

The Occult Hand

By Dan A. Stitzer

“Then, Professor, you think it can be done?”

“I think so. I could not guarantee the result. So far it is but a theory on my part. However, it appears to me all things are possible. You know Christ told us of a time coming when greater miracles than His would be performed. Why may not the time be now as well as any other? Mind over matter is not a theory any longer; it is a reality—a positive fact. Man’s actions are performed by the actions of two great mental forces: the Objective and the Subjective. The Objective mind is in control during your conscious or rational state; the Subjective during your unconscious or irrational state. The Objective mind reasons; the Subjective mind is incapable of reasoning.”

“I don’t quite understand, Professor.”

“No? Well, I’ll try to explain. Did you ever have a dream in which one of the characters changed its form—say for instance some beast changed into human form?”

“Certainly,” I admitted, “I had one of that kind not so very long ago.

“Well, your mind didn’t reason that such a thing was an utter impossibility, did it?”

“Why no, Professor, it did not. I’ve often wondered why it was that we never think in our dreams that such things couldn’t be.”

“Well, that is the Subjective mind. In a conscious state such a thing would be an impossibility. Here is this stick of wood in my hand. No amount of persuasion on my part would convince you that it was anything different to what it is—a piece of wood—would it?”

“I doubt if it would, Professor,” I answered, convinced that no one could fool me on a simple proposition like that.”

“Under hypnotic influence I can, though. At my suggestion that piece of wood will become a red-hot poker, and with it I can produce blisters on your body. I have done it in cases. Don’t get scared,” as he noticed the alarm in my face. “I shall not produce any on you at any time. I am only telling you this to inform you of what can be done. Of course, you would have to be perfectly under my influence; subject to my will. That would be an instance of mind over matter. All doubt would be removed for the reason that your mind would be incapable of reasoning otherwise. I could do the same thing with you in a conscious state if I could remove all doubt, but there lies the difficulty. You might try to believe ever so hard but still the doubt would remain, and the efficacy of this piece of wood would be nil so far as the application of heat would be. By faith we can move mountains, and faith is belief. Under my influence you will believe, because your Subjective mind will not be able to reason differently. Do you understand now

“I think I do, Professor.”

“And now, after explaining the subject to you, do you still wish me to try it? There will be no harm resulting therefrom, I assure you, even if we should be unsuccessful. It will be an experiment without the slightest danger to you.”

“If you’re sure of no harm to me, I’ll let you try.”

“I am perfectly sure. You can set your mind at perfect rest on that score. You will be under my complete control, and any suggestions I will give you, either mentally or orally will take effect. I can demonstrate to you later on by proofs better than I could by talking a whole week to you,” he

concluded, as he fixed his glittering, black eyes on me, much in the manner of a snake when charming a bird.

The Professor was a tall, slim person, with black hair, black, searching eyes that seemed to look clear through you, dark complexion and clean cut features. No matter when you met him, he was habitually well dressed, whether in his office or out on the street, and he always wore a button-hole bouquet which had the effect of finishing off his genteel appearance. He had the gift of being a ready and fluent talker on any and all kinds of subjects, whether it was scientific farming and fancy poultry raising, politics, or his own particular brand of charlatany—occultism. Yet with all these gifts and perfection, he had that “Don’t tread on me; mind your own business” air about him that caused people to be more or less averse to him. ‘Whenever anyone set an argument in opposition to his theory he would confound them by citing a dozen different authorities substantiating his line of reasoning, thus putting a quietus on his adversary in the start, after which he would continue to explain and instruct as though he was the teacher and they the pupils; he the fountain head and they the recipients.

To come back to my story. He certainly did demonstrate to me after he got me into his power. Even now, years since it has happened, his glittering, black eyes haunt me, even in my sleep, producing a strange and weird effect on me which it takes all my resolution to dispel sometimes. Even his laugh was something sardonic, accompanied by a sound, something between a yelp and a hacking cough. I’ve often wondered since, what impelled me to give myself into the power of such a fiend—for fiend he was, nothing more nor less.

‘Well, I left his office, promising to return the following evening to surrender myself to his will and power.

The time of my visit to the Professor happened to be in mid-winter. While being in consultation with him it had started to snow, the pavement being already covered with light, fleecy flakes as I came out of his house. The first thing I did was to take a fall, both feet shooting from under me before I had time to realize to be careful on account of the slippery pavement, precipitating me with the force of a catapult on the stump of my right arm, the extremity of which had been lost two years before through an accident on the railroad, by getting it between two bumpers as they were coming together. The Professor had made his appearance in town about three months previous to this consultation and had immediately begun advertising his occult powers and what he was able to perform through them in the way of healing all kinds of incurable diseases, such as cancer, consumption, leprosy,—if there’d be any in the vicinity,—and last but not least those chronic complaints,—lame back and headache. He soon had a lucrative business established. His office became overrun with patients from far and near, especially with female patients. People became afflicted with diseases they never knew they had. They also found out that there were diseases that the medical profession were yet ignorant of. Often, in diagnosing a patient’s case, he would give it some hard-sounding name, the patient forgetting it as soon as he had heard it, yet which produced its effect by either giving the patient a very self-important air in way of possessing something that was denied to others, or produced certain effects through mental suggestions.

One day I accidentally met him on the street whereupon he asked me concerning the lose of my hand. We had quite a little chat regarding the profession he professed to follow, winding up with the promise on my part to see him in his office, where we could talk the matter over in private, as he called it. The talk he gave me was so embellished and flowery; it whetted my appetite to such extent that I could hardly abide the time set for the appointment.

