

THE FELIXOMETER

By Fred. J. Cox

I.



THE long years of patient investigation which Professor Clement Hawksworth had devoted to those forces which are vulgarly considered recondite, had led him on from triumph to triumph, finally establishing for him among the unlettered classes a queer reputation for wizardry and incredible inventiveness; compelling, at the same time, his scientific contemporaries to regard his name as a synonym for unrivalled interpretation of the laws and mysteries contained in that enchanted borderland between the physical and psychical sciences.

His labours in the realm of radio-activity, whereby he not only codified results achieved by fellow-workers in the same field, but made certain valuable independent discoveries of his own, thus transforming mystery into commonplace, and laying bare the nature and properties of radio-active substances, need surely not be specified at this time of day. To those having but a casual acquaintance with recent scientific advance, Professor Hawksworth's great treatise on radium represents the very flower of his life-work; but this view is founded upon a complete ignorance of his later researches in a far more fertile field, where the possibilities are so immense that they seem to touch infinity—a field which has hitherto been given over to haphazard conjecture and blind empiricism—the field of the human soul itself!

It was the discovery by a French *savant* of the *N*-rays—those subtle eman-

ations from the soul foreshadowed by the Theosophist in his *aura*—which first stimulated Hawksworth's activity in this field of the newer psychics. As was his manner, he worked ardently and without intermission at this fascinating study, buoyed up with the confident belief that, with diligence, he would be able in time to wrest from Nature's keeping secrets more amazing than any yet made manifest. He spoke so freely and in such sanguine terms of the dreams which enthralled him, that many of his old scientific friends shook wise heads, imagining that he was slowly drifting from safe scientific moorings into the backwater of fanatical conjecture.

But in spite of his large enthusiasms, there was ever a superb assurance underlying Hawksworth's manner, a reliance upon himself, an unwavering belief in his methods, which convinced me that he would sooner or later add a new chapter to the natural history of the human soul. And in this I was not deceived.

His laboratory was on the top floor of a large building off Chancery Lane, and upon entering it one bleak January morning I found the Professor busily engaged at his bench. The fire in the grate had apparently just burned itself out, and this was not the only indication that he had been working there all through the bitter night; his pallid face and certain marks under his eyes told the same tale. He looked a strange figure as he stood there, against the fog-laden half-light which was struggling in through the windows, clad in a threadbare overcoat, an old silk muffler twisted round his neck.

He turned sharply at the sound of my footsteps. "Bramber!" he cried, "Glad to see you. 'Twould have been otherwise, though, had you arrived a few minutes earlier. Gad! I should have sent you packing fast enough."

I fancied that I was about to hear the story of another abortive experiment—for Hawksworth had known many such of late—and I was preparing myself for the rôle of friendly sympathiser, when suddenly I caught his glance full face, and saw that his eyes, for all the heaviness under the lids, were strangely bright.

My heart beat high. "Has the great idea fructified?" I asked, excitedly.

Hawksworth laughed out of sheer delirious glee.

"It has, Bramber, my boy, it has. At last the Felixometer is an accomplished fact. But I seem to have been in the clouds too long. By Jove! how cold it is! We must kindle a fire, Bramber, and brew ourselves some tea. Then we can talk."

He did not, however, defer his talk until then, but chatted with enthusiasm, while the pair of us busied ourselves at the grate.

"Where I went wrong before, Bramber," he said, "was with the sensitized medium. Plenty of substances which I tried would collect the rays, but the difficulty I found was to get them out again. I wanted, you see, to convey them to the indicator, but even the strongest psychical magnet was powerless to extract them, until ——"

"Yes?" I interjected eagerly.

"Well, until I found the proper medium to gather up all the rays from a human soul, and hand them, as it were, into the charge of the magnet at precisely the moment desired."

"And the medium is ——"

"Not so fast, Bramber," Hawksworth exclaimed. "It's a very delicately compounded substance, and I doubt, even if I explained it as lucidly as I was able to, you would understand how the various ingredients coalesce. For, I regret to say it, Bramber, you are no chemist."

"It's unfair to harp upon my shortcomings, Professor," I rejoined with a laugh, "seeing that a lack of interest

in your achievements is certainly not one of them."

"I accept the reproof," he went on, with that charming smile of his, "and I'll say, by way of compensation to your wounded feelings, that you have quite enough chemistry to equip you for your calling. Scientific detail need never trouble the journalist; his task is simply to crystallise—embellish, perhaps, is a word you would like better—scientific results for the information of *profanum vulgus*."

