

## JOHN HENDERSON, ARTIST.

### A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY FROM LIFE.



**I** MADE the acquaintance of John Henderson, the subject of this sketch, many years ago in the little town of South Bend, Indiana. He was at that time a passenger-car decorator in the paint-shop of the Michigan Southern Railway Company, and I, a boy of sixteen, was an operator in the telegraph-office at the railway-station. I cannot now remember how I became acquainted with him; but as his place of employment adjoined mine, I presume that I met him frequently going to and from his work, and that, attracted by his bright, intelligent face, I finally spoke to him. He was an artist—a portrait-painter—by profession; but having no pecuniary resources, and finding it impossible, at first, to support himself in his chosen field of labor, he entered the repair-shops of the railway company at South Bend, just before I made his acquaintance, as a painter and decorator of passenger-coaches. The work was as uncongenial to him as house-painting would have been to Tintoretto; but he devoted himself to it with conscientious industry for ten hours every day, in order that he might earn and save money enough to take him to New York city,<sup>5</sup> where he hoped to enjoy wider opportunities for culture and to find work more directly in the line of his tastes and aspirations.

As I remember him now, he was a young fellow of twenty-two or twenty-three, with a tall, slender figure, an erect, graceful carriage, and a head and face which not only attracted attention, but seemed, to my boyish imagination, to be the head and face of a born artist. His hair was dark, and had a way of falling in short, thick, disordered curls over a high, white forehead; his features were clear-cut and regular, and gave one in some way the impression of unusual refinement and delicacy; his lips and chin, although partly concealed by a light mustache and a short Vandyke beard, were full of strength and character; and his eyes, deeply set under the bold, prominent arch of his brow, had the clear, dark color that one sees in the deep pools of a forest brook where the water has taken up the tint of countless generations of dead leaves. To me there was in his face something indescribably winning and attractive; but whether the charm lay in

the keen, bright intelligence of his glance, in the quick, responsive play of facial expression, or in the ever-lurking laughter of his dark hazel eyes, I could not tell. I only knew that he attracted me and interested me more than any man whom I had ever met.

He was six or seven years older than I, and, of course, had seen more, read more, and thought more, than I; but he seemed, nevertheless, to enjoy my companionship, and often invited me to join him in the long walks that he was accustomed to take on Sunday afternoons through the woods and over the hills which border the South Bend River. He was a passionate lover of nature, and so, in an instinctive, half-animal way, was I; and this bond of sympathy drew us more closely together, perhaps, than any other. His love of nature, however, was that which is born of a keen, artistic appreciation of form, color, and grouping, while mine was simply an inherited and unenlightened instinct. He could analyze a beautiful landscape, explain it, weave imaginative fancies about it, and invest it with the glamour of poetry; while I could only feel its charm in a dumb, passive way, and say nothing. In our conversations, therefore, I generally received much more than I imparted.

Henderson made no pretensions to literary culture, but he was fairly well acquainted with the modern English poets and essayists, was well read in art, and had thought to some purpose about the problems of human life and destiny. I do not think that he was a religious man in the orthodox acceptance of the words, and I cannot remember ever having seen him in church; but his moral standards were high, his attitude toward religion was serious and reverent, and his unbelief took the form rather of sorrowful agnosticism than of aggressive hostility or contemptuous denial. He never attempted to shake my faith, nor to add to my difficulties and doubts; but his replies, when he was closely questioned, showed that the intellectual side of his nature was not satisfied with the explanation given by the Bible of man's origin, condition, and ultimate destiny.

He had, naturally, one of the brightest, sunniest, most buoyant dispositions that I have ever known. He seemed to be absolutely incapable of sullenness, was very seldom moody or depressed, and in the whole period of my early acquaintance with him he was angry, if



I remember rightly, only once. His attitude toward the petty evils, annoyances, and disappointments of life was that of a broad-minded, good-humored stoic, and his philosophy might have been summed up briefly in the brave, cheerful words of Thackeray: "The world is a mirror, and it gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it in turn will look sourly at you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion." Henderson always laughed at and with the world, and received its rudest buffet with a half-stoical, half-humorous gibe, in which there was never the least bitterness, resentment, or malice. If a breeze of annoyance ruffled for a moment the smooth serenity of his temper, it was only to break it into innumerable ripples, every one of which flashed back the sunshine in a sparkle of wit or a quick gleam of humor.

To sum up briefly my early impressions of John Henderson, I need only say that he seemed to me to be a handsome, high-spirited, pure-minded young man, with unusual buoyancy of disposition, great artistic talent, and an ambition to excel which would carry him, I felt sure, into the front ranks of his profession. He was very closely and intimately associated with me for nearly two years, and he exerted a stronger influence over me, perhaps, at that period of my life, than was exerted by any other man of my acquaintance.

In the latter part of the year 1863 I left South Bend to take a position as assistant chief operator in the office of the Western Union Telegraph Company at Cincinnati, Ohio, and my personal relations with Henderson were necessarily broken off. We wrote to each other occasionally for a time, but he was a very irregular and uncertain correspondent, at best, and when I sailed for Siberia in the summer of 1865 I lost sight of him altogether.

At some time during my three years' absence from the United States, Henderson left South Bend, went to New York city, opened a studio there, and entered in a quiet way upon the artistic career that he had planned for himself. He was successful almost from the first. The unerring certainty with which he caught the characteristic expression of a face, and the technical skill shown in his treatment and rendering of flesh-tints, soon attracted the attention not only of his fellow-artists, but of the picture-buying public, and in less than two years he had orders enough to occupy most of his time and to relieve him from all anxiety with regard to the future. When I returned from a second trip to Russia, in the spring of 1871, I was gratified to learn from friends of his family in Buffalo that his pictures had been hung more than once on the line in the annual

Academy exhibitions, and that he was on the flood-tide of success and prosperity. I cannot now remember whether I corresponded with him at this period of his life, but I think not. We had been separated about eight years, my early interest in him had cooled, my circle of friends and acquaintances had widened so that his companionship was no longer essential to me, and I regarded him as one who had finally gone beyond the limits of my horizon. I thought of him now and then, and I was glad to learn that his success had justified my boyish anticipations; but I felt that we had grown away from each other, and that it would be impracticable to renew our early intimacy upon any other basis than that of renewed personal association.

In 1876 I abandoned the unsuccessful business in which I had previously been engaged, went to New York city with a capital of fifty dollars to begin life anew, took rooms in the south tower of the University Building on Washington Square, and joined the ranks of that great body of unknown or unappreciated literary workers who expect eventually to be crowned with laurels and hailed with acclamations, but who are compelled in the mean time to "cultivate literature on a little oatmeal."

One raw, chilly day in the spring of 1877, as I passed through Waverly Place on my way home from the Astor Library, I suddenly and unexpectedly encountered John Henderson. I had not seen him before in fifteen years, and I was astonished and shocked at first by the change in his appearance. In all my thoughts of him I had pictured him to myself as a man still young, still handsome, with the light of added culture in his fine intellectual face, the assured confidence of success in his manner, and the outward evidences of worldly prosperity in his dress and environment; but I found nothing of the kind. The man who responded to my greeting seemed to be prematurely old, his dark hair was already threaded with silver, his shoulders were bowed a little, as if from long sedentary work at a desk, and his face, although still handsome, was worn and haggard, and bore unmistakable traces of suffering, trouble, or grief. He had no overcoat, his clothes, although neat and carefully brushed, were shiny and threadbare, and I could see at a glance that he was very poor. He seemed delighted to meet me, and my very first words brought a faint flush of excitement to his cheeks and irradiated his worn face with the peculiar sunny smile which was so characteristic of him, and which I so well remembered. He accompanied me to my room, and in the course of a conversation which lasted an hour or more I had an oppor-



tunity to observe him more closely. He was the same cheery, buoyant, sympathetic comrade that I had known in boyhood, and yet I soon became conscious of a change in him which at first I could neither describe nor explain. We compared recollections of our life in South Bend, discussed our common friends and their fortunes, talked about Russia and Siberia, and exchanged opinions with regard to all sorts of subjects; but when he bade me good-by and left my rooms, promising to call soon again, I found myself no better able to understand the subtle change in him than I was when I first noticed it. Something had evidently happened to him—but what?