Well, I sprawled unto my feet again, hugging my sore and wounded stump all the way home, my mind occupied with doubts, fear, hope, and the pain in my arm. My wife was impatiently awaiting my return and immediately began to shoot questions at me in rapid-fire succession. She was not quite so gullible in believing all such “tommy-rot” as she styled it, warning me at the same time to be cautious in surrendering myself body and soul to that man. Her advice was like throwing chaff into the wind. It blew in all directions save in the one aimed at. I found out afterward, I was a fool for not taking it. She knew more than I did, but at the time, I thought I knew it all. I told her I was determined to brave the consequences. I paid the fiddler, dragging her in as my banker. The two years following were the meanest and most miserable of all my existence, past, present, and I doubt not, the future. The tortures I suffered were worse than those of the Spanish Inquisition.

So much for the preamble to the next two years of my life.

II

I rang the Professor’s door bell—my second visit

to him. He opened the door in person. A more affable person I never met in all my life than he was as he smilingly, or rather grinningly bid me enter.

“Please take a seat and make yourself perfectly at ease,” he said as he turned up the light. “I have been waiting for you, although I was a little dubious about your coming on account of the storm we had,” he continued, rubbing his hands together in a self-satisfied way, no doubt enjoying the prospect of having me for a subject to practise his hellish designs on.

These little particulars I didn’t notice so much at the time they occurred, being as yet unsuspecting of their meaning. But now, after I have been put through the mill, I thoroughly understand their significance.

“Do. you still wish to place yourself under my influence?” he asked, as though surprised at my consent, and that all responsibility for any baneful effects were to be placed to my account.

“Certainly, I’m here for that purpose, if you are certain there will be no harmful effects,” I answered.

“Not in the least, not in the least, sir, I assure you. Besides, it’ll not cost you one penny. The results attained will be of equal value to us both. You, if the outcome will be successful, will be the possessor of a new hand, whilst I will be the gainer of such scientific knowledge as will startle the world. My name will go down in history as a conjurer in occult science, and as one of the greatest benefactors of the age; a name for future scientists to ponder over. In view of your lack of knowledge on the subject, a knowledge that few people possess or understand, you can not realize the importance of such a discovery. I do. It will revolutionize the art of healing. It will be equal to raising the dead to life. Think of the boon to humanity: the maimed, the halt, the blind; thousands of instances whereby poor wretches could be brought out of their despondency into a realization of happy lives.”

He continued to talk in such glowing and flowery terms that all doubts and fears, whatever remained, were dispelled. I was spell-bound. To think that I was the first one to come under the benediction, my name going down in history side by side with the Professor’s tickled my vanity not a little. If but my wife could have heard him talk! What would she think now? Of course, I didn’t understand half of what he said. He used so many technical and scientific terms that much of his talk sounded like ancient Greek to me, which he no doubt used to impress me with his superior knowledge.

“We might as well begin at once,” he said, “Are you very positive?” he asked.

“Positive? Pardon me, I don’t quite comprehend,” I answered, ashamed of my ignorance.

“I mean are you set in your opinions: determined. Have you a considerable will power?”

“Oh, certainly, certainly, Professor, I have a very strong will,” I answered as the full meaning of the word dawned upon my stupid mind.

What other man would not have asserted the same thing? What man would admit that every Tom, Dick, or Harry could lead him around like a cow by the halter?

“In that case,” he answered, “I may have a little trouble in putting you to sleep. After I once have you, there will be no trouble afterward. Please take that rocker and place yourself in the most comfortable position you can assume,” pointing to a large Morris-rocker that stood in a shadowy corner of the room. “Now,” continued the Professor, after I had taken the chair, “please think of going to sleep and exclude all other topics from your mind.”

For about half an hour he tried his best to put me to sleep, without avail. I suppose he summoned all the different incantatory words and acts to his assistance he could think of. Several times I peeped from under my eye-lashes and each time I noticed that the perpetual grin had entirely disappeared. In its place was a grim determination on his face. It is hard to say who of us two was the more tired, he or I. He finally gave up in disgust and produced a hollow glass ball. This, he explained, was an automatic magnetizer on which I was to concentrate my thoughts thereby inducing sleep. This also proved futile. I simply refused to go to sleep. I suppose I was too positive. He didn’t say. I know I felt as though I had grown a foot in stature since he first suggested the idea to me earlier in the evening. I felt as though I had become a man in one night. As it was getting late I bid him good-night, promising to return the following evening to renew the experiment. On my way home I stopped in at the tavern and drank a bumper of whiskey, something I had not indulged in for the last five or six years.

On account of not having tasted any liquors for such a length of time, the whiskey soon produced a peculiar effect on me. Not in the way of hilarity, as it does on some people, nor surlily or dizzily. It made me feel more conceited, more determined, as the Professor defined it. It was the paramount subject on my mind. Hitherto almost everybody had been able to sway my opinion in an argument. From now on I’d assert my own opinion and stand by it like a man. And I’d begin in my own home. I’d let my wife know that she had a man for a husband after all. To be sure I’d not be rude to her, nor ill treat her in the least bit; in fact, I’d be more kind to her than ever before, if that were possible. But I’d be more firm. I arrived home, and the first thing I did to announce my presence was to stamp the snow off my shoes vigorously. I don’t think she understood the meaning of its significance. I did. I braced my shoulders, took a deep breath, threw out my chest, and walked in. My wife was sitting at the table sewing. On account of the lateness of the hour she had begun to worry, fearing something might have happened to me at the Professor’s.

