

The League of Lost Causes

Being the Romantic Adventures of Paul Lane, American Millionaire

The Seance at Nishikoff

(Copyright, 1912, by W. G. Chapman.)

THE league was doomed; that was the substance of nearly every conversation in the diplomatic clubs of Europe. Created by Drornak, that brilliant and erratic genius whose diatribes against democracy had stirred all the courts of the continent, it had become organized in a single year in every country between Spain and the Ural. Kings had become members of it, and the league, backed by the most powerful of influences, had acquired immunity from governments and threatened to impose its will upon the civilized world. Then the inevitable happened. Factions arose, base men perverted its aims to their own ends; the best element abandoned it in disgust, a counter-organization of Western rulers was initiated, and, after the issue had hung for months in the balance, the scales fell, and the league became discredited.

And up and down Europe, travelling from court to court, a cohort of paladins, each fighting singly and wholeheartedly, strove for the two factions. That the league was planning a desperate stroke in order to regain its former influence was the substance of a conversation between Lord Claude Tresham, secretary to the cabinet of kings which had fought the league successfully, and Paul Lane, the young American millionaire, as they sat together in the palm room of the Hotel des Anglais, at Geneva, and looked out at the snow-capped mountains.

Paul's wits had been sharpened in many fights when he was serving the league. He had been induced to place his fortune and his services at its disposal by the Princess Clothilde of Austria, the guiding spirit of the society. When he came to understand that he was but a tool in the hands of an unscrupulous woman, whom, nevertheless, he had grown to love with a passion which he knew would last during the remainder of his life; when, too, he understood, in shame and humiliation, that the high motives of the league were always masking criminal designs, he offered his services to Lord Tresham, to fight his former friend's cause. He had performed several missions with honor, he had met Clothilde herself in battles of wits and worsted her; but each encounter only drove home more deeply the shaft of the pitiless archer who wounded him to the heart.

For this reason he fought the more daringly. He had become, next to Tresham, the opposing organization's most powerful agent. Tresham had summoned Paul to Switzerland to undertake a mission which was to overthrow Lord Tresham's last remnants of power and influence in Europe. He explained it to him in the aftermath of the glorious August evening.

"The league has one prop, Paul," he said, "and you are to kick it away. The Kaiser has long abandoned it; so has Alfonso of Spain, its leading western ally. But in the realm of the Tsar the league still rests supreme. The Russian agent of that unscrupulous association is Apollodorus, the monk who has obtained so strong a hold upon the people and over the superstition-ridden Nicholas II. As you undoubtedly know, this Apollodorus, whose headquarters are in the monastery at Nishikoff, is the latest of a long train of charlatans who have duped Nicholas with spiritualistic phenomena. At Nishikoff, they say, he calls up the ghost of his majesty the late Alexander III, and this spectral adviser, whose counsels are, of course, always those of the league, and who is, in reality, the 'medium' Apollodorus himself, directs the policy of the whole realm of Russia. Paul, did you ever turn the dark lantern on a 'spirit' at a seance?"

"I did," said Paul, chuckling over the remembrance. "It was in my college days. I exposed the notorious Fraulein, who had fooled many leading people in New York, and photographed him with a calcium light, capering round the room in fifteen yards of crash towelling."

"That, Paul, is exactly what you are to do to Apollodorus," answered Lord Claude. "You can imagine the scene: the Tsar, wildly credulous, his attendants secretly sceptical, but outwardly believers, and just a little bit inclined to a mystical interpretation of the phenomena because of the inherent human tendency to self-deception. I can obtain for you a chance for a seance through friends at St. Petersburg. You will, then, attend the seance with a dark lantern under your coat, expose the fraud at the psychological moment, and obliterate the league's influence in Russia in a flood of ridicule. Once Nicholas has left it, we shall hear very little more about it."