In the course of the next two or three weeks I saw him frequently, and succeeded at last in satisfying myself as to the nature of the change which at first had so puzzled me. It consisted mainly in a mysterious, impenetrable reserve with regard to his present employment and to a certain part of his past life. He would talk cheerfully and frankly about all of his adventures and experiences up to the year 1873, but over everything that had happened to him after that time he drew a curtain of silence and reserve. It was perfectly evident to me that his artistic career had been a failure and his life a disappointment; but the reasons for such failure and disappointment were not discoverable. He did not look like a man who had ever been dissipated, and, indeed, it was impossible to associate the idea of vulgar dissipation with his fine, pure, sensitive nature. His ambition, supported by his natural buoyancy of temperament, would not have been crushed, I felt sure, by any disappointment in love; his health seemed to be virtually unimpaired; and I could not imagine any adequate reason for the poverty-stricken condition in which I found him. I made two or three attempts to ascertain, by means of carefully framed questions, whether he had wholly abandoned art as a profession, and, if so, for what reason; but finding that he evaded all my inquiries, I finally said to myself: "It's of no use. Henderson and I are a couple of lame ducks. We both have made a failure of life, we both are wretchedly poor, and we both feel sensitive about it. I have n't told him how I happened to come to New York with only money enough to pay for a month's board. Why should I expect him to tell me how he became reduced to his present shabby and overcoatless condition? My clothes are a little better than his just at present, but I don't feel at all sure that they will be so three months hence, and then he will have quite as much right to ask me as I now have to ask him, 'How did you come to be so poor?'"

Throughout the month of April, 1877, Henderson called frequently at my rooms, and we

gradually became as friendly and intimate as we had been in the little telegraph-office at South Bend fifteen years before. He was almost always cheerful and buoyant, took an eager interest in everything that interested me, responded with quick, sympathetic comprehension to all my moods, and was in every respect an ideal comrade; and yet he remained an insoluble mystery.

Some time in the early part of May he came to my rooms one afternoon, apparently in trouble or distress, and said to me, with an air of embarrassment: "George, I have been forced to leave my quarters unexpectedly to-day, and I have n't been able yet to find another suitable place to stay. Would you mind my coming around here to sleep for a night or two, until I can look up a room?"

"Certainly not," I replied cordially. "Come over and stay as long as you like. I'll have the janitor put up a cot-bed in my working-room, and if you can be comfortable there you may regard yourself as perfectly at home. It has been horribly lonesome living all by myself in this gloomy old tower, and I shall be delighted to have you here."

Before bedtime that evening Henderson moved in. I knew, of course, that he was very poor, and I conjectured that he had been forced out of his quarters by his inability to pay rent; but I was somewhat surprised, nevertheless, to find that all his worldly possessions were contained in one small black gripsack, or hand-bag. He brought with him neither pictures, nor canvas, nor drawing-implements, nor colors; and no one would have guessed, from a casual inspection of his baggage, that he was, or ever had been, an artist. I felt an intense curiosity, of course, to know what he had been doing since 1873, and how he was supporting himself; and for a week or two after he came to my rooms I watched him as closely as possible, with the hope of discovering the nature of his employment. I never saw him engaged in any other work than writing. Two or three times, when I came in unexpectedly, I found him sitting at my desk with a pen in his hand and a dozen or more closely written sheets of cheap foolscap paper lying at his left elbow; but he always rose quickly at such times, put his manuscript and writing-materials away in the little black bag, and went out, as if he did not wish to give me an opportunity to ask him what he was doing.

Some time in the early part of June he began to make obscure, veiled allusions to a probable change in his life and circumstances. He did not explain, at first, the nature of the impending change, but intimated that it would be for the better, and that I should have a share in his prospective good fortune. I had



had very little good fortune of my own up to that time, and I was quite ready to take a share of his if he had any to spare; but I really could see no valid reason for believing that good fortune was lying in ambush for either of us, and his vague references to the success and prosperity which were to be ours in the near future only served to deepen the mystery in which his life was enshrouded. I was careful, however, to conceal my skepticism, maintained a proper attitude of expectancy toward all these sublime chances, and invited further disclosures. Taking courage from my apparent comprehension and sympathy, Henderson gradually became more and more frank and confidential in his talk, until at last he informed me one morning that he expected in a very short time to receive from some unnamed source a fortune of three million dollars; that with this money he was to go to Europe on a mission, and that I was to accompany him. I think it was immediately after this conversation that the first vague doubt of Henderson's sanity entered my mind. I dismissed it at once as unfounded and, indeed, preposterous; but it returned persistently again and again as Henderson gradually unfolded to me, in vague, cloudy, but impressive outlines, his plans and expectations for the future. He never made any assertions or predictions that were absolutely incredible, nor did he talk at any time in a manner that seemed to be extravagant or irrational; but as I listened evening after evening to his conversation, the impression gradually deepened in my mind that he had undergone or was undergoing a subtle psychological change which left unimpaired all his intellectual faculties except that of judgment. In other words, it seemed to me that he was becoming over-sanguine and visionary.

About this time I made another discovery with regard to him, which added a new feature to the problem, and which seemed at first to explain his frequent but vague and mysterious references to a certain mission in which he expected shortly to be engaged. He invited me one evening to go with him to "Jerry" McAuley's prayer-meeting in Water street, which at that time was one of the worst slums in the city. I had never heard of his attending a prayer-meeting before in the whole course of his life, and I knew that his attitude toward religion in the years of his early manhood was skeptical. Could it be possible that he had become a religious enthusiast, and that the "mission" about which he talked was a mission of salvation to the degraded sinners of Water street? I determined to go to the prayer-meeting, and I was very glad afterward that I did so. It proved to be more interesting and absorbing than any tragedy that I had ever wit-

nessed on the stage, and it revealed to me a new and hitherto unsuspected side of Henderson's life. He had become a devout Christian. He did not take any active part in the prayer-meeting, but he was evidently in full sympathy with its methods, he was well known to "Jerry" McAuley, "Happy Charlie," "Salvation Jennie," and all the other converted and rejoicing sinners of the Water-street slum, and throughout the evening he went from one to another of the poor, degraded, sin-battered wrecks of humanity who asked for the help and the prayers of the redeemed, and comforted them with whispered words of encouragement and hope. I must confess that "Jerry" McAuley's prayer-meeting made upon me a most profound impression. From that time forward I went there as often as every other night,—sometimes every night,—and discussed with Henderson for hours afterward the characters and the histories of the people whom we saw there. Although the view that he took of "Jerry" McAuley and his work seemed to me to be perfectly just and wholly sane, he continued to talk now and then in a mysterious way of his own great mission, of the extraordinary things that he expected to do, and of the share that I was to have in them, until the suspicion which I had long entertained, that he was mentally unsound, deepened almost into a conviction.