“Why John, how late you are! It’s going on twelve o’clock. I thought you’d never come home.”

“Have no fear for me, my dear,” I answered bravely. “Mary,”—Mary was my wife’s name, without any prefixes or suffixes to embellish it. Just plain Mary. “Mary, do you know what a positive man is?”

“Why yes, I think I do. But what a foolish question to ask at twelve o’clock at night.”

“Never mind the time; tell me what a positive man is.”

“A positive man is one who is half conceit, and half fool; one who is too stubborn to be convinced when he is wrong.”

This definition of the word, so different to the Professor's partly knocked the conceit out of me. Whatever else I might be, I was not going to pose as a fool. It exasperated me. I stepped over to the big rocker, yanked it up to the stove and threw myself into it. We both remained silent for about five minutes. Perhaps it was well that we did. It gave me time to cool off, and also time to ponder over the proposition. My wife was the first to break the silence.

"What made you ask such a question? Didn't you know the meaning of it?"

"Who, I? What a preposterous question to ask of me. Certainly, I knew, but I wanted to know whether you knew."

As I sat by the hot stove, the heat from the outside, and the heat from the inside of me seemed to concentrate in my head and gave me a quarrelous disposition. I was determined not to give in so easily after having formed my new resolution. I was tired and my head began to feel heavy.

"Mary, you are wrong,—but take off my boots and let's retire. It's getting late."

My wife looked at me in a quizzical way. She would not understand.

"Why John, can't you take them off while I put away my things?"

"Mary, take off my boots," I said in a firm voice.

My wife came up to me in a hesitating, timid way.

"John, what has that Professor been putting into your head? You have never acted like this before."

She smelled my breath and began to cry, walking back to the table in a crestfallen way.

I could never bear to see a woman cry, least of all my wife. I succumbed completely, my new resolution shattered like a vase. I removed my boots myself, bestowed a lot of endearing terms upon my wife, and bliss once more reigned in our home.

III

The following night found me once more in the Professor's office encountering the same diabolical grin on the Professor's face. After a few common preliminaries he proceeded to business—that of putting me to sleep. This time he was more successful, although not entirely so. After waking up I had a faint recollection of hearing talk, although what it was I could not remember. I felt no noticeable effects after his partial success. Probably he had refrained from exerting any of his power on me as yet. The following night I was there again. This time he had me fast and secure, and from this time on my trouble began and stealthily increased. I became subject to the most hellish and devilish influences that a man can put himself under. Many a time, when free from his influence and I was permitted to act under my own free will, which I often times was permitted to do, no doubt with the intention of torturing me by showing me my folly, I resolved to assert myself and break the spell by which he had bound me body and soul, and never have anything to do with him any more. Vain resolutions. I could no more break loose from him than I could pull myself up by my boot-straps. Such resolutions only lasted during such intervals as he permitted. I was under his power I supposed, when his mind was unoccupied by any other business. Even when under his influence, I, all the time, knew perfectly well what I was doing, yet I was entirely helpless to control my actions, oftentimes doing the most ridiculous things imaginable. Whenever the spell was removed and I returned to my normal self, I felt as though coming out of a dream, remembering all, perfectly. At night, I was as a rule, perfectly free and my natural self. After I had been to see him involuntarily for five or six weeks, he told me it was not necessary to come oftener than once or twice every two weeks. I felt greatly

relieved at this welcome news, thinking I might possibly be able to break the hold he had on me. He seemed to divine my thoughts and answered:

“Don’t worry on that account. I shall be able to reach you at any time and place I desire.”

About this time I felt a queer sensation in my arm—the arm that was minus the hand—extending from the shoulder down to the extremity. It was something akin to a rheumatic pain when denoting a change of weather. Sometimes it became so intense that it prevented me from concentrating my mind on anything else. I went to see the Professor one night, about it. The consolation he gave me was:

“O, my dear, the leaven is working!” rubbing his hands together, a fashion he had when expressing more than ordinary satisfaction. “Be brave and take it all philosophically. This is only the beginning. Think of the benefits you’ll derive and what it’ll do for science.

“To the devil with science,” I thought. “If this is but the beginning, what’ll be the end. My sufferings were already enough to set me crazy.”

I went home in a disconsolate state of mind. I made up my mind I’d be free, and if I’d have to kill him. The following day I met him on the street. He greeted me very cordially, asked me how my arm felt, and gently cautioned me not to harbor any designs on his life, and passed on.

“My God,” I thought to myself, “can I not even think without that man reading my thoughts?”

I turned round, my eyes following him as he leisurely strolled away. If I had had a pistol at the time, I would have killed him. I wished it then, and as the thought entered my mind, I thought I heard a faint cackling laugh. I wasn’t positive, although it served to increase my ire against him.

Things continued to go on thus for several months without any change in my condition, either mentally, morally, or physically. One day I happened to examine my wrist more minutely than I had been wont to, and was startled by its appearance where the hand had been severed. I noticed a knotty, gnarled growth somewhat similar to the out-growths on trees, the skin becoming hard, and calloused, and chafed. I hardly know whether I was frightened or surprised at the appearance. I immediately ran into the house to show it to my wife.

“What do you make of this, Mary?” I asked as I showed her the stump.

“I don’t know,” she said, shaking her head. “When did you first notice it?”

“A moment ago,” I answered. “Perhaps we have judged the Professor too harshly after all,” I said as the light dawned upon my mind. “That must account for the pain I had in my arm. I’ll go and show it to the Professor tonight,” I continued.