Paul left for St. Petersburg on the following day, bearing a letter of introduction to Count Gabel, a man of old family who, though at present out of favor, anticipated the day when the wheel of fortune would once more place him in office. Paul had been instructed that Gabel was a firm believer in the phenomena and that he must obtain admittance to the seance

in the guise of a believer. Upon presenting his card he was at once admitted to Count Gabel's house and ushered into the presence of a portly, elderly gentleman, somewhat pompous, but with a saving sense of humor which, together with a certain airiness of nature, attracted Paul.

"And so you wish to investigate the phenomena of the monk Apollodorus, young man," he said, when he had finished reading the letter. "Lord Tresham and I are very old friends, dating from the days when he was first attaché at the Russian court. I am sure that I can obtain permission from his majesty, and you have come, luckily, at precisely the most favorable time, for his majesty departs for Nishikoff on Wednesday next, with all the gentlemen of his court, to question his late father concerning an important matter of foreign policy, upon whose adoption or rejection, I may say in confidence, grave issues depend. His majesty is only too anxious to make converts, and anyone for whom I vouch can accompany his gentlemen."

His voice grew low and he bent forward and began speaking earnestly. "It will convert you, my friend," said Count Gabel. "It is positively the most wonderful exhibition ever vouchsafed to man. I knew the late Tsar Alexander. And, since his death, I have seen him at the Nishikoff monastery—seen him, touched his hand, just as it was in the flesh, and spoken with him face to face and heard his own voice answer me. It is wonderful! Imagine what it means to you who have been privileged thus to learn for surety that death is, in truth, only transition! Imagine what it means to the Tsar to have the advantage of his father's counsel upon matters of state!"

He suddenly became aware that he was talking with utter abandon to a stranger and, sitting up in his chair, resumed his severe manner.

"Mr. Lane, it will be necessary to make use of a very harmless deception," he said. "You are not married?"

"No," answered Paul.

"Good! Good!" exclaimed the jovial old man. "Because of course you must have some sort of excuse for being taken to Nishikoff. You must be some relative of mine, for instance. You don't speak Russian? Ha! Ha! Then you can't be a blood relative. Ha! I have it! You shall pass as the fiancé of my wife's cousin, a very charming lady of royal blood who is staying with us and is a friend of the Tsaritsa. She will, I am sure, willingly accept you in that capacity for she loves a jest. She is as convinced as I in the reality of these phenomena—and so will you be too. Now you must send to your hotel for your baggage and come home with me."

Paul was completely disarmed by the old count's hospitality. In fact nothing but a strong sense of duty prevented him from throwing away the dark lantern and calcium powder which he had brought in his suitcase. But he conquered this impulse and at the end of the day waited upon the count again, entered the droshky which was waiting outside his office, and was whirled away to Gabel's residence in a fashionable part of St. Petersburg, where he was warmly welcomed by the countess. A few words of explanation from the count in Russian easily amused her.

"Clothilde will be here in a few minutes," she said to Paul in English. "But wait! I myself will go and tell her that her fiancé is expecting her!" And she tripped out of the room, leaving Paul and the count alone.

Clothilde! It could not be the same, unless she were ubiquitous. Yet Paul was hardly surprised when she came in, for fate seemed resolved to link their fortunes together.

The strangeness of that meeting filled him with a realization of the dramatic nature of the parts they were to play together.

"Well, how do you like each other?" inquired the countess amiably. "Do you think you can permit Mr. Lane to act as your fiancé for a day, Clothilde?"

She raised her eyes for an instant. "I—I think I can," she murmured, and the blood flushed her cheeks and then receded leaving them whiter than ivory. In that moment Paul felt assured that she was not indifferent to him.

They found themselves side by side upon the window seat after dinner, when the old count snored peacefully in his chair and the countess knitted, casting secrets, sly, amiable glances toward her guests. She had taken an extraordinary fancy to this young American. She did not know very much about Clothilde, who had always moved in a circle loftier than her own; but the good soul's mind was filled with match-making. If Clothilde could learn to care for him as much as he evidently cared for her! It seemed to be a case of love at sight! Perhaps—well, stranger things had happened. She saw in her mind the acceptance of Paul as Clothilde's lover, the marriage ceremony, the bridesmaids, in white, with fragrant

blossoms in their hands . . . and all this faded into the mist of dreams. The countess slept beside the fire, opposite her sleeping husband.

