil lamps shed a comfortable glow; but outside, the wind roared inland from the shore, and the rain splashed in furious showers against the windows of the house. It was a night of tumult and darkness; but neither the old man who lay waiting for his end, nor the young man who watched that end approaching, gave any heed to the turmoil of the elements. Each was self engrossed.

Except for an occasional rasping cough or a slow indrawn breath, no sign came from the small iron bedstead on which the dying man lay. His hard emaciated face was set in an impenetrable mask; his glazed eyes were fixed immovably on a distant portion of the ceiling; and his hands lay clasped upon his breast, covering some object that depended from his neck.

He had lain thus since the doctor from the neighboring town had braved the rising storm and ridden over to see him in the fall of the evening; and no accentuation of the gale that lashed the house, no increase in the roar of the ocean three hundred yards away, had power to interrupt his lethargy.

In curious contrast was the expression that marked his nephew's face. An extraordinary, suppressed energy was visible in every line of John Henderson's body as he sat crouching over the fire; and a look of irrepressible excitement smoldered in the eyes that gazed into the glowing coals. He was barely twenty three years old, but the self control that comes from endurance and privation sat unmistakably on his knitted brows and closed lips. He was neither handsome of features nor graceful of figure, yet there was something more striking and interesting than either grace or beauty in the strong youthful form and the strong intelligent face. For a long time he retained his crouching seat on the wooden stool that stood before the hearth; then at last the activity at work within his mind made further inaction intolerable. He rose and turned towards the bed.

The dying man lay motionless, awaiting the final summons with that aloofness that suggests a spirit already partially extricated from its covering of flesh. His glassy eyes were still fixed and immovable, save for an occasional twitching of the eyelids; his pallid lips were drawn back from his strong prominent teeth; and the skin about his temples looked shriveled and sallow. The doctor's parting words came sharply to the younger man's mind." Sit still and watch him — you can do no more."

He reiterated this injunction many times, mentally, as he stood contemplating the man who for seven interminable years had ruled, repressed, and worked him as he might have worked a well constructed manageable machine; and a sudden rush of joy, of freedom and recompense, flooded his heart and set his pulses throbbing. He momentarily lost sight of the grim shadow hovering over the house. The sense of emancipation rose tumultuously, overruling even the immense solemnity of approaching death.

John Henderson had known little of the easy, pleasant paths of life, carpeted by wealth and sheltered by influence. His most childish and distant recollections carried him back to days of anxious poverty. His father, the elder son of a wealthy Scotch landowner, had quarreled with his father and, at the age of twenty, left his home, disinherited in favor of his younger brother. Possessed of a peculiar temperament — passionate, headstrong, dogged in his resolves, he had shaken the dust of Scotland from his feet; sworn never to be beholden to either father or brother for the fraction of a penny; and had gone out into the world to seek his fortune. But the fortune had been far to seek. For years he followed the sea, for years he toiled on land; but in every undertaking failure stalked him. Finally, at the age of forty-five, he touched success for the first time. He fell in love and found his love returned! But here again the irony of fate was constant in its pursuit. The object of his choice was the daughter of an artist — a man as well connected, as needy, as entirely unfortunate as he himself.

But love at forty -five is sometimes as blind as love at twenty. With an improvidence that belied his nationality, Alick Henderson married, after a courtship as brief as it was happy. For a year he shared the haphazard life of his wife and father-in-law, then Nature saw fit to alter the small manage. The artist died, and almost at the same time little John was born.

With the coming of the child, Henderson conceived a new impetus, and also a new sense of bitterness and self-reproach. A homeless failure may tramp the face of the earth and feel no shame; but the unsuccessful man who is a husband and a father moves, as it were, upon a different plane. He has ties — responsibilities — something for which he must answer to himself.

There is something pathetic in the picture of a man setting forth at forty-six to conquer the world anew; and its grim futility is not good to look upon. Henderson had failed for himself, and he failed equally for others. The years that followed his marriage were but the unwinding of a pitifully old story. Before his boy was ten years old, he had run the gamut of humiliation; he had done everything that the pinch of poverty could demand, except apply for aid to his brother Andrew. This, even the faithful patient wife, who stood staunch in all his trials, never dared to suggest.