That night I showed it to the Professor, who was overjoyed to see the results of his occult power, as he described it.

“It is extraordinary! extraordinary!” he exclaimed.

His black eyes fairly sparkled, and he almost must have rubbed the palms of his hands through in his delight.

“Ah, my friend, didn’t I tell you, you required patience? Will you believe in me now, after this demonstration?”

“Yes, but the pain, Doctor. I can hardly bear it any longer. It will set me crazy. I can’t get any rest at night.”

“O, bother the pain. You can’t expect anything for nothing. Forget it, think of something else.”

That was invariably the answer I got whenever I mentioned my sufferings. However, I was in the toils, shackled, hand and foot, and I had to endure it whether I would or no.

From now on the pain which I thought was severe, became unendurable, oftentimes impelling me to walk the floor at nights for hours at a time. My wife, like myself, became almost distracted out of sympathy for me. Sometimes I almost became raving, cursing the Professor to the lowest

depths of hell in my impotence. At certain intervals the pain was not so severe, sometimes leaving me altogether. Had it been, I think I'd have committed suicide and ended it all. It came on at irregular intervals, no doubt whenever he was at liberty to exert his mind in my direction. Whenever the pain in my arm came on my mind appeared to be free from his influence and I was at liberty to act of my own free will. Whenever my will came under his influence, the pain in my arm ceased. Sometimes I was completely unpossessed, mentally and physically. Those times were like the sunshine through rifts in the clouds. They made me long all the fiercer for the liberty I had been robbed of. I could have been happy at those times had it not been for the two-edged sword that was hanging suspended over my head. The hours I was perfectly free were about eight out of the twenty-four. With all this pain I suffered, and my obsession I took particular notice of the changes in my arm from day to day, and noticed that the hand was gradually increasing. The growths slowly developed into five processes, corresponding to the five meta-carpal bones.

IV

One day the Professor must have decided to shift the course of my actions on a new tack altogether. At least they began to run in quite a different groove altogether. Hitherto they had been erratic enough, but from now on they began to assume the ludicrous. One day I suddenly conceived the crazy idea of having some fun, all to myself. The idea was no sooner conceived than acted upon. I forthwith began running up and down the street, shouting to every one I met, at the top of my voice, "Make room, make room for the noble Petronius," at the same time brandishing a club in a threatening way over my head. My intention was not to harm anyone, but merely to see them scamper. Needless to say, everyone ran for cover in double quick time, the women and children especially, falling over each other in their efforts to escape my supposed insanity. I finally wound up in the little hardware store which the town contained. The hardware merchant was at the time busily engaged listening to the glib tongue of a drummer who was vainly trying to unload some of his wares upon him—goods that he didn't want and which he knew he was unable to sell in such a one horse town. I listened to the embellished speech of the drummer for a while when, pretending to get angry at the unfair advantage he was trying to get over the unsophisticated merchant, I walked up to him and demanded in self righteous indignation:

"How dare you, sir, presume to have the audacity to enter our peaceful village with your undesirable wares, trying to foist them on one of our most honourable and successful businessmen?"

There wasn't much said in consequence of my butting in, on the part of the drummer. He was a pretty husky guy and appeared to be able to take his own part creditably under almost any circumstances. He sized me up for about half-a-minute, the very picture of patience, probably expecting an apology on my part. The conciliatory spirit not showing on my part in either my actions or words, he quietly slipped off his coat and his hat, and laid them both carefully aside; after this he took a decidedly threatening attitude from which I suspected that he would do me up in fine style. At this moment the merchant interposed and apologized for my indiscreet words, indicating by signs that I was not altogether responsible for what I did, thereby saving me from a most deserving and ignominious thrashing I immediately began to sober up and resumed my normal condition. I hung my head in shame and left the store, humiliated to such a degree that I was unable to utter a word of thanks to the merchant, or an apology to the drummer, but cursed

the Professor for bringing such disgrace upon me. I straightway made a bee line for my own domicile where my wife, who had already heard of my escapade, gave me a thorough lecture, out of principle I suppose, she knowing as well as I did that I was not responsible for my actions.

Several days after this I chanced to pass one of the neighbors' cows with a bell attached to her neck. Every time she reached out for a blade of grass the bell would give a harsh tingle. The more I listened to the music of the bell, the more I became imbued with the idea of possessing one myself to carry out a certain idea that immediately formed itself in my brain. After having completed my purchases I immediately hastened home to begin carrying out my plan. I remembered having an old bell similar to the one I saw on the cow, stored away somewhere in the barn, although I could not remember just where. I diligently began to ransack every nook and corner and finally drew it out of a cob-webby box that had been used as an old junkshop for storing all kinds of odds and ends. I took a great deal of delight in making my preparations, ever and anon laughing aloud to myself as I anticipated the fun I was going to have that night. I kept the matter a secret, making my preparations in a quiet corner of the barn, allowing not even so much as a tingle of the bell to escape for fear my wife might hear and suspect.