"Oh, leave me out of the reckoning, Hawksworth," I cried, with assumed impatience. "My sole desire is to understand the instrument of your invention. Pray see if I am proving an apt pupil. I presume the sensitized material is placed somewhere adjacent to the apparatus, and that the subject stands before it, and the *n*-rays which his body emits——"

"His soul, Bramber," the Professor interrupted.

"Well, his soul—these pass into the sensitive medium, and are thence extracted by a magnet and conveyed along certain secret stages to a dial whereon their number or their strength is recorded."

"You have marvellous insight," he observed. "That is very much what happens. But I notice that you speak of one dial only. Your ignorance is excusable, because when I first broached the idea to you there was but one indicator in my conception. That was just where I was wrong, fundamentally wrong. The difficulty that I had with the sensitized material was as naught to the grave error of imagining that one indicator would suffice. I was striving to invent a machine for angels rather than mortals. Don't you see, Bramber, perfect happiness is something we cannot measure, because it does not exist. This life's web, the poet says, is a tangled skein, good and ill together. And I, a searcher into the great mysteries, quite failed to grasp so elementary a fact—the fact, Bramber, that you can't gauge happiness without measuring also its accompanying misery. Hence the reason for the two dials."

"I see," I returned; "you have made

the instrument an Infelixometer as well as the other thing."

"The law of Nature compelled me to do so," Hawksworth assured me. "No happiness can be registered while the separated misery is allowed to remain in the machine, and clog its action. Consequently, in a bright moment of inspiration, the idea came to me, not only to separate the two elements, but to record them on distinct dials. By this time, Bramber, you have surely heard enough of the theory of the apparatus. Come now and test its working."

I felt a strange thrill as I approached the Felixometer. For the moment it seemed like an unwarranted intrusion into realms forbidden; the limitations set by the sects closed in upon me, Hawksworth appeared in the light of a mediæval necromancer, and I felt like one placed under a weird and uncanny spell.

When I stood in front of the instrument, it was with a sensation of strange dread, and the preliminary thrill which I had felt became something palpable and electric.

"Is there any danger?" I asked. "Won't you try the first experiment, Hawksworth?"

"I *have* tried, my dear fellow," he responded, "and if I do so again I shall simply break the instrument to pieces. You see, Bramber, the exhilaration which I feel over the success of my labours is such that it would shatter the most perfect Felixometer, even though every part was constructed of wrought iron."

There was no help for it, then. In spite of my perturbation, I must go through with the ordeal.

"Nothing seriously wrong with you this morning, I hope, Bramber?" he said, kindly.

"Only that I had the MSS. of that wretched novel of mine back by the first post," I answered.

"Well, we'll see how a trivial incident such as that affects your general felicity," he rejoined.

I braced my nerves for the experiment. I hardly knew what was happening when I perceived that the pointers on the two dials were violently

turning. When they ceased, I saw that eighty volts of happiness had been recorded against twenty of misery.

"The balance is well on the right side," exclaimed the Professor. "I always knew you were an incurable optimist, and now here is a scientific testimony to the fact."

"It's wonderful," I exclaimed, my gaze fixed on the pair of pointers, which, when I moved away from the centre of the machine, instantly fell back to zero.

"What is more, it's accurate, Bramber," said Hawksworth, rubbing his hands with delight. "You perceive now what an exceptionally lucky fellow you are to be so happy, and how inconsiderable is the effect of a temporary literary reverse upon an author's general felicity."

I parted with the Professor and his remarkable machine with extreme reluctance. I would gladly have remained to witness further experiments—on other people. As I shook hands with him at the door of the laboratory, I ventured to ask whether he wished his secret to be kept.

"For the moment, yes," he replied. "You must subdue the temptation to describe what you have seen until I grant permission. I can trust your discretion, Bramber, and, in return, I promise faithfully that you shall be the first to announce my discovery to the world. Only don't send the article to the *Hustler*. Its spasmodic English and flamboyant headlines would destroy the fascination of the Felixometer even. By the way, bring Marples with you when you call to-morrow."

As I stepped into the foggy street, and walked along the dank, greasy pavement, I fell to pondering over the miracle how anyone, obsessed by the grim environment of a January morning in London, was able to achieve so high a record as eighty volts of happiness! Surely I was a veritable Mark Tapley without having previously been aware of it!

II.

I took Marples round to the laboratory with me on the following day. In the old days Marples had been a faithful

member of our little set ; as full of zest as the rest of us for the things that matter, having the same delight in the flash of a phrase and the paradox of a thought ; careless and Bohemian on the surface, but at the heart of him sound and sincere. But Marples had experienced the great lapse. The fine ideals which had nourished his youth had shrivelled and atrophied as the years went by, becoming extinguished ultimately by so slight a cause as a legacy bequeathed to him by a maiden aunt. He left us, hugging his sordid boon, and we saw the gates of the City open at his approach. Henceforward he became a mere "something" in that astounding conglomeration of the warring units of humanity.