In this atmosphere it was that John learned to look on life. A naturally high-spirited and courageous child, he gradually fell under that spell of premature understanding that is the portion of a mind forced too soon to realize the significance of ways and means. Day by day his serious eyes grew to comprehend the lines that marked his mother's beloved face; to know the cost at which his own education, his own wants, were supplied by the tired, silent father who, despite his shabby clothes and prematurely broken air, seemed perpetually to move in the glamor of a past romance. And gradually, steadily, passionately, as these things came home to him, there grew up in his youthful mind a desire to compensate by his own future for the struggle he daily witnessed.

Many were the nights when — his lessons for the next day finished, and his father away at one of the many precarious tasks that kept the household together — he would draw close to his mother, as she sat industriously sewing, and beg her for the hundredth time to recount the story of the grim Scotch home where his father had lost his birthright; of the stern old grandfather who had died inexorably unforgiving; of the unknown uncle of whom rumor told many eccentric stories. And, roused by the recital, his boyish face would flush, his boyish mind leap forward towards the future. "'Twill all come back, mother!" he would cry; "'twill all come back! I'll win it back!" And with a sobbing laugh, his mother would drop her sewing and draw him to her heart in a sudden yearning of love and pride. In such surroundings and in such an atmosphere he passed sixteen years; then the first upheaval of his life took place. His father died.

His first recollection — when the terrible necessities of the event were past, and his own grief and consternation had partially subsided — was the remembrance of his mother calling him to her room; of her kissing him, crying over him, and telling him of the resolve she had taken to write and make known his existence to his uncle in Scotland.

The confession at first overwhelmed him. His own pride, his sense of loyalty to his father's memory, prompted him to cry out against the idea as against sacrilege. Then slowly his boyish, immature mind grasped something of the nobility that prompted the decision — something of the inexpressible love that counted sentiment and personal dignity as nothing beside his own future; and in a passion of gratitude he flung his arms about his mother, repeating the old childish vows with a new and deeper force. So the letter to Scotland was dispatched, and a time of sharp suspense followed for mother and son. Then, one never-to- be-forgotten day, the answer arrived.

Andrew Henderson wrote unemotionally. He expressed formal regret for his brother's death, but evinced no interest in his sister-in-law's position. He briefly described himself as living an isolated life in a small house on the sea-coast, a dozen miles from the family home, which had remained untenanted since his father's death. He admitted that with advancing years the duties of life had begun to weigh upon him, diverting his mind and time from the graver pursuits to which his life was devoted; finally, he grudgingly suggested that, should his nephew care to undertake the duties of secretary at a salary of sixty pounds a year, he might find a home with him.

The immediate feeling that followed the reading of the letter was fraught with chill-ing disappointment. On the moment, pride again asserted itself, urging a swift refusal of the rich man's proposal; then once more the patience that had kept Mrs Henderson brave and sweet-tempered during seventeen years of wearing poverty made itself felt. All thought of personal grievance faded from her mind, as she gently pointed out the urgent necessity of John's being seen and known by this uncle, whose only relation and ostensible heir he was. She talked for long, wisely and kindly — as mothers talk out of the unselfish fulness of their hearts — and with every word the golden castles of her imagination rose tower on tower to form the citadel in which her son was to reign supreme.

So wisely and so lovingly did she talk that she persuaded not only the boy, but herself, into the belief that he had but to reach Scotland to make his inheritance sure; and before the day closed she wrote to Andrew Henderson accepting his offer. A week later the whole light of her life went out, as she watched the train steam out of the station, carrying John northwards.

Upon the days that followed his arrival in Scotland there was no need to dwell. He came as a stranger, and as a stranger he was introduced by his uncle to the routine of work expected of him. No mention was made of his recent loss, no suggestion was given that his mother should make her double bereavement easier by visits to her son. Whatever hope or sentiment he had brought with him, he was left to destroy or smother as best he could.