There was a certain farmer living about half-a-mile out of the village against whom I had conceived an unfounded prejudice. He was considered fairly well off by the neighbors, so far as worldly goods were concerned, he considering himself the wealthiest man in the community, a fact which he never failed to impress on your memory whenever he had the opportunity. Whether this was the cause of my prejudice I do not know, but I know that I took a special delight in forming the scheme to rub it in on him. Across the street, and opposite to his house he had a large field planted with corn which had grown to such a height as to completely hide a man walking through it. That night I excused myself to my wife, explaining that I had some little business matter to attend to, whereupon I went out to the barn and got the bell and an oil coat to protect myself from getting wet, it having rained that day, after which I started out on my fool's escapade. I cut across the fields so as to escape being noticed by anybody. When I arrived at the place of operation it was about half-past-nine. The night was pitch dark and a fine drizzle was coming down which served my purpose to perfection; which was to give the farmer a harmless, chilly bath. I crept up to the fence at the edge of the corn field opposite the house and found the occupants still up. I could see the old man in his rocking chair, reading his paper and smoking his pipe. He appeared to be very contented as he sat there in his chair and I certainly envied him. I waited and watched for about half-an-hour when I noticed the light to disappear down-stairs and reappear shortly after on the second story. Ten minutes later everything was in darkness, by which fact I concluded everybody had retired. I waited about fifteen minutes longer, when I decided to begin operations.

At this moment I heard some one coming along the road. This new factor facilitated my plan. I sneaked back into the corn and waited until he was opposite me when I gave a sudden bound in imitation of an animal suddenly alarmed, at the same time jingling the bell violently. Presently I heard him call out to the old farmer:

"John, hello John! There's a cow in your cornfield."

Presently I heard the window being raised and the old farmer calling out: "What's the matter out there?"

"There's a cow in your corn-field," the man answered back.

"I guess there's too much corn inside o' you" the old man retorted hotly, irritated at being called out of his sleep.

To convince the old numbskull that the man in the street knew what he was talking about, I gave the old bell such a vigorous shaking, at the same time running along the edge of the field parallel with the fence, that there remained no more room for doubt or argument in the old man's mind.

"Thunderation! that's Hen Spade's old cow. I know it by the jingle of that bell," he called down to the man below.

Immediately I heard the window come down with a bang, followed by the clatter of broken glass on the paved path below. I could have roared with happiness at this result, had I dared. About five minutes later I saw him come out in his pajamas, carrying a lantern.

"I'll fix her for him," he continued to the man. "What business have people to leave their cattle out on the street at this hour of the night, breaking through other people's fences?"

I heard him ask the fellow to help get the "D—d cow" out. The man declined politely, on the plea of it being too wet a night to run around in a cornfield. The old man was therefore compelled to tackle the disagreeable job alone, an arrangement that suited me perfectly. Him I could see, on account of having a lantern, whereas the other fellow might accidentally stumble upon me, thus exposing me, a thing which I desired to avoid. 'Whether the Professor had any control over fate so far as shielding me from exposure was concerned, I do not know. Certain it is, I was always saved at the opportune moment.

I immediately raised the curtain for the second and most important act in the drama, by giving a violent shake of the head accompanied by a bellow, in imitation of a real cow, jingling the bell with all my might, and starting on a wild rampage between the rows of corn with the old farmer in hot pursuit. I ran about two hundred yards, when I stopped and turned to get a view of the other end of the stage occupied by the farmer. He must have been a pretty good runner, judging by the scant distance I was ahead of him: about twenty-five yards. I held the old bell muffled, ran ahead about a hundred yards more, crossed six or seven rows, then I began the race once more by running obliquely across the rows, jingling the bell for all I was worth and doing all the damage to the corn I possibly could. The old Nick must have had possession of me. I felt as though I would have liked to ruin that whole corn-field. I knew it was wrong for me to worry an old man like that, yet I could no more refrain from doing it than a duck can escape a pond' of water. The old man was in hot pursuit, although at a safer distance. I could see the rays of his lantern through the corn. Once I saw him fall. His foot must have become entangled in the broken corn-stalks. I saw the lantern drop out of his hand and roll along the ground. He slowly got up and I could plainly hear him go through the whole gamut of curse words. I could have danced with joy had not a faint streak of my conscience or will asserted itself. Instead of giving vent to my hilarity I was moved to sincere compassion for the old man, who must have been wet to the skin by this time, as the corn was very wet and a heavy drizzle was still coming down.

At this time the Professor must have withdrawn his influence, leaving me free to the guidance of my own will. I began to realize more and more how wrong it was to play a joke of this kind on an inoffensive old man like the farmer, a man who had never done me the least injury. I began to feel very mean about it and was half prompted to confront the farmer and confess all and try and make amends for my misdeeds the best way I could. Since I was not responsible for my actions, I finally decided to keep the secret and discontinue my depredations for that time. I therefore beat a hasty retreat for home and my beloved Mary. I could not desist from giving the bell another vigorous shake in way of emphasizing to the old man that the cow was still in evidence, after which I made for the fence at the other extremity of the field, leaving the old farmer to deal with the imaginary cow as he thought best.

My wife was in bed and sound asleep when I arrived home. I crept into bed with as little disturbance as possible, for fear I should awaken her and become subject to a whole lot of undesirable questions from her. I felt something akin to a trusted old dog returning from a sheep-marauding expedition. I soon fell asleep, never waking up until the next morning. This was one of the few restful nights I had had ever since the Professor had taken me in his hand. 'Whether my wife knew of my late return I did not know. It was not mentioned when we rose in the morning, although she gave me several mistrustful looks. After breakfast she had occasion to go down to the store for a few articles. I noticed, the moment of her return, that there was something more than ordinary in the wind.

"John, where were you last night?—Where were you?" she demanded as I refused to answer.

A bright idea had entered my mind. "Now or never is my time," I thought as the old, dominant idea of positiveness entered my mind. Straightening myself to my full height, I addressed her sternly:

"Mary, I would like to know by what right you address me thus, your lawful lord and master. You are becoming a little too positive for your sex. When I married you, you placed yourself in my keeping, trusting me to protect and support you. You will therefore deem it wise to obey me in the future instead of trying to command me."