The Professor greeted him with the *abandon* of our older days. "My excellent Marples!" he cried. "How pleasant to see you again after—let me see, how many years is it? Five it must be, at the least. And how moves the great world of London finance?"

"I have managed to get a little control over a small corner of it," the other said, somewhat stiffly. It almost seemed that he was suspicious of us—*us*, his old comrades—and it was then that I realised how great a gap lay between Marples and the old ideals.

"I congratulate you, Marples," said Hawksworth, with evident sincerity. "I congratulate you upon your success, for success, according to the world's computation, is but an alternative name for happiness. It is a dogma which I have always regarded as unproven ; but, be that as it may, I am now in a position to test it. Bramber has told you of the little toy I have here, I expect?"

"He was trying to get some wild idea into my head as we walked down," he answered, "but I didn't feel so astounded as he imagined I would. You were always an inveterate dreamer, Hawksworth."

"Ah, but sometimes dreams come true. Step just here, if you will, Marples."

As the City man faced the Felixometer, I anticipated that there would be a tremendous register recorded on the positive indicator, for the imperturbable self-satisfaction that governed his features, his dignified demeanour, the trim smart-

ness of his attire, and the general atmosphere of opulence which he exhaled, formed a *tout ensemble* which unmistakably indicated prosperity and well-being. But the strange thing was that the instrument scarcely acted at all. The pointers on the opposing dials made a languid upward movement, and when the Professor read out the result, it was as follows:—"Happiness, 30 volts ; misery, 30 volts."

"Yours is a well-balanced record, at any rate, Marples," observed Hawksworth, drily.

"And what's better than a good balance," asked Marples, "especially when it's at the bank?" He laughed immoderately at his wretched facetiousness, and proceeded to make a close inspection of the Felixometer. "No trick here, I s'pose, Hawksworth?"

"One of Nature's, that's all," was the Professor's quiet response.

"There ought to be money in the thing," said Marples, promptly.

"There *will* be," said Hawksworth, "Our friend Bramber will doubtless make a few guineas over the article he intends to write on the instrument."

Marples sniffed contemptuously. "I mean something bigger than that. What about a company to work the thing?"

"Scarcely applicable, I imagine," returned the Professor, quietly. "You see, Marples, the Felixometer is too dangerous a toy to introduce into the suburban parlour."

"I can't see why," was Marples' answer. "And if you do happen to change your mind, and want to get the bag o' tricks on the market, remember, Hawksworth, I'm your man."

"I'll remember," the Professor assured him, and with that Marples left us, with a hurried adieu.

"Poor old Marples!" said Hawksworth, when the door had closed. "Those old sentiments *did* matter, after all, Bramber, old chap."

Before I could reply, a knock sounded at the door. "This must be Cary," the Professor exclaimed, "I asked him to come because I have an incurable love for contrasts. After Marples, Cary!" He laughed heartily.

The man who now entered was, as Hawksworth had just indicated, in vivid contrast to the man who had recently left. An extremely nervous temperament quivered from every corner of an extremely fragile frame. Set in a pale face, and from under bushy eyebrows, a pair of sparkling, brown eyes sent forth luminous rays, kindly and humoursome. His features were thin and pale, and were crowned by a high forehead denoting a dreamy intellectuality.

"Has the Muse been kind of late, Cary?" asked Hawksworth, dispensing with formal greeting.

"Tolerably," replied our visitor, in a quiet, musical voice. "Only she keeps me bound so rigidly to the wheel of the magazines. Lyrics, lyrics, lyrics! and with no particle of soul in them. That is all your modern editors will tolerate."

"And meanwhile," suggested Hawksworth—

"Meanwhile, my epic, 'The Uprising of Aurora,' remains uncompleted."

"Well, well," said the Professor, cheerily, "it will be finished some day, no doubt. In the interim, I am sure, Cary, you are quite happy, turning out your jingling metres."

"Happy?" Cary laughed bitterly.

"Well, come and test it for yourself," said Hawksworth.

The poet stood before the Felixometer, which immediately began to exhibit a remarkable activity. Even the sensitized material seemed to my excited vision to grow tumultuous, in its eagerness to receive the charge from that ardent, intense soul. The pointers commenced to oscillate violently, and I soon heard the calm voice of the Professor reading out the record: "Happiness, 95 volts; misery, 95 volts."