The first week resolved itself into one round of boyish home sickness and desolation; then gradually, as the marvelous healing properties of youth began to stir, a new feeling awakened in his mind — a sense of curiosity concerning the strange old man whom fate, by a twist of the wheel, had made the arbiter of his life. Even to one so young and inexperienced, it was impossible to know Andrew Henderson and not to feel that some strange peculiarity set him apart from other men. In his ascetic face, in his large light -blue eyes, in his extraordinary air of abstraction and aloofness from mundane things, there was something that fascinated and repelled; and with a wondering interest the boy studied these things, trying in his unformed way to reconcile them with his narrow experience of human nature.

For many weeks he sought without success for some key to the attitude of this newfound relative. Then one evening — when solution seemed least near — the key, metaphorically speaking, fell at his feet. Returning home from a ramble over the headland, his observant eye was caught by the sight of a narrow foot track that, crossing the main pathway of the cliff, wound steeply upward and seemingly lost itself in a tangle of gorse and bracken. Stirred by a boyish desire for exploration, he paused, turned into this obscure track, and incontinently began its ascent.

For some hundreds of yards it led upwards in a sharp incline; and with its added steepness the ardor of the explorer warmed. With impetuous haste he climbed the last dozen yards; then, as the anticipated summit was reached, he halted in abrupt, dismayed surprise. With alarming suddenness the land broke off short, disclosing a deep gap or fissure, carpeted with heather and surrounded by natural protecting walls of rock, in the centre of which was set a miniature chapel built of black marble.

At sight of the little edifice he thrilled with adventurous surprise. There was something mysterious, something almost fine, in the sight of the small temple, with the setting sun gleaming on its solid black walls, its low massive door and round window of thick stained glass. He leaned out over the shelving rock, staring down upon it with wide astonished eyes; then the natural instinct of the boy overtopped every other feeling. With a quick movement of excitement and expectation he began to descend into the hollow.

But though he walked round the little building a dozen times, shook the heavy door, and peered ineffectually into the opaque window, nothing rewarded his curiosity; and after half an hour of diligent endeavor he was compelled to return home no wiser than when he had first stood on the summit of the path and looked down into the rocky cleft.

All that evening, however, the thought of his discovery remained with him. At the eight o'clock supper of porridge, vegetables, and fruit which he shared with his uncle, he chafed under the silence of his companion and the air of calm indifference that the whitewashed room, with its oak-raftered ceiling, seemed to convey; and it was with a sigh of satisfaction that he rose from table and bade his uncle a formal good-night. With the same suggestion of relief he watched the old man light his candle and ascend the bare stairs to his own room; then, prompted by the impulse he never neglected, he went into the study to write the daily letter that made his mother's existence bearable.

He wrote for nearly an hour, omitting no detail of the evening's discovery. Then, as he closed and sealed the letter, a clock on the mantelpiece struck ten. The sound had an oddly hollow and chilly effect in the bare carpetless room, and unconsciously he raised his head and glanced about him. His ideas, still stirred by his adventure, were more prone than usual to the suggestion of outward things, and for almost the first time since his arrival he felt drawn to study his intimate surroundings. With a new curiosity he let his eyes wander from the severe bookshelves to the ugly iron safe that stood in the most prominent position in the room; and from this safe his glance turned to the revolving bookcase placed by his uncle's favorite chair, in which lay the volumes that were in daily use. Following an impulse he had never previously been conscious of, he crossed the room, and drawing three books at haphazard from the case, studied their titles. 'The Indissoluble Essence,' he read. ' The Soul in Relation to the Human Mind.' 'The Mystic Influence.'

He stood for a space gazing at the sombre covers, but making no attempt to dip into their pages; then a look of comprehension sprang into his eyes. The puzzling marble chapel took on a new and more personal meaning. With a quick gesture he thrust the books back into their place, extinguished the lamp, and softly left the room. Gaining the hall, he did not turn towards the stairs; but, tiptoeing to the table, picked up his cap, crossed the hall noiselessly, and opened the outer door.

The warmth of the August day was still heavy on the air as he stepped into the open; a great copper coloured moon hung low over the sea, and a soft filmy haze lay on both land and water. Without hesitation he turned into the cliff path, and followed it until his expectant eyes caught the indistinct foot-track that he had discovered earlier in the evening. With the same decision, the same suggestion of anticipation, he stepped rapidly forward and once more began the sharp ascent.