I shall never forget the evening when I first became absolutely satisfied that Henderson was insane. We had been having a long and interesting talk about astronomy, in the course of which he had vigorously attacked and I had defended the now generally accepted theory of Laplace known as the nebular hypothesis.

"It's all very well, George," he said, "to talk about the possibility of the development of the universe from a nebula, or fiery mist, if you bear in mind that you are dealing only with conjectures. You don't really know anything about it. In the first place, what proof have you that there is any such thing as a nebula? Faint luminous masses that were once supposed to be nebulae have been resolved by higher telescopic power into separate stars; and if there are still some which cannot be so resolved, it is simply because you have n't a telescope strong enough to show what they really are."

I remarked that I believed the existence of nebulae had been conclusively proved with the spectroscope.

"I don't accept," he said, "all the conclusions that certain astronomers have drawn from the results of spectroscopic analysis. It's comparatively a new thing, and I doubt very much whether the mere presence of a certain line in the spectrum of a luminous body is sufficient



proof that the light comes exclusively from a gas or a fiery mist. But, waiving that point, admitting the existence of a nebula, how are you going to get it into rotation so that it can throw off rings? And suppose it does throw off rings, the bodies into which these rings ultimately consolidate must revolve in the plane of their primaries' equators, must n't they? And yet it is a well-known fact that the moons of Uranus, for example, have a nearly retrograde movement—a movement which is at right angles to the planet's equator. How do you account for that?"

We had a long and hot discussion, in the course of which neither of us succeeded in convincing the other; and at last, having exhausted all our arguments, we lapsed into silence. Henderson sat thinking for two or three minutes, and then, as if to resume the discussion, he said, "Do you remember, George, seeing in the scientific papers an account of a new star which appeared recently in the constellation of the Swan, increased gradually in brilliancy until it reached the first magnitude, and then slowly faded away?"

"Yes," I replied; "I think I saw something of that kind in the 'Scientific American' about a month ago."

"Do you know what that star was?" he inquired.

"N-o-o," I said dubiously; "I suppose it was one of the stars classed by astronomers as variable."

"Not at all," he replied confidently; "that was the original Star of Bethlehem, sent by God the Father to herald my mission."

If a pailful of ice-water had been poured suddenly down the back of my neck, I could not have received a greater shock than that given me by this unexpected and irrational turn in an interesting and perfectly sane scientific discussion. Fortunately, Henderson did not notice my astonishment, and as I was too much dazed to speak, he went on to explain that the reappearance of the Star of Bethlehem in the constellation of the Swan marked the beginning of his public ministry; that he was shortly to be raised to the highest position in the Masonic order; and that, under his superintendence and direction, that order was to become a greater and more powerful organization than the Church.

By the time he had finished this explanation I had recovered to some extent my self-possession, and was able to make an acquiescent remark or two for the purpose of leading him on. Encouraged by my sympathetic attitude, he became more and more communicative, and talked about his mission for at least an hour, in a manner that left no further room for doubt as to his mental condition. He was, and ap-

parently had been for years, a religious monomaniac. How this extraordinary change had been brought about—how the light-hearted, skeptical, free-thinking young artist had been transformed into a half-crazy religious fanatic—I could neither conjecture nor imagine. In vain I tried to penetrate the mystery which enshrouded the part of his life that was comprised in the period between 1873 and 1877. He would not talk about his past if he could possibly avoid it, and for a long time all my efforts were fruitless. Close personal association, however, broke down at last all barriers of reserve between us; he gave me his confidence, drew aside the veil of secrecy which had so long hidden the tragedy of his life, and told me his whole story. Inasmuch as that story has no direct bearing upon this part of my narrative, and can be better understood in the light of later events, I shall reserve it for consideration at the close of my paper.

After Henderson had confided to me the secret of his wrecked life, he made no further attempt to conceal anything from me. He talked with absolute frankness and freedom about his mission, told me all that he had done and all that he expected to do as the inspired representative of God on earth, and finally opened his little black bag and showed me more than two thousand closely written foolscap pages of manuscript, which consisted chiefly of supernatural visions and divine decrees, and which he called his "record." As I looked at this immense mass of manuscript, I no longer wondered that his shoulders were bowed, and I was quite ready to believe him when he assured me that he had been working hard.

I have not space within the limits of a single magazine article to give a detailed account of all Henderson's insane vagaries and delusions. He told me once, I remember, that he expected to purchase a railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and to pay for it the sum of fifteen million dollars. At another time he said that he was to be President of the United States in February; but why in February, rather than on the 4th of March, I do not know. The bare recital of these wild fancies will perhaps give the reader the impression that Henderson was an absolute lunatic; but such was not at all the case. Off the subjects of religion and his mission, he was the sanest man of my acquaintance. He kept himself widely and accurately informed with regard to current events; he was interested in everything that interested me; he listened attentively when I read to him the manuscript of one of my magazine articles or lectures; and gave me the benefit of his excellent judgment and intelligent criticism; he would get as much excited over



the result of a boat-race or a base-ball game as if he were a young collegian; and he would even discuss, with perfect good temper, and indeed with light-hearted gaiety, the question of his own sanity. He was just as pleasant a companion as he ever had been, and during more than four fifths of the time I found it impossible even to think of him as insane. But when one of the fits of lunacy came upon him, the transformation was so abrupt, so complete, and so startling, as to suggest the idea that an unknown and alien spirit had suddenly taken possession of his body. I had a great many talks with him about his mental condition, and tried in every possible way to make him see and realize that his judgment was, in some respects, impaired; but to no purpose.

I can, perhaps, show more clearly his psychological state at this time by narrating a conversation that I had with him one evening in the latter part of June. I cannot now remember what we had been talking about, but we finally drifted in some way to the subject of his mission, and he said, with cheerful animation, "Have I ever told you, George, that I am one of the two witnesses referred to in the eleventh chapter of Revelation?"

"No," I replied; "I think not. You have referred to yourself several times as 'the King,' but I don't remember to have heard you say anything about being a witness. Who are these two witnesses? Hold on a minute until I get a Bible and look it up."

He watched me with a peculiar, inscrutable smile as I went to the bookcase for a New Testament, and then, resting his head upon one hand, he fixed his dark, glowing eyes upon me, and waited until I had found the designated chapter and began to read aloud as follows:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

"Do you expect, Henderson," I said, interrupting my reading, "to have to put on sackcloth and ashes, and prophesy straightaway for three or four years?"

"I do," he replied quietly. I stared at him for a moment, and then read another verse.

These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

"Which do you expect to be, Henderson," I inquired, with an attempt at jocularity, "an olive-tree in sackcloth, or a prophetic candlestick?"

He regarded me for a moment with a quiet, half-amused, and at the same time compassionate smile, as one would regard a thoughtless, playful, but impertinent child, and then said

gravely: "Ofcourse the olive-tree and the candlestick are merely symbolic. I am referred to as an olive-tree, but the reference is metaphorical. I do expect, however, to be fifteen cubits in height before I die—quite as high as an olive-tree."

"What!" I gasped. "Fifteen cubits high! How much is a cubit?"

"The temple cubit is supposed to have been equivalent to about two feet," he replied imperturbably.

"Then you expect to grow to be something like thirty feet in height?"

"I do. Does it seem to you incredible? I have grown more than three inches since the 1st of January."