"When I married you I thought I had married a man; one who appreciated a good wife when he found one, but I find I have yoked myself to an imbecile, an idiot, a lunatic, one who didn't even have sense enough to come in out of the wet."

This was too much for me. I inferred she meant my escapade in the wet corn-field the night before.

"Enough Mary. Into the house with you at once before my just wrath impels me to chastise your insolence."

Without another word my wife started, with a downcast face, for the house, sobbing out her grief as she went.

For a moment I stood there irresolute. I felt like a whipped cur. My own sense of justice upbraided me for the cowardly attitude I had assumed toward her. I had acted like a savage; a brute. I slowly conquered my false pride—my positive, stubborn determination which I had harbored ever since my first visit to the Professor. I began to realize what it might lead to and it vanished like a wreath of smoke. She had conquered by her most powerful weapon: her tears. Had she continued the way she had started out, by scolding and upbraiding me, I never would have given in. But who can resist a good woman's tears? I couldn't. I followed her into the house and found her sitting in the rocker, still weeping. I gently put my arm around her and addressed her in the most soothing tones.

"Mary dear," I said, "Please forgive me this once. I know I acted like a coward. I shall never insult you like that again. Won't you forgive me, dearest?" I pleaded as I put my hand under her chin and lifted her face, giving her a kiss.

The effect was magical. I was greeted with a radiant smile through her tear-stained face; like the sun breaking through the clouds. She appeared more beautiful to me than ever before. We had both won. She had conquered my pride, and I her tears.

"Mary, what do you know?" I asked her in the gentlest words, giving her another kiss for good measure, and also to win her extra good will.

“I don’t know what you mean, Mary. What did I do?” I asked, trying to throw her off the track by pretending ignorance.

“Oh John, I know all. At least I think I do. By what I saw yesterday and what I heard this morning, I can put two and two together and the rest I can guess.

“What did you see? What did you hear?” I asked eagerly.

“I saw you fixing up that old bell out in the barn, yesterday. This morning when I came down to the store I heard old Mingle giving an account of the event to the grocer. It’s a shame, John. He said he was wet to the skin from head to foot, and that he fell and sprained his ankle. He is hardly able to walk and has to use a cane. He threatens to sue Hen Spade, claiming that it was his cow that caused all the mischief.”

At the word “mischief” the ludicrous side of my nature again asserted itself. As I rehearsed in my mind the events of the preceding night I could not control myself any longer and gave vent to loud and uncontrollable laughter.

“John, I can’t see how you can enjoy anything like that,” my wife reproved me with: “Can’t you realize that you have gotten another innocent man into trouble? Oh, why don’t you break loose from that wicked man

“Would to God I could, Mary. But I can’t,” I answered bitterly, suddenly brought back to a full realization of my iron-clad fetters.

“There is only one way I can think of to free myself, and that is—”

“How?” She asked searching my face for an answer, as I hesitated.

“By killing him.”

“Oh no, no, John, not that. Think of the great crime that would be—and the consequences.”

“Yes, I have thought it all out—crime, consequences, and all—and it is the only solution I can arrive at, barring my disability to commit the crime, which I doubt very much I could accomplish. Why, Mary, he has such complete control over me that he even reads my thoughts before they are fully conceived.”

“Your thoughts? Why how can he do that?”

“I don’t know how he does it, but he does it all right. Several weeks ago I passed him on the street and I was thinking to myself: ‘How I would like to kill you,’ I turned around and found him looking after me. He told me I’d better not try any such game on him.”

“Couldn’t we move away from here, John? Out of his sight and influence?”

“What good would that do? He could reach me just as easily as he can here. No, Mary, I see no hope of escaping him that way. We must hope for something else to turn up.”

VI

During all this time my hand was gradually developing, although it was far from symmetrical. It was a monstrosity. I hated the sight of it. It had neither correct size nor shape. It was much larger than my other hand, and in shape it was something similar to a flounder: broad, flat, and straight. The fingers were long and thin, and entirely out of proportion to the palm of the hand, without the least development of nails at the extremities. It had an unnatural, shiny appearance as though it was covered with a coat of varnish. So far as usefulness was concerned, it stood me in as much stead as a sixth finger on a hand would. There was life in it, in fact too much, as I had had demonstrated to me during many a sleepless night. There was a slight circulation in it but I had no voluntary control over it. No matter how much I willed there was no response. It was a

handicap to me by persistently getting in the way and continually stubbing against everything that came in its way, invariably causing excruciating pain.

It served but one earthly use, and that was as a curiosity to the inquisitive neighbors, whom I tried to shun as much as I possibly could with but partial success. I could not get rid of them altogether without being decidedly rude, as they persisted in obtruding themselves into my house without any invitations. I became prominent on one jump and had lots of friends. I never knew I had so many. Neighbors who seldom looked at me, and never recognized or spoke to me, now came and cheerfully accepted of my unwilling hospitality. Each and everyone wanted to know the history of the hand and have a look at it. I got so used to rehearsing the story that I could repeat it and think of something else.

“How strange!” some said, after looking at it. “Do tell!” others exclaimed. “The idea!” still others commented, and all shaking and wagging their heads wisely.

Most all congratulated me on the success of the experiment without taking into consideration the demerits of the case and the pain I endured, the sleepless nights and the loss of my own free will. Some of the ladies, usually the most inquisitive, after looking at it, would turn away with a shudder remarking that it looked horrible and that they couldn’t bear the sight of it.