The impetus of his curiosity carried him forward, he mounted the path in hot haste; then, as he gained the summit, he halted again, but in new surprise. In the hazy mellow moonlight the small black building stood out smooth and dark as on his previous visit, but from the round stained glass window a flood of light — crimson, rose-color, and gold — poured out into the night.

**CHAPTER 2**

In the first moment of astonishment John stood motionless, his gaze riveted on the glow of color that poured through the window upon the rocks and heather of the cleft. Then, as he continued to stand with widely opened eyes, another surprise was sprung upon him. The door of the chapel opened, and the figure of his uncle — long since supposed to be sleeping tranquilly in his own room — showed tall and angular in the aperture. From John's position, the open door and the lighted interior of the little edifice were distinctly visible; and in one glance he saw his uncle's silhouetted figure, and behind it a bare space some dozen feet square, lined on floor and walls with sections of marble alternately black and white. From the ceiling of this chamber depended on an octagonal symbol in polished metal, and close by the door eight wax candles flickered slightly in the faint stir of air. But his astonished and inquisitive eyes had barely become aware of these details when Andrew Henderson turned towards the circular sconce in which the candles were set and began to extinguish them one by one. As the light died he stepped forward, and John drew back sharply; but at his movement a stone, loosened by his heel, went rolling down into the hollow; and a moment later his uncle, glancing up, saw his figure outlined against the luminous sky.

What the outcome of the incident would have been on any other occasion is difficult to say. As it was, the moment was propitious. Old Henderson, surprised in an instant of exaltation, was pleased to put his own narrow, superstitious construction on the boy's appearance. Laboring under an abnormal excitement, he showed no resentment at the fact of being spied upon; but calling John to him, ordered him to walk home beside him across the cliff.

Never was walk so strange — never were companions so ill -matched as the two who threaded their way back over the headland. Andrew Henderson walked first, talking all the time in a jargon, addressed partly to the boy, partly to himself, in which mysticism was oddly tangled with a confusion of crazy theories and beliefs : behind came John, half fascinated and wholly bewildered by the medley of words that poured out upon the night.

On reaching the house, the old man became suddenly silent again, falling back as if by habit into the morose absorption that marked his daily life; but as he turned to mount the stairs to his own room, he paused, and his curious light blue eyes traveled over his nephew's face. "Good night!" he said. "You make a good listener." And John — still confused and silent — retired to bed, to lie awake for many hours partly thrilled and partly elated by the awesome thought that there was a madman in the house.

But all that had happened seven years ago, and now Andrew Henderson lay waiting for his end. In those seven years John had passed through the mill of deadly monotony that saps even youth, and lulls every instinct to save hope. The first enthusiasm of romance that had wrapped the discovery of his uncle's secret had faded out with time. By slow degrees he had learned — partly from his own observation, partly from the old man's occasional fanatic outbursts — that the strange chapel with its metal symbol and marble floor was not the outcome of a private whim, but the manifestation of a creed that boasted a small but ardent band of followers. He had learned that — to themselves, if not to the world — these devotees were known as the Mystics; that their articles of faith were preserved in a secret book designated the Scitsym, which passed in rotation each year from one to another of the six Arch-Mystics, remaining in the care of each for two months out of the twelve. He had discovered that London was the Centre of this sect, and that its fundamental belief was the anticipation of a mysterious Prophet — human and yet divinely inspired — by whose coming the light was to extend from the small and previously unknown band across the whole benighted world.