"A strange reading," said Hawksworth. "By-the-bye, Bramber, it confirms the truth of the old hazardous guess that the poet suffers and enjoys more deeply than others. And after this, I suppose"—a pleasant smile played around his lips—"we must regard Cary as a poet."

Cary laughed, as became a man who

could register 95 volts of happiness all at once. "It's scarcely fair, Hawksworth," he said, "to make your friends the *corpus vile* of all your experiments. Why don't you test yourself?"

"I've done so," replied Hawksworth, "and nearly shattered the machine."

"Yes," I interposed; "but that was at a moment when you were exhilarated by the influence of a great success. Try again."

Hawksworth faced the Felixometer, which responded readily enough. The reading was: "Happiness, 80 volts; misery, 20 volts."

"The same reading as mine," I exclaimed.

"Exactly," said the Professor, "proving, Bramber, that you and I are normal, natural beings. Let us shake hands upon that, at any rate."

"After this, Hawksworth," I said, "you will have to suppress that vein of cynicism which has become a habit with you. It sits badly upon a man who can boast 80 volts of felicity, and goes far to prove my old contention that your true cynic has no tangible existence. It's a pose, Hawksworth, and nothing else."

"Perhaps you are right," said the Professor, smiling out of eyes cloaked with that admirable cynicism which conceals a genuine kindness.

For the next few days Cary and myself were busy beating up subjects for experiment with the Felixometer. All sorts and conditions of people came to that laboratory on the top floor of the huge building off Chancery Lane—ladies of title, factory girls, South African millionaires, street labourers, artists, artisans, scientists, charlatans—but space forbids a completion of the catalogue.

It only remains for me to say that we were at length able to draw a series of valuable conclusions from the readings of the instrument, but the chief of them all was this—that no one is a competent judge of his own happiness or misery.

Still, in spite of all the stir which the Felixometer was creating in our select circle, it was a long time before I could induce Adela to come and witness its operations. When I at length intro-

duced her to my friend the Professor, he smiled very knowingly, and with a touch of his old-fashioned courtesy to the sex, bade her take up her position before the apparatus.

Her reading was normal and, therefore, uninteresting.

"But the experiment doesn't end here," said Hawksworth, suddenly. "Step forth, Bramber; you, Miss Bradenham, stand by his side. His happiness, I may tell you, at the present moment stands at 92.5 volts. Now, please, walk slowly to the other end of the room."

Adela obeyed, and, as she did so, I observed the pointer on the positive indicator gradually recede, while the figure on the opposing gauge correspondingly increased.

"This is the strangest phenomenon of all," said Clement Hawksworth. "When you are near our friend, Miss Bradenham, his felicity increases, but as you withdraw, the record shrinks, shrinks amazingly. Strange, very strange!"

But I knew that it was *not* strange.

And Adela was beginning to know also.

"Would the same thing happen," she asked timidly, while her cheeks flushed, "supposing our positions were reversed? That is to say, if I faced the Felixometer, and Frank—I mean Mr. Bramber—gradually withdrew to the other end of the room?"

"Ah," Hawksworth replied, with a dry smile, "I have, of course, no means of knowing. You are the best judge of that—that is, the best judge—after the Felixometer."

Adela tested her happiness again. The reading this time was vastly higher than that previously registered; but—wonderful to relate—as I slowly with-

drew from her side, the pointer dropped at least ten points.

It was a great moment. I could barely conceal my joy. Adela was in charming confusion, while dear old Hawksworth smiled benevolently upon us both.

"This," he exclaimed, "is indeed a discovery."

"What does it mean?" asked Adela, feeling all the while the utter superfluity of the inquiry.

"I think, Miss Bradenham," said the Professor, with a meaning smile, "Bramber can give you a much better explanation than I can."

That was true. I could explain fast enough. I could tell her how the Felixometer had revealed a secret which my accursed timidity had long prevented me from disclosing.

But when Adela and I were alone together, I saw that such an explanation would simply be an inartistic redundancy. Because when we looked into each other's eyes, we understood everything.

"I must go again to-morrow and see that wonderful Felixometer," Adela exclaimed, as we strolled home together.

"I would gladly come with you, dear," I said, "only I—I am—well, rather afraid."

"Afraid of what?" she asked.

"Oh—of falsifying one of the Professor's cherished theories—the theory that no human soul ever realises a perfect happiness."

"That would be unkind to the Professor," she said. "And, on second thoughts, I don't think I'll go either."

"But why?" We had reached the gate of her father's house.

"Why"—she answered, breaking away from me, her face all blushes, "for the same reason, of course!"