"Three inches! Since the 1st of January! Excuse me, I really had n't noticed it. How did you come to find out that you were growing in this extraordinary way?"

"It was revealed to me," he replied calmly, "that I should reach the stature of fifteen cubits, and I have been measuring myself from week to week, and making pencil-marks behind the door."

"Show me the pencil-marks," I said.

He took up the student-lamp, went to the door opening into the hall, and pointed out to me on the casing behind it, about six feet from the floor, a series of horizontal penciled lines, between the highest and the lowest of which there was a space of three or four inches.

"How did you measure yourself?" I inquired. "You had no one here to help you."

"I simply stood with my back to the casing," he replied, "held a book horizontally against it in such a way that it would just touch the top of my head, and then drew a pencil-line along the edge of the lower cover."

"But is n't it possible that you slanted the book at one time down a little, and at another time up a little, and so got a series of different measurements without any real change in your height?"

He admitted the possibility, but denied that he had made the pencil-marks in that way; and when further pressed with skeptical inquiries, he fell back upon the book of Revelation, which, he said, made it perfectly clear that he was to live 177 years and to attain a height of fifteen cubits.

"All right," I said at last; "I'll agree to the fifteen cubits. Let's see what else is to happen to you"; and turning again to the eleventh chapter of Revelation, I resumed my reading at the fifth verse as follows:

5. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

6. These have power to shut heaven, that it



rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

7. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

8. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

9. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.

"Now, Henderson," I said, "surely you don't expect, with your present body, to go to Sodom, wherever that may be, get killed there by a nameless beast from the bottomless pit, and lie unburied three days and a half in the street?"

"That is precisely what I think will happen to me," he replied, with a bright smile of hopeful anticipation, as if to lie unburied in the streets of Sodom would be the height of human felicity. "If you will read a little further on, you will see that the spirit of life from God is to reanimate my body, and that I am to ascend to heaven in a cloud."

I read a little further on, found the fact to be as stated, and then, laying aside the New Testament, I said: "Henderson, you are so provokingly sane nine tenths of the time, and your judgment is so perfectly sound with regard to every other subject except this one, that I find it almost impossible not to argue with you. I suppose it is useless to try to make you see the preposterous absurdity of your belief that you are to live 177 years and to grow to a height of thirty feet. From my point of view it is the wildest imaginable lunacy; but I know from experience that I can't make you think so. I should like, however, to ask you one more question. Don't answer it hastily,—don't refer me to the Bible,—but think about it quietly and reasonably, and give me such an answer as you would give if I asked for your opinion with regard to the value of Bierstadt's paintings. The question is this: Can you imagine any possible evidence, from any possible source, supernatural evidence not excluded, which would convince you that your judgment upon the subject of religion is unbalanced?"

He covered his eyes with one hand, and seemed, for two or three minutes, to be buried in profound reflection. At last he looked up and said: "No, George; I can't imagine any evidence which would convince me that I am not just as sane upon what you call the subject of religion as upon any other subject. But," he added, "I understand perfectly well how you look at it; I don't wonder that it sounds

to you like insanity. If I were in your place, with no more light than you have, I presume that I should think and argue just as you do; but I have knowledge which is not accessible at present to you. I have put these things again and again to the test of experiment, and I *know*."

"All right," I said; "that settles it. It is perfectly clear to me that you are stark, staring crazy; but I see that it is useless to try to convince you of that fact, and I sha'n't waste any more time in argument with you. I give it up. Let's talk about something else. If I keep on reading the book of Revelation and listening to you, I shall lose what confidence I have in my own sanity. You're worse than a crank discussion in the Astor Place Liberal Club."

Henderson laughed a long, hearty, infectious laugh, as if he had succeeded in making me the victim of a peculiarly ingenious bit of mystification; and then, sobering a little, and wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes, he added consolingly: "Never mind, George. It'll all come right. You'll understand these things better one of these days. What's the news in the evening papers? Anything about the result of the boat-race? I tell you, George, the Harvards are going to win, and don't you forget it."

"No," I replied confidently. "You are more off on that than you are on the subject of religion. According to all accounts, the Harvards are pulling a very ragged stroke, and it's too quick and jerky—there's no stay in it."

"You just wait and see," replied Henderson. "Sometimes even a light-weight crew will pull that quick stroke right through from start to finish without a let up and without being winded in the least. Do you remember that fast crew from the Northwest somewhere—the Showacettes, or what was it they called themselves?—they pulled that same short, jerky stroke, and yet they cleaned out everything. They could keep it up, too, for three straight miles. The trouble with your Yale men is that they're too heavy and logy—they have n't any dash. They'll stay about three lengths behind, that's where they'll stay."

We had a long and animated discussion of the comparative merits of various crews, boats, and strokes, and before it ended, the fact that Henderson was insane had vanished absolutely from my consciousness. Familiar as I had become with his mental state, I could not listen for twenty minutes to his sane conversation without completely forgetting all his delusions, and treating him just as I should have treated any other intimate friend and comrade. I tried for a time to bear the fact of his monomania



constantly in mind, and to weigh critically in the light of it every assertion and statement that he made; but I was utterly unable to do so. His intelligence was so quick, sympathetic, and responsive, and the range of his information so wide, that before I knew it I found myself deeply interested in his talk, and completely oblivious of his infirmity. He did not bring up the subject of his alleged mission frequently, nor dwell upon it pertinaciously. Sometimes he would talk with me for three or four days without making a single reference to the supernatural, and then suddenly, without changing in the least his tone or manner, he would inform me that he expected, within the next fortnight, to have the power of turning water into blood.

About a week after the conversation to which I have just referred, Henderson came to me one afternoon with a twinkle of mischievous fun in his eyes and a faint glow of anticipated triumph in his face, and said, "Well, George, where do you think I have been?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Where?"

"I've been to see a doctor. You insisted so the other day upon my insanity that I thought I'd just have an examination made of myself, and get an expert opinion as to the real state of my mind. Of course I knew perfectly well that I was not insane, but I wanted, if possible, to satisfy you."

Henderson then gave me, at some length and with manifest glee, an account of his interview with the physician whom he had consulted—a man whom he had known in the days when he was sane and prosperous, but whom he had not lately seen. After the first cordial greetings and inquiries, Henderson, with a bright, sunny smile, said to his old acquaintance, "Doctor, I have a friend who thinks that I am insane. Now, I am not conscious of any mental disorder, and of course I don't believe that I am insane; but just to satisfy him, I wish you would make a thorough examination of me, and tell me what you think. If I am deranged, I'd like to know it."

The doctor very naturally looked at Henderson with amazement. There was no suggestion of lunacy in his appearance, or in his behavior. His face, it is true, was somewhat thin and worn, but it was lighted up by a smile of peculiar sweetness and gaiety; his eyes were clear, frank, and unshrinking, with a twinkle of amusement in their depths; and his whole manner was that of a man who had perfect confidence in himself and complete control of all his intellectual faculties. The doctor was disposed, at first, to regard the matter as a joke. He had no clue, of course, to the nature of Henderson's mania; and even if he had had a clue, it is doubtful whether he would have been

able to follow it. Henderson could talk rationally when he chose, even upon the subject of religion, and he was perfectly capable of deceiving, for an hour or two, not only an all-round medical practitioner, but even a trained insane-asylum expert. As soon as the doctor became satisfied that the matter was serious, he subjected Henderson to the usual physical examination, asked him a number of questions, talked with him informally for half an hour, and finally expressed his professional opinion as follows: "You can go back to your friend, Henderson, and tell him, from me, that if he thinks there is anything the matter with your mind, he is a good deal more insane than you are."