He had learned all these things. He had been stirred to a passing awe by the discovery that his uncle was, in his own person, actually one of the profound Six who formed the Council of the sect, and to whom alone the secrets of its creed were known; and for three successive years his interest and curiosity had been kindled when Andrew Henderson travelled to England and returned with the Arch -Councillor,— an old blind man of seventy, — who invariably spent one day and night mysteriously closeted with his host, and then left, having deposited the sacred Scitsym with his own hands in the tall iron safe that stood in Henderson's study. But that annual excitement had lessened with time. Even a madman may become monotonous when we live with him, day in, day out, for seven long years, and gradually the attitude of John's mind had changed with the passage of time. The sense of adventure and triumphant enterprise had steadily receded; the knowledge that he was working out a slow distasteful probation had advanced. Reluctantly and yet definitely he had realized that his position was not to come and conquer, but to watch and wait; and this consciousness of a tacitly expected end had grown with the years — with the growth of his mind and body. It was not that he was hard-natured. The regularity with which he despatched his yearly money to his mother — reserving the merest fraction for himself — precluded that idea. But he was young and human, and he was youthfully and humanly greedy to possess the good things of life for himself and for the one being he passionately loved. It would indeed have been an enthusiast in virtue who could have blamed him for counting upon dead men's shoes. And now the shoes were all but empty! He stood watching his uncle die.

Having stayed almost motionless for several minutes, he glanced at the clock; then moved to the bed, taking a bottle and a medicine spoon from the dressing-table as he passed. "Time for your medicine, uncle!" he said in his quiet level voice. But the dying man did not seem to hear. In a slightly louder tone John repeated his remark. This time the vacant expression faded slowly from the large pale eyes, and Andrew Henderson moved his head weakly.

Seeing the indication of consciousness, John carefully measured out a dose of medicine, and stooping over the pillows, passed one arm under his uncle's neck. Andrew Henderson submitted without objection; but as his head was raised and the medicine held to his lips, he seemed suddenly to realize the position, to comprehend that it was his nephew who leaned over him. With a spasmodic movement he turned towards John, his lips twitching with some inward and newly aroused excitement. "The Book, John!" he said sharply — "the Book!" John remained quite composed. "With a steady hand he balanced the spoon of medicine that he still held. "Your medicine first, uncle," he said quietly. "We'll talk about the Book after." But the old man's calm had been disturbed. With unexpected strength he raised one thin hand and pushed the spoon aside; spilling the contents on the bed. "How can I leave it?" he exclaimed. "How can I go and leave the Book unguarded?'' Again his lips twitched, and a feverish brightness flickered in his eyes, as they searched his nephew's face. "When I go, John," he added excitedly, " the Book may be in your keeping for hours, perhaps for a whole night. I know the Arch-Councillor will answer my summons immediately; but it is possible he may be delayed. It may be the ordination of the Unknown that I should Pass before he arrives. If this is so, I want you to guard the Book — but also I want you to guard my dead body. Let no one touch it until he comes. The key of the safe is here." He fumbled weakly for the thin chain that hung about his neck. " No one must remove it. No one must touch it until he comes." His voice faltered. With a calm gesture John forced him back upon the pillows, and quietly wiped up the medicine. But with a fresh effort the old man lifted himself again. "John," he cried suddenly, "do you understand what I am saying? Do you understand that for a whole night you may be alone with the inviolable Scitsym? 'The Hope of the Universe, by whose Light alone the One and Only Prophet shall be made known unto the Watchers!" He murmured the quotation in a low rapt voice.

Again the younger man attempted to soothe him. " Don't, uncle! " he said gravely. "Don't distress yourself! I am here. You can trust me. Lie back and rest." But his uncle's face was still excitedly perturbed; his pale eyes still possessed an unnatural brightness. "Oh yes!" he said sharply, "I trust you! I have trusted you. I have left a letter by which you will see that I have trusted you — and that your fidelity has been rewarded. But this is another matter. Can I trust you in this? Can I trust you as myself?" As he put the question a sweat of weakness and excitement broke out over his forehead.

But it was neither his wild appearance nor his question that suddenly sent the blood into John's face and suddenly set his heart bounding. It was the abrupt and unlooked-for justification of his own secret, treasured hope; the tacit acknowledgment of kinship and obligation, made now by Andrew Henderson after seven unfruitful years. A mist rose before his sight and his mind swam. What was the mad creed of a dying man — of a dozen dying men — when the reward of his own long probation awaited him? But the old man was set to his purpose. With shaking fingers he fumbled with two small objects that depended from the chain about his neck. And as he held them up, John saw by the glow of the lamp that one was a copy in miniature of the metal symbol that decorated the little chapel; the other a long thin key. As Henderson disentangled and raised these objects to the light, his eyes turned again upon his nephew. "John," he said tremulously, "I want you to swear to me by the Sign that you will not touch my body — nor anything on my body — till the Arch-Councillor comes! Swear, as you hope for your own happiness!" A wild illumination spread over his face; the unpleasant fanatical light showed again in his eyes.