And Paul was stammering out his love and clasping Clothilde's little hands in his.

"Forgive me," he was saying, "for my remarks to you that day in Paris. I was mad with a sense of shame and betrayal. I have always loved you, Clothilde. I shall love you for ever more. Do you love me?"

For they never seem banal to lovers, those hackneyed words. Nor did her reply seem as insipid as the printed record of it would be; for both were in heaven.

Paul saw tears in Clothilde's eyes. "I k. a you, Paul," she said, and humbly had replaced the imperious pride in her voice. "When you showed me to myself for what I am I suddenly realized—O, ever so many things. I knew then that I had found the one man whom I could love. I always loved you, Paul, from that strange moment of our first meeting in America. But lately—well, Paul, do you know why I am here?"

"To aid Apollodorus," he answered, with the least tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"No," she answered. "It is because I am sick of the league. I tried to bury myself here, to escape them."

Why, Paul, do you not know that Alexander was the strongest man in Europe? He could bend a horseshoe double with one of his hands. And I have seen him—his spirit—do that, to convince Nicholas."

"Never, Paul. He is a weakling and has hands like a woman. Paul, if you are here to expose the monk you will be convinced in spite of yourself."

"You are deceived by a clever impostor," Paul answered. "It cannot be, Clothilde."

She did not try further to persuade him, and a moment later the countess awoke and looked around for her knitting.

The party was to start from the station at ten o'clock on the Wednesday morning, in a special train, scheduled to reach Nishikoff late in the afternoon, when they would be received and dined in the refectory of the monastery and lodged overnight. The program was carried out as it had been planned. Paul caught a glimpse of the thin, nervous figure of the Tsar as he hurried into his private coach; then, with his host and Clothilde—for the countess stayed comfortably at home—he entered a compartment already three parts filled with gentlemen of the Tsar's bodyguard, and the train rolled out of the station, to pull in at Nishikoff about

five in the evening. There carriages awaited the party and drove in long procession to the monastery.

Their sleeping accommodation was in cells, for the Tsar's visits were regarded both by himself and by the head monk as disciplinary journeys; but the meal, spread on long tables in the refectory, was satisfying and almost epicurean. Evidently these monks were not averse to the good things of life; indeed, from the glances which they turned upon Clothilde it was evident that they were by no means fanatical in their asceticism. The admission of a woman, though contrary to the strict monastic rule, was condoned in the case of one of his majesty's suite, but it proved sufficiently disconcerting for many of the inmates. Paul noticed, however, that each scrutiny of his companion was preceded by a furtive glance toward a small, thin man in a brown monk's robe made, instead of from cloth, out of horsehair, and fastened with a plain hempen girdle, and that this man, who occupied a carved chair at the head of the long table, seemed to possess a wholesome authority over the brethren.

"That is Apollodorus," whispered Clothilde to Paul; and Paul, looking at the stern, ascetic face of the man, was conscious of a fund of power in him which would make his own duty the more difficult. He grasped the little dark lantern tightly under his coat. Undoubtedly Apollodorus was no common impostor and would fight for his control over the wavering mind of Nicholas. And Paul was not among friends. He knew the self-deluded vanity of those who are tricked.

you will do nothing until you are convinced that it is fraudulent."

"I promise you that, Clothilde," Paul answered, and at that moment the dinner came to an abrupt end by the rising of the Tsar. The brethren stood up from their benches and marched out in order, leaving the Tsar and his retinue alone with the head monk and Apollodorus.

Then, since the affair was a matter of routine, by reason of frequent repetition, no words were spoken, but the whole party filed out in the monks' wake and entered a large, square, vault-like chamber, at one end of which a black curtain had been drawn in front of a sort of dais, a platform containing a dark cabinet and a chair. In front of this were chairs in rows several deep, into which the Tsar and his courtiers sank, while the head monk bowed his head and intoned a prayer. Then, bowing solemnly, he withdrew, leaving Apollodorus to perform his feats.

