

A PEBBLE FROM INDIA

II.

Mystic Tragic Influence Exerted on the Possessors of a Wonderful Oriental Love-Stone

By JULIAN HAWTHORNE

ABOUT the middle of last June I was crossing Madison Square, New-York, diagonally, from Broadway to Madison-ave. The day was warm and beautiful, and there were many persons sitting on the benches. One man I happened to notice particularly; he occupied a seat near one of the fountains. He was alone, for the bench was exposed to the sun, which, however, was so far from incommoding him that he wore an autumn overcoat, with the collar turned up. A soft-felt hat was pulled over his brows, and the lower part of his face was covered with a short silky beard, which did not disguise the molding of his chin and lips.

I passed this figure, and continued on my way; but after a few paces I stopped, turned and went slowly back. There had been something about him—something that awoke memories in my mind. I paused in front of him. At last he looked up. It was he!

"Edward Beauchamp!" said I.

"Hello! Good to see you! It's been a long time! Sit down!"

An hour passed over us unheeded on that blistering bench, while we recalled the past and interrogated each other. Since we had parted at Jaisalpur a month after the night of Aden, now years ago, I had heard nothing from him. Physically, my friend was greatly changed. He was emaciated and languid and feeble as an old man. "Nothing special the matter; but lost my appetite and that sort of thing," he remarked cheerfully enough. He seemed to me like a dying man, though he must have been under forty; but it struck me that he was gratified, rather than concerned, at his deplorable condition. Attention to outward things caused him a manifest effort; he would lapse into musings, and speak from the purpose; he had lost his grip and initiative. Yet he was not depressed, and his manner with me was tranquilly affectionate. To certain questions which I put to him he returned inconclusive replies. When had he come to America? For what purpose? What was he doing? Did he mean to remain? He would smile gravely and answer in vague terms.

But at last he said: "If you've no engagement, would it bore you to come up to my rooms for awhile? We can chat comfortably there. It's too bright and lively out here to say things; and there are a few things that I'd like to say to you. You're the only fellow I could ever tell things to, you know."

We rose, and he leaned upon my arm, walking slowly and with difficulty—he, who had been the type of the Greek athlete, active and tireless! We proceeded up Fifth-ave, for half a mile, then turned down a side street to the left, and presently arrived at a tall bachelor-apartment building, near the summit of which Beauchamp had his abode. The rooms had a broad outlook over city and river, and the clamor of the streets was hushed at that elevation to a not unagreeable murmur. The rooms were furnished and decorated as became a wealthy and cultivated Anglo-Indian: pictures of reposeful Oriental ruins and landscapes; exquisite lace-like carvings from Agra; wonderful little caskets and figures, in silver, bronze or ivory, from China and Japan; silken hangings and draperies in quiet tints; and in one corner something was fastened to the wall, and a curtain hung before it. Beauchamp took off his overcoat, and then, apologizing for fatigue, laid himself down on the divan, asking me to sit in the Indian extension-chair beside him.

"I'm glad you came," he said. "I've so often thought of you. I wanted you to know it all,

and now, if you don't mind, I'll tell you. It isn't a very long yarn. The cigars and things are on the table at your left."

I began smoking accordingly; but my cigar was nearly half done before Beauchamp found the breeze to fill his sails. I never indeed have known another man who so well understood the art, or the mystery, of the harmonizing of personal spheres; he would not and probably could not disclose himself, until he felt that the adjustments were complete. This might occur in silence or otherwise; but occur it must, before anything of import could ensue.