For a moment John looked at him, then, stirred by his own emotions, by a new pang of self-reproach and gratitude towards this half-crazy man so near his end, he went forward and touched the small octagonal symbol that gleamed in the light. "I swear — by the Sign!" he said, in a low level voice. And almost as the words escaped him, the chain slipped from old Henderson's fingers, his jaw dropped, and his head fell forward on his chest.

The moments that follow an important event are seldom of a nature to be accurately analyzed. For a long while John remained motionless and speechless, unable to realize that the huddled figure still warm in his arms was in reality the vessel of clay from which a spirit had escaped. Then suddenly the realization of the position came to him; with a sharp movement he stood upright, and seizing the bell-rope, pulled it vigorously.

When the old woman who attended to the household appeared, he pointed to her master's body and explained in a few words how the end had come, and how, in a last urgent command, Henderson had forbidden his body to be touched until the arrival of a member of his religious sect. The old woman accepted the explanation with the apathy common to those who have outlived emotion; and with a series of nods and unintelligible mutterings, methodically proceeded to straighten the already neatly arranged furniture of the room, in the instinctive belief that order is the first tribute to be paid to Death.

With something of the same feeling John drew the coverlet over the dead body, and turned to watch the old woman at her work. But as he looked at her a great desire to be alone again swept over him, and with the desire, a corresponding impatience of her slow and measured movements. Chide himself as he might for his impatience, curb his natural instinct as he might, it was humanly impossible that his strong and eager spirit could give thought to Death — while Life was claiming him with outstretched hands.

He held himself rigidly in check until the last chair had been arranged and the last cinder swept from the hearth; then, as the old woman slowly crossed the room and stepped out into the corridor, he sprang forward with irrepressible impetuosity and shut and locked the door.

He had no superstitious consciousness of the dead body so close at hand. The dead body — and with it, the dead years and the long probation — belonged to the past; he, with his youth, his strength, his hope, was bound for the limitless future.

Without a moment's hesitation he crossed to his uncle's bureau, which stood as he had left it three days before, when his last illness had seized upon him. The papers were all in order; the ink was as yet scarcely rusted on the pens; the key protruded from the lock of the private drawer. With a tremor of excitement John extended his hand, turned it and opened the drawer; then he caught his breath. There lay a square white envelope addressed to himself in his uncle's fantastic crooked handwriting.As he drew it out and held it for a moment in his hand, his thoughts centred unerringly round one object. In a moment the seven years of waiting— the strange death-scene just enacted — even Andrew Henderson and his mystical creed — were blotted from his mind by a wonderful rose-coloured mist of hope, from which one face looked out — the patient, tender, pathetic face of the mother he adored. The emotions, so long suppressed, welled up as they had been wont to do years ago in the sordid London home. With a throb of confidence and anticipation, he inserted his finger under the flap of the envelope and tore it open. With lightning speed his eyes skimmed the oddly written lines. Then a short inarticulate sound escaped him, and the blood suddenly receded from his face. "MY DEAR NEPHEW," he read, — "In acknowledgment of your services during the past seven years — and also because I have no wish to pass into the Unseen with the stain of vindictiveness on my Soul — I have obliterated from my mind the remembrance of my brother's ingratitude to his father, and have placed the sum of £500 to your credit in the Cleef branch of the Consolidated Bank. I trust it may assist you to commence an industrious career. For the rest, it may interest you to know that my capital, which I realized upon your grandfather's death, is already placed in the Treasury of the sect to which I belong — where it will remain until claimed by the One in whose ultimate advent I most solemnly believe. "I make you cognisant of these facts, that all disputes and unnecessary differences may be avoided after my death. The papers by which my property was made over to the Mystics some five years ago — together with a doctor's certificate as to my mental soundness at the time — are in the hands of the Council. Any attempt to unmake this disposition of my fortune will be fraught with failure. "With sincere hope for your future welfare, your uncle, "ANDREW HENDERSON."