As Henderson closed his recital with this emphatic declaration of the doctor, which so completely turned the tables upon me, he burst into a fit of triumphant laughter, and said: "Now, George, who's insane, anyhow? Confess, for once, that you were mistaken."

"I confess nothing," I replied savagely. "Did you tell your friend the doctor that you had grown three inches since the 1st of January, and that you expected to reach a height of fifteen cubits?"

"No," he said, still laughing; "I answered all his questions, but he did n't ask me anything about that."

"Of course he did n't," I rejoined, with increasing irritation. "He did n't know anything about it. I lived with you for weeks before I noticed that there was anything the matter with you. How was he to discover in half an hour what I failed to find out in a month? I never said that you were an out-and-out lunatic; I said that your judgment with regard to religious matters was unbalanced; and it is. You're a crank!"

Henderson's only reply was another fit of chuckling laughter. The suggestion that I might possibly be more insane than he not only gratified his self-esteem, but appealed strongly to his sense of the humorous; and my irritation, instead of offending him, merely added to his amusement.

"What's the use, Henderson, of discussing this question?" I said at last. "You can't convince me, and I don't make the least impression upon you. I will admit that you are sane enough to be a pleasant companion and a good fellow. Let's compromise on that."

"All right, George," he replied laughingly; "I've no desire to rub it in, if the doctor does think that you are a little deranged. We'll drop the subject, and call it square."

As the summer of 1877 drew toward a close, Henderson gradually became shabbier in dress and more worn and haggard in appearance. I did not know how or where he obtained food,



and I thought several times that I would inquire; but as he never made any complaint, and as I knew him to be extremely proud and sensitive, I hesitated to do so. One day in the early part of September he came to me and asked me if I would lend him five dollars. I did not have five dollars at that time in the world; but I promised that I would try to get it for him in the course of the day. Something happened, however, to engross my attention, and I forgot all about it. Early the next morning Henderson came to me again, apologized for troubling me, but said he must ask for a little money, as he had had nothing to eat in twenty-four hours. Shocked and overwhelmed with remorse, I took him at once to my boarding-place in West Tenth street, gave him a hearty breakfast, and told him that although I had no money, my credit was still good, and that he might take his meals there with me until he could get some employment which would enable him at least to live.

About this time I began to urge upon him the necessity of trying to support himself by manual labor. "It's all very well, Henderson," I said, "to write out visions and decrees from the Lord, if you think it your duty to do so; but don't give up all your time to it. Write out visions during half the day, if you must, but devote the other half to something that will bring in money."

Two or three days after this I came into my room about the middle of the afternoon, and found Henderson seated before a large drawing-board upon which were pencils, a ruler, a pair of dividers, and a large sheet of paper. "Well, Henderson," I said, "I'm glad to see that you have gone to work at last. What are you doing?"

His pale, thin face flushed a little with embarrassment as he said, "I'm drawing a map of the trans-Danubian principalities."

"What are you going to do with that?" I inquired in astonishment.

"I'm planning a campaign for the Russian armies in Bulgaria," he replied; "and I couldn't get along very well without a map."

"But what, in Heaven's name, have you got to do with the Russian armies in Bulgaria? Do you mean to say that you are directing those armies?"

"Certainly," he said coolly; "they have been acting under my orders for months."

"But how do you get your orders to them?" I inquired. "Bulgaria is four thousand miles away."

"I send them on postal cards," he said; "there's no trouble about that. I used to write letters at first, but lately I have n't had money enough to buy stamps, and so I use cards."

"Do you find that your orders are obeyed?" I asked.

"Yes; in most cases. Prince Bismarck weakened a little once, and failed to follow the line of policy which I had indicated for him in his dealings with Russia; but I sent him a postal card upon which I had written the words 'God is a sure paymaster,' and it braced him up like a tonic."

The grotesque absurdity of the idea that the stern man of blood and iron had been recalled to a sense of his duty and "braced up" by an anonymous postal card from America informing him that "God is a sure paymaster" was too much for my self-restraint, and I burst into a fit of laughter.

Henderson took it good-humoredly, merely remarking, "You may laugh, George, but you'll see the serious side of this subject some time."

"My dear fellow," I said, "I beg pardon for laughing at you. I see the serious side of the subject now, but it is serious for other reasons than those that you have in your mind. I won't laugh at you again. Tell me more about these orders that you issue for the regulation of human affairs. How do you make them up?"

Henderson then explained to me that he received the orders from the Supreme Ruler of the universe by means of what he called "visions," which came to him when he was wide awake, and which seemed, as nearly as I could understand, to consist of a series of extremely vivid pictures in his mind. He would write out full descriptions of these imaginary pictures, as they were presented to him, and then, if he failed at first to understand their significance, he would ask the Lord questions about them, writing down carefully both questions and answers. The divine responses came to him in the form of what he called a "warm pain," which began to manifest itself somewhere in the neighborhood of the diaphragm, moved slowly upward through the breast, and then either turned to the right or left or ascended to the throat. If this "warm pain" turned in the direction of the heart, the divine response was "Yes"; if to the other side, "No"; while if it moved upward to the throat, it was an indication that the question had not been properly put.

As an illustration of the nature of these visions I will briefly describe one of them. It is the shortest and simplest one that I remember. In a sort of vivid mental picture Henderson saw himself walking through an unknown street of an unknown city on a cold and very stormy night. Under a lamp-post he noticed the crouching, shrinking forms of two hungry, half-frozen cats, one black and one yellow. They were so miserable and so nearly starved to death that he felt sorry for them; and seeing on the other



side of the street a dwelling-house the bright windows of which showed that it was well lighted and warmed, he took the yellow cat in his arms, crossed the street, opened the door of the illuminated house, and put the cat into the hall, with the hope that the inmates would give it something to eat and otherwise minister to its necessities. This was the vision. Having written it out fully, Henderson began to ask the Lord questions about it as follows:

"What does the cold, stormy night symbolize?"

A "warm pain" which moved up through his stomach to his collar-bone indicated that the question had not been properly put.

"Does the cold, stormy night signify some human distress or calamity?"

The "warm pain" turned in the direction of the heart, which was equivalent to "Yes."

"Do the two cats stand for two nations, or peoples?"

"Yes."

"Is their half-starved condition an indication that the nations which they represent are suffering from hunger?"

"Yes."

"Does the yellow cat symbolize the Chinese?"

"Yes."

In this manner Henderson gradually obtained an interpretation of the vision. He had learned some time before, through the newspapers, that a famine prevailed in China and another in India. He had issued a decree stopping the Chinese famine, which was represented by the half-starved yellow cat, but had neglected the hungry black cat, which stood for the famine in India; and this vision had been sent by the Lord to remind him of his duty. He issued a decree stopping the Indian famine, and the Lord was satisfied.

I presume that it will not seem credible that the man who spent a large part of his time in writing out such wild nonsense as this was, nevertheless, an intelligent, cultivated human being, and a most agreeable, sympathetic comrade. It would not seem credible now to me if I had not my notes to prove it. Up to the very last it was just as pleasant to talk with Henderson upon most subjects as it had ever been. He lived two weeks at my boarding-house, became a general favorite there, and was never suspected even of eccentricity. I could not afford, however, in my poverty-stricken condition to pay his board indefinitely, and at the end of a fortnight he began to live again from hand to mouth, borrowing small sums of money occasionally from me to purchase the coarsest, cheapest kind of bread. Upon the sum of fifty cents he would live a whole week, and still have a few pennies left with which to buy

the postal cards upon which he sent his orders to Prince Bismarck, General Skobelev, and the Czar of all the Russias.