The monk addressed the Tsar. What he said Paul could not, of course, understand, but he saw how thoroughly the man dominated the mind of the monarch and impressed himself upon the courtiers.

From behind the curtain came a low muttering sound, gradually increasing in intensity, with broken words in deeper tones interjected as by an alien voice. Then a draught blew back the curtain till it belled into the face of the Tsar. Nicholas drew back with a stifled shriek; a moment later the curtain was as suddenly withdrawn, and as the Tsar subsided, a huge figure of a man glided from the cabinet and stood be-

fore the company, his arms raised as in benediction. "Do you believe? Do you believe?" whispered Count Gabel excitedly in Paul's ear. And Paul, looking toward that he had never seen a clearer representation of the late Tsar than this spectral figure with the gaunt cheeks, gray beard, and mighty arms stretched out over the company. The Tsar had fallen upon his knees, the courtiers followed suit, and somebody among the audience was singing a Russian hymn. It died away; the figure still stood motionless before the curtain; then Nicholas arose weakly and, prostrating himself upon the lowest step, held communion with the figure, which bent over him. Only the whispers of their voices were audible in the room.

The eyes of all were on the pair. All watched, all wondered; perhaps of that assembly half believed and hardly one was wholly sceptical. Paul slipped, unnoticed, out of his chair, and edged his way toward the front row, immediately behind the prostrate sovereign.

A candle flickered in one corner and the light fell clearly upon the face of the tall figure. Paul was amazed. This could not be Apollodorus—some confederate, perhaps, but never that ascetic little man.

A voice whispered in agitation on one side of him. Others took up the words. Hands clutched at him. Paul did not understand that he was sitting in Nicholas's chair. At any moment the monarch might rise and come back and perceive this intruder. They laid hands violently upon him, and Paul, thinking his purpose had been discovered, tore the dark lantern from under his coat and flashed it into the face of the figure. He had planned to begin instead with the calcium, but this proved equally efficacious.

For everybody was upon his feet shouting at Paul, leaping forward, his lantern light flooding the room, grasped the tall man by the flowing draperies he wore and whirled down the steps with him and into the midst of the guests. Simultaneously the whole company precipitated themselves upon Paul and him whom he held fast. Whoever it was, it was no ghost, that much was certain, but a giant in strength, a giant who sought for him and found him among the stumbling men and crashing chairs and wrapped his great arms around him like a vise and slowly crushed the breath out of his body. Pinned helpless in the grip of his antagonist, Paul felt his senses leaving him. He heard the shouts of the courtiers blend and mingle into a sullen roar as of the sea; lights flashed before his eyes; he felt himself lifted up and carried away. The last things that he saw were Clothilde's terror-stricken face and the horrified eyes of Count Gabel.

When he opened his eyes again he was lying in the little cell which had been assigned to him on his arrival. Overhead an electric light burned brightly. Beside his bed a cowed figure was seated—the figure of Apollodorus. As Paul stirred the monk put down the missal which he had been reading and came toward him.

"You are feeling better?" he asked, smiling composedly. "Then you can tell me who you are. An Englishman?"

"American."

"Newspaper correspondent?"

"If you like," answered Paul indifferently.

"Or perhaps an emissary of the league," continued Apollodorus, smiling more broadly.

"Like yourself? No," answered Paul.

"My good American, you are a month out of the date," Apollodorus answered. "I knew that I had the reputation of being a member of that organization, but one must not believe all that one hears. I have better things to occupy my mind—eternal things, not those of this wretched world. That his majesty has been inclined toward the league was due to the counsels of his father; lately Alexander has counselled him otherwise."

"By whom you mean yourself," said Paul. "Now let us be frank. What are you going to do with me?"

The monk stared at him thoughtfully.

"If you will give me your word of honor to keep the secret which I shall reveal, you may go free," he said. "To be equally frank, you have us in an unpleasant position. If we had not dragged you away before the lights went up—"

"Yes."