For a space John stood pale and rigid, making no attempt to reread the letter; then, all at once, one of those rare and curious upheavals of feeling that shake men to their souls seized upon him. The blood rushed back to his face in a dark wave; the rose-coloured mist that had floated before his vision flamed suddenly to red; the same implacable rage that, years ago, had impelled his grandfather to disinherit his favorite son swelled in his heart. All ideas, all considerations save one, became blurred and indistinct, but this one idea rode him, spurred him to a frenzy of desire. It was the blind, instinctive human wish to wreak his loss and disappointment upon some tangible, visible object.

With a dazed movement he turned to the bed, but only the huddled, impassive figure beneath the coverlet met his gaze. For more than a minute he stared at it helplessly; then a new thought shot across his mind, and his lips drew together in a thin hard line. The road to revenge did lie open to him! With an abrupt gesture he stepped forward and pulled back the counterpane.

In the yellow lamplight the thin face of the dead man had an ashen hue; the half-opened eyes and the prominent teeth, from which the lips had partly receded, confronted him gruesomely. But the force of his disappointment and rage was something before which mere human horror was swept aside. With another rapid movement he stooped over the bed and unclasped the thin gold chain that hung round the dead man's neck, letting the metal symbol and the long thin key slip from it into his hand. Turning to the dressing table, he caught up a lamp; hurried from the room; and, descending the stairs, passed into the study.

To his excited glance the place looked strangely undisturbed. Though the frames of the windows rattled in the gale, the interior arrangements were as precise and bare as usual; the fireless grate stared at him coldly, and against the whitewashed wall the heavy iron safe stood out like an accentuated blot of shadow. Impelled by his one dominating idea, he crossed without an instant's hesitation to the door of this hitherto inviolable repository of his uncle's secrets, and, inserting the key he carried, swung back the massive door. One glance showed him the thing he sought. Lying in solitary state upon the highest shelf was a heavy book bound in white leather. The edges of the cover were worn yellow with time and use, and from the centre of the binding gleamed the familiar octagonal symbol exquisitely wrought in gold and jewels. With hands that trembled slightly, he lifted the book from its place, closed and locked the door of the safe, and, extinguishing the lamp, left the room.

In the flood of unreasoning rage and thwarted hope that surged about him he had no definite plan regarding the object in his hand. He only knew, by the medium of instinct, that through it he could strike a blow at the uncle who had excluded him from his just inheritance — at the crazy scheme by which he had been defrauded of his due. With hasty steps he mounted the stairs and re-entered the bedroom. To his agitated mind it seemed but just that, whatever his vengeance, it should be accomplished in the grim unconscious presence of the dead man.

Stepping into the room, he paused and looked about him, seeking some suggestion. As he stood there, his eyes, by a natural process of inspiration, fell upon the fire that glowed and crackled in the grate; and with a sharp inarticulate sound of satisfaction he strode forward to the hearth, knelt down, and prepared for his work of destruction. As he crouched over the fire a fresh gale swept inland from the sea, seizing the house in its fierce embrace; and the flames leaped up the chimney in the instant answer of element to element.

Instinctively he bent forward, opened the book, and gathered the first sheaf of leaves into his fingers. Then involuntarily he paused, as the bold characters of the printed words shot up black and clear in the fierce glow from the coals. Almost without volition he read the opening lines: "Out of obscurity will He come. And having proved Himself — no man will question Him. For the Past lies in the Great Unknown. By the Scitsym — from which none but the Chosen may read — will ye know Him; and, knowing Him, ye will bow down — Mystics, Arch-Mystics, and Arch-Councillor alike. And the World will be His. For He will be Power made absolute!” "For He will be Power made absolute!" Something in the six simple words arrested Henderson, suspended his thoughts, and checked his hand. By an odd psychological process his rage became chilled, his mind veered from its point of view. With a curious stiffness of motion he drew away from the fire — the book held uninjured in his hand. "He will be Power made absolute " he repeated mechanically, as he rose slowly to his feet.

**(To be continued.)**