As the winter progressed, his condition, both mental and physical, grew steadily worse. His clothes became so shabby that I feared he would be arrested as a vagrant; the soles came off his shoes, and he replaced them with three or four thicknesses of coarse brown meat-market wrapping-paper to keep his stockingless feet from the icy pavements. The expression of his thin, worn face grew wilder and more haggard, and he lost completely his spirit and buoyancy. He borrowed money from me in smaller and smaller sums,—never until he was forced to it by dire necessity,—and, finally, he came one night to the table where I was writing, laid down upon it a solitary gold collar-button,—the only article of intrinsic value that he possessed,—and said: "George, would you be willing to lend me twenty-five cents on that collar-button? It's gold, and I think it is worth at least as much as that."

"My dear fellow," I said, "I don't want any security for the money that I let you have. I would give you all you want if I could, but you know that I myself have no employment. I am selling books from my library to pay my room-rent and board, and just at this moment I am absolutely penniless. I had to walk up-town from the City Hall this afternoon, simply because I had n't even money enough to pay for a ride on a street-car. I'll sell some more books in the morning, and give you as much of the proceeds as I can spare."

On the following day I sold an iconographic cyclopedia to David G. Francis, who then had a little book-store on Astor Place, paid my rent, settled my board bill in West Tenth street, and gave Henderson money enough to keep him alive for two or three weeks. So far as I can remember, he never asked me for money again. I offered him small sums two or three times, but he declined to take them, and gave me to understand that his wants were provided for.

Some time toward spring, when I had found regular employment, and was going out to my work every morning at eight o'clock, Henderson said to me: "George, I wish you would n't leave apples on the desk in your room when you go to your office. I am hungry now most of the time, and it is a constant torture to me to see them lying there and not eat them."

"Why, my poor fellow," I exclaimed, "you don't mean to say you are as near starving to death as that! I knew of course that you were poor, but I had n't the faintest idea that you were actually suffering for food. Why did n't you say something about it?"

I found out subsequently that although Henderson would not touch fruit left occa-



sionally on my desk, he had eaten apple-parings and cores which I had thrown on the floor or into the waste-paper basket, and had devoured, to the last crumb, the hard, moldy, dust-covered rind of an old Edam cheese which had been lying almost a year on the top of one of my bookcases.

I gave him money again to buy food, and when he had gained a little strength and buoyancy I tried once more to persuade him to give up the writing out of visions and to go to work at something useful and practical. "The course that you are pursuing, Henderson," I said, "is simply suicidal. You'll kill yourself if you keep on in this way."

"I'm not afraid, George," he said, with a half-sad, half-humorous smile; "I'm doing God's work. He will take care of me."

"Perhaps he will," I replied skeptically; "but he seems to be neglecting his business just at present. When a man who is doing the Lord's work finds himself reduced to a diet of cheese-rind and apple-parings, I think he is fully justified in approaching the throne of grace with a respectful remonstrance."

I made repeated attempts in the winter of 1877-78 to ascertain the place of residence of Henderson's relatives, in order that I might communicate with them, inform them of his condition, and consult them as to the course that it would be best to pursue with him; but all my efforts were fruitless. Inquiries made through friends in Buffalo, where the Henderson family at one time lived, elicited the information that Mrs. Henderson and a daughter had "moved West" many years before, and that since that time nothing had been heard of them. Henderson received letters, now and then, from his sister, and sometimes read parts of them to me aloud; but as they did not come to my address, and as he never allowed me to see them, I could not find out where the writer lived. When I made inquiries with regard to his family, he either returned evasive answers, or said frankly that he did not care at that time to have his people know how he was situated. It was perfectly evident, from the tone of his sister's letters, that he had said little or nothing to her about his mission, and that she was completely ignorant both of his mental infirmity and of his extreme destitution. I was strongly tempted, at times, to force or pick the lock of his black gripsack, with the hope of finding among his papers some clue to the residence of his family; but I never could bring myself to do it.

As the spring advanced, Henderson's mania assumed a wilder and more threatening form, and I began, for the first time, to be a little afraid of him. In the earlier months of our personal association he had seemed to find

pleasure in my companionship, and had always been glad to see me and talk with me when, after a brief absence, I returned to my rooms; but toward the last he became gloomy and reticent, his worn, emaciated face assumed an expression of hardness and sternness that I had never seen in it before, and he showed a disposition to avoid me, as far as possible, by staying away from the tower until late at night. This apparent avoidance of me, however, may have been due to another cause. His sensitiveness with regard to his shabby personal appearance made him dread chance meetings with strangers at my rooms, and often, in the evening, he would take off his shoes at the foot of the tower stairs, and come up noiselessly with bare feet to the third landing, where he would stop for a moment and listen. If all was still, he would come in; but if he heard voices, he would go softly down, put on again his broken, paper-soled shoes, and roam the streets until he thought my visitor had gone. Sometimes, late in the evening, when the stillness of the old tower was not broken by a sound louder than the nibbling of a mouse or the faint distant jingle of the bells on the horses of the University Place cars, I would suddenly become conscious of the presence of some one or something in the room, and, looking up from my writing, would be startled to find Henderson's pale, wild face and gaunt figure bending over me. It was like looking up suddenly, amid profound stillness, and seeing a ghost. Perhaps if he had been sane I should have thought nothing of it; but when he began to assume the appearance of a dangerous lunatic it was very unpleasant to have him steal noiselessly into the room, bare-footed, and stand motionless behind my chair until a subtle nervous thrill warned me of the near presence of something that I had neither seen nor heard. Then, too, he began to manifest about this time a disposition to injure people whom he did not like, and although the methods to which he resorted were harmless, the disposition itself was significant and threatening, because it indicated a new and more serious phase of mental disorder.

He came in, I remember, one Sunday just before noon, looking particularly worn, haggard, and gloomy, threw himself into a chair by the fire, covered his eyes with one hand, and breathed a long, deep sigh.

"Where have you been, Henderson?" I inquired. "You look tired and cold."

"I have been walking back and forth in front of the Fourth Avenue Church," he replied. "I issued a decree this morning paralyzing Dr. Crosby, and I have been looking in occasionally to see if the order had been executed."

I said nothing. That night, between two and three o'clock, I happened to awake, and



noticed a light in my working-room, the door of which was ajar. I rose softly, crept to the door, and looked in. Before the base-burning stove, in my big arm-chair, sat Henderson, with nothing on but the remnants of a linen shirt, which hung in strips and streamers over his gaunt, naked body from his throat to his waist. The wind was roaring and moaning about the old University tower, rattling the window-sashes and making the mica windows of the stove click a little now and then as it sucked up and down the chimney. Henderson had just finished writing down a vision, and was counting the clicks of the little sheets of mica in the stove, which he regarded as so many divine attestations, or "seals," intended to give added solemnity to the revelation that he had just received. I watched him for two or three minutes, and then went back to bed; but I found it impossible to sleep. Henderson sat there all the remainder of the night, brooding, listening, and occasionally writing; but at the first streak of dawn he laid his papers away in the little black bag, put on his wretched clothes, and went out. When I rose, about seven o'clock, and went into my working-room, I found on my desk a sealed envelop addressed in Henderson's handwriting to me. I tore it open, and read the following letter:

April 30th, 1878.