"His majesty might have guessed at your purpose. As it is, everybody thinks you were a journalist. Have I your word? Good. The man you fought with was his late majesty Alexander III. In middle life he wished to withdraw from the world to give himself up to meditation. As the Tsar cannot abdicate he followed the example of his predecessor, Alexander I, and withdrew to this monastery after a mock funeral, and hither his majesty comes at times to receive counsel. You understand, my friend, that with a sovereign of his majesty's type of mind we cannot always be frank." He whispered into Paul's ear. "Nicholas is weak in his wits. It is necessary to use certain methods to strengthen them. You understand?"

"And to strengthen the priesthood," answered Paul.

"But not the league," said Apollodorus. "Come, there we are quits. You have achieved your purpose—for I know all about you, Mr. Lane. The league no longer rules in Russia. And I have your word of honor. A carriage is waiting to convey you to the station. A train arrives at dawn—one hour from now."

From behind the curtain came a low muttering sound, gradually increasing in intensity, with broken words in deeper tones interjected as by an alien voice. Then a draught blew back the curtain till it belled into the face of the Tsar. Nicholas drew back with a stifled shriek; a moment later the curtain was as suddenly withdrawn, and as the Tsar subsided, a huge figure of a man glided from the cabinet and stood be-

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SEEN IN BAT WORLD

Habits and Oddities of Little Night Creatures.

Is Not a Bird, but a Mammal, with a Great Difference From the Ordinary Four-Legged Land-Going Type.

Of all the more common animals about us the bat is probably the least well known to the average man, a writer in the Scientific American states. This is because of its nocturnal habits and the consequent difficulty in observing it. Indeed, all that most people seem to know about bats is that they fly at night and are "awful things to get into your hair." As a matter of fact, there is no authentic instance of bat's ever alighting upon a woman's hair, and they are no more in the habit of doing so than are humming birds.

The fact is, very little is known concerning the habits of bats and much remains to be found out about them. The order comprises some 450 species, but it is safe to say that three-fourths of them are known only by their dry skulls. They exhibit differences in form that are fairly bewildering. They range all the way from the beautiful to the fantastic and hideous. The great majority, however, are useful to man in destroying insects which, without the aid of birds and beasts, would very soon overwhelm him. The harmful species are those which destroy fruit and a few which suck the blood of domestic animals.

The bat has figured in folklore from the earliest times. But it cannot be said to have given the Latin poet Virgil the idea of harpies—creatures that had the faces of women and the wings and claws of birds. The Greeks had a story about the two daughters of a certain hero who, on account of their obstinacy, were changed by the gods into bats. The Saxons called the bat the "vire-mouse." The word comes from hreran, to move, and mus, a mouse—the mouse that moves the air with its wings. The word is now used only in heraldry as signifying a bat on a coat of arms. You may hear country people speak of the fitter mouse, and the word has been used sometimes in poetry, as for instance: "And giddy fittermice with leather wings."

The Chinese speak of the bat as the heavenly rat, the fairy rat, the flying rat or the night swallow. Their ideas of the animal are very odd; they believe that it flies head downward because its brain is so heavy, and that it lives to a very great age because it has the habit of swallowing its breath. They also take the bat as their emblem of happiness. A symbol consisting of five bats is called wu fu, or the "five happinesses" which every one is supposed to desire; they are wealth, health, goodness, long life and a peaceful death. In China, if you wish your guest good luck, a graceful way of doing so is to have five bats depicted on the bottom of his teacup.

The bat is not a bird but a mammal, with almost as wide a departure from the ordinary four-legged, land-going type as is a whale of manatee. Its hand reveals an extreme degree of what is called "specialization." For a mammal the arms are unusual length. The bones of the fingers are enormously extended and connected with hairless skin as flexible as India rubber to form a wing for flight. This wing membrane is extended on up the arm to the body and the legs, and is continued between the legs and tail, where it forms a supporting parachute in flight. The thumb of a bat is very short and free, and its nail is developed as a hooked claw, by the aid of which the creature can comfortably climb about or support itself. The favorite position of a bat at rest is hanging by its feet, head downward.