I remember one young lady especially, who remarked that she didn’t think it very remarkable after all, and had she known before what she knew now, she “wouldn’t a’bothered comin’ in to see it.” This expression slightly increased the temperature under my collar, and I could not help from expressing myself somewhat freely and rudely.

“Young lady,” I said—she was about thirty—, “I am very sorry you wasted any of your valuable time under my roof in such an idle quest. Furthermore, you will please remember that I have not asked anyone to look at my hand which I greatly prefer to hide from the prying eyes of idle curiosity seekers.”

Needless to say, she immediately asked for her hat and wraps and never darkened my door again. I escorted her to the door and bid her a hearty good-night, she responded with a haughty shrug of her angular shoulders. I was well rid of her together with some others who overheard my rebuke. It made no difference to me; I was fast losing my patience. To have people obtrude themselves into my house and to be insulted by them on top of it was more than I could or would stand for.

I was getting sick and tired of it all, and often wished Mary and myself on some lonely island in mid-ocean, free from my pretending friends, and with my liberty restored. My wife and I were on the best of terms again. Now and then I became possessed with a bit of positiveness as I called it then; I have since discovered that it was nothing more nor less than a streak of stubbornness instilled into me by the Professor. However my wife knew how to handle me by this time. Whenever I got my spell, she went into one of her tearful fits. I suspect it was put on for effect sometimes. Be that as it may; I am not sure that I can prove it. I never could bear to see Mary in tears and invariably yielded, becoming as gentle and forbearing as an affectionate husband should be.

VII

My hand now being fully developed, I was relieved of that acute pain from which I had suffered so long, but mentally, I was shackled more firmly than ever before. It seemed as though my least actions were subject to his will. Not a moment that I could call my own. Oftentimes when conversing with my friends on some topic, I would unexpectedly, without any cause whatever,

veer off unto another subject entirely irrelevant to the one under discussion. This always placed me in a very embarrassing position, the more so because I was fully cognizant of what I was doing without being able to prevent myself from acting thus. My friends, at first, gave me a knowing smile, leaving me with the excuse of other important and pressing business. Finally they tabooed me altogether. I didn't blame them. No sensible person enjoys a conversation with a lunatic. I gradually, but surely, became still more erratic in my actions and in my speech.

Nor was this the sum of my afflictions. I have said that the acute pain had ceased. So it had, but it now gave place to an irritating sensation which in some respects was almost as bad as the former pain. It was something between a tickling and a scratching sensation that served as a continual reminder to me; just enough to barely allow me to sleep and to bring me back to a full realization of my deplorable condition the first thing after waking in the morning. That condition gradually became worse as time slowly wore on. If I ever cursed anyone, I cursed that Professor, not once, but a thousand times. I went mad, mad in the fullest sense of the word. I lost all control. My wife was the only one who could do anything with me, and that didn't count for much.

That positive spirit the Professor had instilled into me was about to react upon himself. He had overreached himself. Nothing on this side eternity would stop me from accomplishing the purpose I had resolved upon. I would kill him without warning if I could muster sufficient will power of my own to overcome his influence, and thus send him to where he had kept me bound for the last two years. I kept my resolution a secret from my wife.

I had a thirty-two caliber revolver hidden in one of the bureau drawers, and with this instrument I determined to free myself if possible. I sneaked upstairs while my wife was preparing the noon day meal. The revolver was not to be found at its accustomed place, my wife no doubt having hid it on account of my mental derangement, not deeming it safe for me to have it. For a moment that stubborn, determined spirit almost got the better of me. I was on the point of going down and demand in peremptory tones the hiding place of the weapon. That would have ruined everything by putting my wife wise, even if not to the exact truth as to what I wanted it for. I swallowed my anger, although it choked me not a little to do so, and I continued to ransack every nook and corner wherever I thought it might be. At last I found it hidden under some old rags in a little niche of the wall up in the attic. I don't think I ever discovered anything previously or since that gave me so much satisfaction as the finding of that revolver did. It was loaded and in excellent condition. I stuck it into my pocket and went downstairs to eat my dinner before I'd start out for the enemy. Mary was unsuspecting. After dinner I excused myself, stating I was going to the store.

All that day and the preceding night I had felt normal, mentally and physically. My mind was clear and the irritation in my hand had entirely ceased. I felt like a regenerated man, the first time for a long, long time. However, I was determined to carry out my resolution, knowing well enough that my good fortune would last only temporarily—so long as the Professor willed it. I walked resolutely up to the Professor's house and noticed that all the shutters were partly closed with the exception of two on the second story. The ones to his office were shut up tight. The whole affair had a strange appearance to me, and I instinctively felt as though something was wrong—that my plans would miscarry.

I determined to find out, and that at once. I rang the bell for all I was worth. It was a ratchet bell, and I turned the knob back and forth until I heard someone approaching. It happened to be the servantgirl. She opened the door just far enough to see who was there.

“What is the matter?” she asked in an irritated tone of voice. “It wasn’t necessary to make an alarm like that was it? We are not deaf.”

“Pardon me, but I don’t think you are the party in supreme command here.”

I was stung by her rebuke, although she had a perfect right to call me down. But I certainly had taken delight in ringing that old bell. I could have rung it a whole year, if only to disturb that scoundrel’s peace of mind, that the house contained. My intention was to get him mad before I killed him. I hated to kill him in cold blood and I thought that was a good way to get him off his base.

“Where is the Professor?” I asked somewhat sharply. “Is he home?”

“Yes he is home, but you can not see him today,” the girl answered.