GEORGE KENNAN, Esq.: In order to allow you and others to escape just penalties, and to close forever a subject so painful to Ourselves, We make the following order. You are hereby directed to turn over to King John before twelve o'clock, noon, May 4th, A. D. 1878, all your receipts from the copies of His records which you have made and published, except so much as may be sufficient to reward you for your work. You will also turn or make over to Him any and all interest that you now have in the publication or sale of copies of such records. It was revealed to the King this morning that any and all who fail to comply with this order will be, on the afternoon of the day mentioned, sentenced to the never-ending hell revealed in the Bible. And Our action in such cases will be final. You will be left entirely uninfluenced by superhuman power in deciding to obey or disobey this order. Choose for yourself. We have repealed the law recorded in Revelation XI requiring the punishment of all who hurt the King, and revoked any and all sentences under said law. You will make this statement known to your confederates in the business referred to, for the terms apply to them also.

Sealed by God the Saviour,  
Sealed by God the Father,  
Sealed by God the King,  
Sealed by God the Comforter.

KING JOHN.

In the original, after "King John's" name there is a cross over a crown, and the letters "s. s."

When I came home from my office, late in the afternoon, Henderson was not to be found. I waited for him that evening until nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, and still he did not come. Conjecturing that he might, perhaps, be half ashamed to meet me after leaving such a letter on my desk, and that he was waiting outside somewhere for me to go to bed, I finally turned down the gas, and sat there in the dark.

About midnight the indistinct outline of Henderson's tall, gaunt figure appeared suddenly and noiselessly at the half-open door. He had taken off his shoes at the foot of the stairs, and crept up in his bare feet so as not to make the slightest noise. The room was so dark that he could not see me, but as he glided softly in on tiptoe, I rose suddenly and turned up the gas. He was completely taken by surprise. He stared at me for a moment, and then threw himself into a chair, covered his face with one hand, and sighed in the same deep, heavy way that he had sighed on the Sunday morning when he had failed in his attempt to paralyze Dr. Crosby.

"Henderson," I said, "you have known me ever since I was a boy. A little less than a year ago you came to my rooms, told me that you were in trouble, and asked me for shelter. I invited you to stay with me and make yourself at home. Since that time we have lived here together in the closest possible intimacy. In all the years of our acquaintance, and particularly in the months of our recent association, have you ever seen anything in my behavior or my character which would lead you to suppose that I would secretly and treacherously search a friend's baggage in his absence, abstract his private papers, and publish them for my own benefit?"

The form of the question hurt him, as I intended it should. For a moment he made no reply. Then he said in a broken voice, and without uncovering his eyes, "I had to do it, George."

"Had to do what?"

"To write that letter and leave it on your desk. It was the hardest and most painful duty that I ever had to perform. I did n't understand it,—I don't understand it now,—but I acted under divine direction."

"Henderson," I said, "suppose you should receive an order from the Lord to put me to death, would you do it?"

He looked up at me for the first time since entering the room, and protested excitedly that of course he never could receive such an order, and that it was simply preposterous to suggest such a thing.

"You have n't answered my question," I said. "I did n't ask for your opinion as to the



probability or improbability of your receiving such an order; I asked what you would do if you were placed in that position. You were directed yesterday to paralyze Dr. Crosby; suppose you should be directed to-morrow to kill me, would you do it?"

He still evaded the inquiry, and at last I said, "I am not willing, Henderson, to sleep under the same roof with a man who cannot assure me that my life is safe in his hands, and I must therefore ask you to leave my rooms at your earliest possible convenience."

"All right, George," he said. "Will to-morrow morning do?"

"Yes," I replied; and bidding him good night, I went into my bedroom.

When I arose about seven o'clock the next morning, Henderson had gone, taking his little black bag with him. I did not meet him again for three days. On the fourth morning after he left my rooms I saw him walking in a course parallel with my own on the other side of the street, and looking at me as if he wished to attract my attention. I crossed, bade him good morning, and said: "Well, Henderson, how are you getting on? Where have you spent the last three nights?"

"On benches in the parks," he replied quietly, "or walking the streets."

He was thin and worn to the last degree, his eyes were heavy and deeply sunken in his head, he was shivering with cold, and looked as if he ought to be in a hospital.

"I am profoundly sorry for you, Henderson," I said; "more sorry than I know how to tell you; but I don't see how I can do anything for you."

"I don't want anything, George," he replied, "except to thank you for your kindness to me and to bid you good-by. You need not have been afraid of me. Will you shake hands—for the last time?"

I shook hands with him, and we parted.

Day after day, week after week, and month after month passed, but I saw him no more. I finally concluded that he had died of starvation and exposure in one of the parks, or had been arrested by the police and put into a public asylum. That he was either dead or hopelessly insane I felt sure.

In November, 1878, I left New York city and went to Washington, D. C., where I took a position in the office of the Associated Press. About five years afterward, in the winter of 1883, I happened to give a course of lectures in the Congregational Church of that city, and at the conclusion of the last of them, who should come forward to shake hands with me but Henderson, plump, well fed, rosy-cheeked, fashionably dressed, and carrying a gold watch and chain! If a man whom I had seen die

of a lingering, wasting disease, a man whose emaciated body I had helped to lay in the grave, had suddenly appeared to me after the lapse of five years, in perfect health and with renewed youth, I should not have been more astounded.

"For Heaven's sake, Henderson," I exclaimed, "where in the name of all that is miraculous did you come from?"

"It's a long story, George," he replied, with the cheery, sunny smile that I so well remembered. "I've been in a lot of places since I saw you last—Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans. Just now I am from New Orleans; I've been down there attending the exposition."

I invited him to go with me to the Associated Press office, and there we had a long talk. He told me what he had been doing for the past three years, said that he had taken up house-painting as a means of support, and that he was fairly prosperous. He had apparently recovered in some miraculous way from his monomania, and closely as I watched him and listened to him I could not discover the slightest indication of mental derangement. I tried to get him to tell me how he had extricated himself from the desperate and apparently hopeless condition in which I last saw him in New York; but as soon as I spoke of the old University tower and our life there, his face clouded with an expression of embarrassment and distress, and he said, "Those were dark days, George; I don't like to talk about them, or even to think of them."

From this I concluded that he had become conscious, at last, of his former insane condition, that it was a source of pain and humiliation to him, and that he did not like to be questioned about it or even reminded of it. I afterward took him to my house on one of my wife's reception days, and introduced him to her and to her guests. He behaved in the drawing-room with the ease and confidence of an experienced man of the world, chatted gaily with half a dozen laughing girls, and made a favorable impression upon everybody. After that time we met at short intervals for a period of two years or more, and gradually resumed our old friendly intimacy. He seemed to be happy and prosperous; and when I saw him, just at twilight one summer evening, walking in the Smithsonian grounds with a neatly dressed young woman, I said to myself: "If there were any lingering doubt as to Henderson's complete sanity, this significant circumstance would wholly remove it. He has evidently come to his senses, and perhaps there may be some happiness in life for him yet."

Two or three weeks later he came to the Associated Press office one evening, and said, "I'm thinking, George, of trying to get a place



in one of the departments. I don't like this house-painting; it's wretched drudgery; and if you would take a letter to the President for me, I think I could get a situation."

"I'll take a letter for you with pleasure," I replied; "but I don't believe it will be of any use. Most of the departmental appointments are made now under civil service rules, and I think you'll have to stand an examination."

"I don't think I shall for the place that I want," he said. "If you'll deliver a letter to the President for me, I think it'll be all right."