One of the strangest characteristics about the bat is that it cannot fly from the ground. When it finds itself upon terra firma it crawls painfully to some wall or tree, and, clambering up to a suitable elevation, launches itself into the air. Curiously enough, too, it accomplishes this climbing trick upside down, holding on with one of its hinder hooks while it reaches up and lays hold of the slightest inequality with the other. In this way it makes rapid progress and, flinging itself into the air, takes flight. Once upon the wing all awkwardness of the bat disappears as if by magic.

Plague Rat Convicted.

The editor of the Manila Daily Bulletin died on September 22 after a four days' illness the onset of which was sudden and violent. The case proved to be one of bubonic plague. His office was promptly cleaned out and disinfected. In the course of this work a mummified rat was found in a drawer in his desk. In the same drawer a number of living rat fleas were found hovering about the carcass. In these fleas and in the mummified body of the rat virulent plague organisms were found. The connection between the death of the editor, the mummified rat, and the fleas seems unmistakable. Although the rat had been dead at least two weeks, it was still as highly virulent state, as were also the fleas. The case is of interest as showing with unusual clearness and directness the source of a human plague infection, and also as furnishing the strongest kind of testimony in support of the close connection between rat plague and human plague.

Electrifying Celluloid.

If you will take two thin lengths of celluloid, put them in contact and then suddenly and rapidly pull them between your fingers, you will observe they both have become electrified—not only on their outside surfaces, where the friction of your fingers caused a negative electrification, but also on the inner surfaces of the celluloid.

First in Lumber Production.

Washington stands first in lumber production, with Louisiana second.

looking elderly woman, and the vials of the mother's wrath burst forth.

"You're Mrs. Green, I s'pose," she sneered. "Green by name an' green by nature, I should call you, to keep a ferocious animal like that there Irish territorial o' yours, a-bittin' the whole neighborhood! I'll have the law on you! I'll make you pay! D'you hear? I'll sue you for damages and 'ave that terrible dog shot by act of parliament, I will!"

Then as she paused for a moment for breath the old woman took a slate and pencil and said, in a mildly apologetic tone:

"Very sorry, mum; but would you mind writin' it all down? I'm stone deaf."—London Tit-Bits.

Of Ammunition.

Jimmy—Of course, I didn't hit dat Ryan's squirrel. How could you expect me to?

Johnny—Why couldn't you?

Jimmy—I didn't have no bird about in dis gun.

MURDERERS BURKE AND HARE

Men of Notorious Memory Should Still Be in the Recollection of Londoners.

The skeleton of the last of the body snatchers treasured in King's College hospital recalls that there must be Londoners still living who remember Hare, who, with his accomplice, Burke, first substituted murder for resurrecting corpses in order to supply subjects for the dissecting rooms.

Burke (whose method of smothering the victims gave his name as a new verb to the language) was hanged on the testimony of his accomplice, for Hare turned queen's evidence and was released.

Forty years or so ago Hare was a well-known figure in London streets, or Sergeant Ballantine in his "Life," describes him as one of the most persistent blind beggars on the streets about 1870. Few people recognized the cold-blooded murderer in the middle-aged, stout man, clad in a

white smock and led about by a dog. His blindness he owed to the fact that on leaving prison Hare found work in some lime kilns. The laborers discovered his history and threw him into a pit of lime. It was a terrible vengeance, for it destroyed his eyesight. And as it is not fifty years since he was a striking figure in London streets some people should recall him.—London Chronicle.

The less logic there is in a man's argument the louder he talks.

ELOQUENCE WENT TO WASTE

Indignant Mother Had Gained Nothing by Denunciation That She Thought Effective.

Determination writ large upon her angry countenance, the mother of the child who had been bitten by an Irish scorpion belonging to a new neighbor (Mrs. Green) gave an authoritative "matin'" with the knocker of Mrs. Green's door.

The door was opened by a meek