“I must see him,” I answered, “and at once.”

“It’s impossible. He is very sick and no one but the nurse is allowed in the room.

“Is that so?” I exclaimed in mock alarm. “I hope he’ll”—I checked myself just in time. I had almost said, “I hope he’ll die.” “You don’t need to mention about my having been here, I’ll come around tomorrow to inquire about his health. By the way when did he get sick?”

“Last night about seven o’clock. He got sick very suddenly, accompanied by very severe pains. The doctor thinks it is appendicitis and that an operation may be necessary,” she answered.

The time of his sickness struck me very forcibly. That was the time I got relief. Up to that time his mind must have been centered on me, now, I suppose, he was occupied with himself. I left the house in a happier frame of mind than when I approached it. I would have liked to give that old door bell about fifty more turns before I left. “If only he would never get well,” I kept wishing a thousand times on my way home. Or, “if he would only die under the operation.” How I wished I could be the operating surgeon. Such as these and others of the same charitable kind of thoughts occupied my mind on my way home. My wife noticed my joyful appearance the moment I arrived in her presence.

“What’s the matter, John? I haven’t seen you look so happy in the last two years.”

“Oh joy, Mary! The Professor is sick—dying. Isn’t that a blessing?”

“Well, John, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to be happy when someone is dying,” she answered in rebuke, more for the sake of conventionality than in expressing her real sentiments.

“My dear it’s the first real good news I’ve heard these last two years and I can’t help but be happy over it. Nor can you, Mary,” I answered.

In answer she threw her arms about my neck and gave me a kiss and walked away without saying a word. She immediately came back, her womanly curiosity aroused.

“John, who told you this?” she asked with a doubtful air.

“I was there and got it from the servant-girl,” I answered, after which I told her the whole story. “You may put this away again,” I said handing her the revolver. “I hope I may not need it.”

“This was the hand of Providence, John. You ought to give thanks for being prevented from committing such a crime.”

“I know, Mary dear. I want to see how it turns out first. He must die. There is no other alternative. I shall be very thankful if I don’t have to bring it about.”

I could hardly wait until the following day, so important had the Professor’s welfare become to me. I started out for his house about ten o’clock the next morning. I met several people on my way there, but neither of them said anything to me beyond bidding me the time of day. Everybody in the village, by this time, took me for a lunatic and tried to avoid me. Perhaps those I met that morning had not heard the news. As I neared his house, a cheerful sight greeted my

eyes: The sign of death—a black crape—on the door. No use to go any further. I turned round and hurried home to tell Mary. I shall never forget how lightly I trod the foot-path. Everything I looked at took on a brighter color. I felt like a slave having the shackles knocked off his ankles, and for the first time given his freedom. I was a free man again in body and soul. I whistled all the patriotic airs on my way home, from Yankee Doodle down to The Star Spangled Banner. My wife was waiting for me at the gate. She was just as impatient as I had been.

“Mary, it’s all over; we’ll both go to the funeral. It’s his death, and my resurrection.”

Mary didn’t express her real feeling in words. She was too well bred. But talk about canaries and mocking-birds. They weren’t in it with her the remainder of that day, so far as vocal music was concerned. Never before, nor ever since, have I heard Mary, my wife, sing, as she did that day after hearing of the death of the Professor.

We both attended the funeral, and I dare say, if there ever was a chief-mourner at a funeral who felt like throwing up his hat in the air for joy, it was I at the Professor’s.

The reason I call myself the chief-mourner is because in his death I lost a part of myself that gave me nothing but misery and mortification, and found regeneration.

Words fail me to describe the freedom and happiness I felt after the demise of the Professor. I was again allowed to follow my occupation unhampered: that of a painter. Work became a pleasure to me instead of a drudgery, as it had been the last two years.

It was about two months after the Professor’s death when I again began to notice a strange sensation in my hand. It gradually began to lose life and took on a strange, waxen hue in appearance, slowly becoming scarred and shriveled. This strange appearance continued for several weeks after which time the tips of the fingers began to dry up completely, becoming brownish in color, something similar to the appearance of the fingers on mummies that one sees in our museums. It gave me no pain and therefore I didn’t mind. In fact I was rather glad of it. The hand never was of any earthly use to me outside of a curiosity to other people, and of that I had had quite enough. This mortifying process continued, gradually extending over the whole hand back to the wrist.

Several times I was strongly tempted to take the hatchet and with one blow detach it, but Mary always persuaded me not to. At last I got rid of it in an unexpected manner, and not without considerable pain either. I was on my way to the store one day in quest of some paint, when I happened to be beset by a strange dog belonging to a new neighbor who had made his arrival into the village several days previously. In trying to avoid the teeth of the canine I stumbled over a stone that obstructed my way, and came unexpectedly down on my decaying hand with such force that it snapped off at the wrist. It began to bleed profusely and the pain was so intense that it nearly set me crazy. It was almost as though someone shoved a red hot iron through my arm. I hurriedly picked up the hand and ran home where I promptly fainted from loss of blood and the pain I suffered. When I came to, the doctor was standing over me with a knowing smile on his face, my hand bandaged and dressed up.

“How do you feel?” he asked me.

“Much better but weak,” I answered.

Before he left he asked me for the hand, stating that he wanted to preserve it in alcohol.

“Yes, for love’s sake, take it away and never let me see it again,” I answered.

“Mary,” addressing my wife after the doctor had left, two years ago I made a fool of myself in not obeying your wishes. To make sure of both of our future welfare I’ll let you take the reins in hand again. All I ask of you is a square deal for your John.”