"Very well," I replied. "Bring around your letter. I'll deliver it, and say what I can for you."

The next day he came to the office again, handed me an unsealed letter addressed to the President, and said, "I have left it open purposely so that you can read it. I don't want you to act in the dark; and if, after reading it, you should feel any delicacy about presenting it, you may return it to me. I'll come in again to-morrow."

When he had gone I read his letter. It was as follows:

MR. PRESIDENT: It has been revealed to me, in a vision from the Almighty God, that this country is soon to be engaged in a great war, and that I am to take charge of the Navy Department. I have to request, therefore, Mr. President, that you will appoint me to a subordinate place in that department, so that I may become familiar to some extent with its routine duties before I am called upon to assume the direction of it.

KING JOHN.

With a feeling of mingled amazement, regret, and pity, I replaced this extraordinary document in the envelop, and laid it away in a drawer. Again, and for a period of more than two years, I had been completely deceived by the apparent sanity of this unfortunate but subtle and accomplished monomaniac!

On the following evening Henderson came again to the office, chatted gaily for a while with my associate, Mr. Boynton, and then said, "Well, George, did you read my letter to the President?"

"Yes," I replied; "I have read it. I thought, Henderson, that you had recovered from that delusion. Of course you could hardly expect that I would go to the President with such a letter as that."

"No," he said; "I did n't much expect that you would, but I was instructed to give it to you. It's all right."

He turned the conversation quickly to another subject, talked cheerfully and rationally for ten minutes, and then bade me good night. It was our last meeting. A few weeks later he

disappeared from Washington as suddenly and mysteriously as he had disappeared from New York, and I have never seen him nor heard of him since.

I need only narrate, in conclusion, the story that Henderson told me in New York with regard to the misfortune which changed the whole current of his life and made a wreck of his talents, his character, and his intellect. It is briefly as follows:

Some time in the year 1873, when he was happy and prosperous in his chosen profession, and when his ambition seemed about to be crowned with success and fame, he suddenly discovered that he was becoming color-blind.<sup>1</sup> He stopped work at once, and did all that he could to restore his impaired vision; but neither rest nor treatment was of any avail in checking the progress of the disorder, and in less than six months he found that he could not discriminate accurately between colors, and that there was no hope of recovery. It was the death-blow to all his plans and ambitions. He closed his studio, rented a little attic room at the top of a building in a remote and unfrequented part of the city, where none of his friends could find him, and stole away, like a mortally wounded animal, to brood in solitude over the calamity that had befallen him. In this supreme crisis of his life, when all that he held most dear had suddenly been taken away from him, he remembered that his old mother had told him, when he was a little child, of the goodness and lovingkindness of God, and had assured him that if, when in trouble or distress, he would kneel by his bedside, tell the story of his grief to his Heavenly Father, and ask for help and guidance, his prayer would surely be answered. He had thought little of religion for many years; he had lost his early faith in Divine Providence and had become an agnostic; but the impressions of childhood, and especially the impressions that are associated with the loved form and face of a mother, sometimes return in later life with extraordinary vividness, and revive a faith that has long seemed dead. "If my old mother was right," Henderson said to himself, "if there be a Heavenly Father who cares for us and sympathizes with us when we are in trouble, perhaps he will lighten this blow for me, and show me what I am to do with my wrecked life." He knelt by his bedside—not perhaps with assured faith, not perhaps in the spirit of a professed Christian, but certainly in the spirit of him who cried, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"—and asked,

<sup>1</sup> Since this article was written I have been informed by Dr. Burnett and Dr. Fletcher of Washington that color-blindness, as a rule, is congenital and not acquired. This fact, of course, adds another mysterious feature to the problem presented by Henderson's case.



in the name of his old mother, for divine help and guidance. With that prayer was laid, apparently, the foundation of Henderson's insanity. Not knowing in what way to look for an answer, nor in what form to expect it, he endeavored to surrender his whole intellectual nature to the Divine Spirit in such a manner that it might be influenced by that Spirit, and directed in the way that was best. To explain his attitude more clearly by means of a metaphor, he tried to transform himself into a human harp for the divine fingers, with a faint hope that he might be able to catch the celestial melody. How long he continued to pray in this way, how many times he repeated this petition, with an earnest striving to enter into spiritual communion with his Heavenly Father, I do not know; but at last, grief, solitude, and constant brooding upon the supernatural began to unbalance his reason. He undertook to ascertain the divine will in all sorts of fantastic ways. He would shut his eyes, for example, open the Bible at random, and move his forefinger slowly down a page until he felt impelled to stop. He would then open his eyes, read the text at which his finger pointed, and try to draw from it some conclusion as to the divine

will. From this to dreams, visions, and impaired judgment was only a series of short steps, and in less than a year he was a confirmed religious monomaniac.

As I recall the bright promise of Henderson's early manhood, and think how cruelly his hopes and ambitions were turned into a bitter mockery, my mind goes back to his first prayer after he was stricken with color-blindness, and I ask myself the question, "Where was the merciful, loving, pitying Heavenly Father when this unfortunate half-blind, broken-hearted man knelt by his bedside in that little attic room, pleaded the promises of the Bible and the faith of his old gray-haired mother, asked for comfort, for help, and for guidance, and received such an answer?"

The only reply to the question, and the only solution of the hard problem presented by the existence of undeserved suffering and the apparent fruitlessness of unanswered prayer, seems to be that expressed in the words of Bishop Atterbury: "We shall never be able to give ourselves a satisfactory account of the divine conduct without forming such a scheme of things as shall at once take in time and eternity."

*George Kennan.*

## GEORGE MICHEL,

### THE PAINTER OF MONTMARTRE.

#### I.



BETWEEN forty and fifty years ago a great number of anonymous paintings, floating about vaguely among the picture-dealers of Paris, began to arouse the curiosity of artists and connoisseurs. None of them were signed, but all bore the impress of the same master hand—strange and extravagant landscapes that seemed to be dashed down upon the canvas in a fury of impetuous inspiration; desolate plains, mysterious forests, windmills stretching forth their gigantic arms; vast horizons, storm-laden skies, an atmosphere full of the breath of the tempest—pictures that interpreted nature in her wild, terrific, and pathetic moods with singular insight and fidelity. Almost all of them were transcripts of Montmartre, Chaumont, St. Laurent, St. Denis, and other of the picturesque suburbs of Paris, whose historic features were so changed and obliterated during the improvements and devastations of the Third Empire. The interest that they excited was very great. It was dis-

covered that the name of the unknown painter was George Michel, that he had been a resident of Montmartre, and had died not long before in extreme old age. He was said to have kept a second-hand bric-à-brac shop, and to have lived in poverty and misery, struggling for a precarious existence. He was a sort of rural Silenus, who owed his inspiration to his copious libations. When he shut up his shop in the afternoon, he would go out among his favorite scenes, jot down his impressions, then stop at an inn, get drunk, and paint his pictures at a single sitting, in a frenzy of inspiration and intoxication. He did not sign his canvases for the very good reason that he was too ignorant to write his own name. He had passed the last few years of his life in a hospital, and had died there forgotten and unknown.

It was due to the energy and enthusiasm of an admirable critic and author, M. Alfred Sensier, Michel's future biographer, and several young artists and *litterateurs* with whom he was associated, that this shadow was lifted from the memory of a good and great man.

When M. Sensier published his "Etude sur George Michel," he was able to affirm that it did not contain a single statement which he