*

"An American family came to Madras the year after I met you," he finally said; "and when I heard about them I did what I could for them, mainly for your sake. Franklin, their name was; father and mother, and daughter Guinevere, about twenty years old, educated and modern, eager to know things, and, being in India, interested in the theological fad, as I myself still was at that time. But her impulse was to investigate and to analyze, and so to broaden her outlook upon human nature and the mind—no notion at all of self-abnegation, of abating the individual virus; she loved reasonings, but she balked at belief. For all her modernity, she held to the old conception of character, morality, heroes and heroines, persons absolute and independent in themselves; the idea of thoughtless spontaneity as the secret of the true life never occurred to her. That was her conscious self, the sort of mind she cultivated. But unconsciously, naturally, she was exceedingly winning and agreeable, clean, wholesome and handsome. Her influence was like broad daylight, with a crisp breeze blowing, and no mists or obscurities visible. Her vitality was stimulating, like a plunge into cool spring-water. Her assertion of the feminine prerogative was captivating, for she was perfectly well-bred; and to a fellow who was rather tired from governing a native Province, it was comforting to feel a person who really liked to hold the reins; and thought, will and authority over others were fine things.

"One's experience in life, if you notice, isn't continuous, a logical, progressive development; it comes in areas, as I might say, related to one another sometimes as reactions, sometimes as higher or lower planes, or may be only seeming to be caused by outward circumstances; but, however, it may be, I suspect that underlying them always is the decree that every man of us is to have the opportunity to explore all the possibilities of the phase of our common nature that has been given him. The thread of personal identity runs through them all, of course; but while each of them lasts we live lives more or less different one from another. Well, at the time Guinevere came I had just traversed one of my areas of experience, and was ready to

enter upon another. You know what the former one had been.

"I had lived through the emotions and intuitions, and my time had come for subjects of fact and intelligence. The mystical light had gone out, and I was to kindle the rational one. The change was from deep to shallow, from higher to lower—I don't deny that—at all events, the change was there: Inda had vanished, and Guinevere had arrived. You may call this a sophism, to excuse an infidelity; but I've thought it over, and I doubt the soundness of the conclusion. The man who had known Inda had not the same attributes as the man who knew Guinevere; Inda's earthly life had ceased, and with it had ceased the springs of the life I had led with her. She had taken

away with her the better and purer ideals in me which had made me her lover and husband, but had left behind the existence that had served them as foundation. Now, an inferior stimulus had caused to grow upon that foundation ideals that were correspondingly inferior. Root out of the soil of your garden the roses and lilies, and in their place, if the soil remains, weeds will spring up.

"One state is not comparable with another, any more than a rose is comparable with an apple. Such happiness as I had with Guinevere would have appeared to me like misery, seen from my elevation with Inda; but it was not so that I saw it. And looking back to Inda was like remembering a glorious, inspired childhood, forever passed away. This is the humiliation and tragedy of our finite compass; no doubt there's a deep significance in it—few deeper—but we can't fix the conditions, or prevent the issue. We must accept it as it comes, and learn from it, if we will, what we are not, and what we are.

"I resigned my position in the service, and traveled with the Franklins for two years or more. Guinevere and I became engaged; but we both were content for the time in that intermediate situation: to put off settling down till later on. Meanwhile, we conversed a good deal about America and the American idea. It began to attract me, perhaps because of its utter contrast with the ideas and scenes I'd known hitherto. It seemed to harmonize, as she herself did, with my new phase. Never a word, though, did I utter, or think of uttering, about what had gone before. I never so much as consciously thought of it; a wall of oblivion had risen to shut it out. Who would believe, on the testimony of the snow, that summer had been, or that spring was to come? For aught Guinevere knew, she might have been the first woman I had known intimately; and I was not deceiving her either, for nothing that she knew or could ever know of me—no possible manifestation of me in her presence—had ever existed for Inda. Besides, it seemed physically impossible for me to speak that name in Guinevere's hearing. When Lucifer fell from Heaven, he lost the faculty of angelic language.

"When we got to England, in the course of our journeyings, I found things of my own to attend to; and Guinevere and her parents went on meanwhile to America, where I was to rejoin them. A year passed before I could do so. Then her father died, and our marriage was again put off. But at last the date was fixed for the autumn of last year; and Mrs. Franklin, Guinevere and I went for the summer to a watering-place near Boston. While we were there some luggage reached me which had been packed and stored ever since I left Madras. It was taken to my rooms in the hotel; and Guinevere and her mother were present when the boxes were



"What is That Beside You, Ned? Why, See!—a Girl—She Has a Baby in Her Arms—
No, No! I Won't Believe It!"