

THE MAN WHO FORESAW

By T. Baron Russell



DICKY HAYDON was a commonplace young man, with a certain amount of imagination. That was all. He had intelligence enough to be well thought of at the London, Brighton and South Coast Bank where he was a clerk, and not too much of it to be an eligible subject for experiments at the Psychological Research Laboratory in East Kensington, to which institution he had been conducted by an acquaintance interested in hypnotism. There will be no difficulty in understanding that young Haydon did not attribute the interest taken in him by the laboratory people to his own strictly commonplace character. On the contrary, he regarded it as a tribute to his intellectual abilities, and was fond of telling Annie Somers, the young woman he was engaged to, of the experiments in which he regarded himself as participating.

The Psychological Research Laboratory is a place where they make certain sorts of investigations. One thing which they tried on Dicky Haydon was the personal-equation machine. It is a sort of clock, having an attachment which suddenly throws up a little coloured flag at the top. The subject of the experiment is made to hold a handle with a knob in it, and is requested to press the knob as quickly as he can when he sees the flag fly up. This records the time of perception, and the Professors are interested in finding out how long different people take to receive the visual impression of the flag, and signal it. You would think this could be done instantaneously, but there is always an interval of time, measured

in decimals of a second; and this time varies in different individuals, and in the same individual on different occasions and at different ages. Certain astronomical observers come there from time to time to get the interval measured in their own case, because it is occasionally important for them to know exactly how accurately they are able to perceive and record the precise instant of the occultation of a star. The time has to be allowed for in their interminable mathematics; and the laboratory likes to inform itself as to the averages of perception in various people, and the effect of training and practice on the reaction.

But this is only one of the things the Professors are interested in, and one way in which they utilised Dicky Haydon was to make hypnotic experiments upon him, and interrogate him upon his sensations. Haydon rather enjoyed these experiences, which titillated his self-appreciation. The investigators listened to him with more attention than he was accustomed to receive from his intellectual superiors, and he liked this. He felt that he was getting up in the world.

He took an intelligent interest in the affair, too, and read several text-books, which gave his talk quite a cultivated vocabulary, and enabled him to catch the drift of many remarks exchanged by the experimenters among themselves. They treated him very nicely, and, of course, played none of the tricks with which charlatans and mesmeric entertainment-mongers adorn their exhibitions. Haydon was warned against these people.

He had become very easily amenable to hypnotism and could be "put to

sleep," after he had visited the laboratory a dozen times or so, with very little trouble. The marvels of "suggestion" were quite well understood by him, as they came under his notice, and he was quite prepared for new and unrecorded wonders. Some of the things which were said in his hearing rather gravelled him, it is true. He knew nothing at all of psychology, still less of metaphysics: but he did his best to understand. One evening he arrived at East Kensington in the middle of a conversation among the experimenters on memory as affected by hypnotism. Marcus Bent, the director of the establishment, was explaining a new theory of the backward development of memory in old people. As a man gets into old age it is well-known that he can often remember facts of his childhood which he had forgotten entirely during youth and middle age. Haydon pricked up his ears as he listened to the end of the Professor's dissertation, and wondered what "backward memory" and "forward memory" might mean—especially the latter. What was forward memory?

Did it mean remembering things before they happened? That would be a rather remarkable faculty; but Haydon had seen and read of so many wonderful things hereabouts, that he was prepared for almost any miracle. Moreover, even the elements of metaphysics are highly disturbing to the untrained mind. The idea rummaged about in his mind while he was being hypnotised, and retarded that operation a good deal, by distracting his attention.

When he "went off," however, he forgot about it for a while, and presently, as he walked to his lodgings in Brompton, it only came back to him when a somewhat curious occurrence brought it to his mind. It was a wet night, and the roadway in Carruthers Street, where he lived, was slippery. A hansom cab was clattering towards a cross road, and, as he looked at it, Haydon said to himself: "That horse will fall down as it turns the corner, and break one of the shafts."

There was nothing very remarkable in this expectation, the road, as already mentioned, being slippery; but when,

at an exact spot which Haydon had set his eye upon, the horse did suddenly, and, with a tremendous crash, fall down, and when, running up, he saw the white ends of a broken shaft, Dicky was startled by his own accuracy. However, even this did not reveal to him his own remarkable acquisition. But when, as he fitted the latch-key to the door of the house he lodged in, and, without any particular interest in the matter, felt convinced that Johnson, the man who lived on the floor above him, would be coming downstairs in his macintosh to post a letter, it gave him a decided shock to meet Johnson on the stairs, thus attired, and thus purposing, exactly as he had expected. Haydon bade his house-mate "good-night" as they passed each other, and then he went upstairs to bed, thinking hard all the time until he slept.

It was only next morning, at the Bank, that the exact relevancy of the miracle which had befallen dawned upon him. Douglas, the chief cashier, a man of fifty-two and the most punctual animal in the city of London, had failed to appear at his usual hour. It was his invariable habit to walk in at seven minutes to ten, which just gave him time to get his box from the safe and arrange his notes and money in the drawer under the counter, the gold in one mahogany basin, the silver and copper in others, and the notes in the flat recess at the side, before the Bank opened. After that he always changed his coat and glanced over the *Standard* money page until ten o'clock struck, and the porters unlocked the front doors. Haydon used to drop in a little before (or occasionally a few minutes after) ten. This morning Mr. Douglas was not at his desk. By the time the office clock marked a quarter past the hour and one or two callers had already been attended to, a rumour began to pass through the office. What on earth had happened to Douglas?

The absence of such a steady-going member of the staff was enough to provoke discussion. "Surely there must be a telegram on the manager's table," young Bellamy, who worked with Haydon and was his chief crony, remarked.

Haydon looked up. "No. I don't believe there's a telegram," he said.

"What do you suppose has happened to old Dug then?"

Haydon reflected a moment. "I expect we shall hear that he slipped in getting out of the train at Moorgate Street," he said, "and fell down and broke his leg."

Bellamy stared at him. "Why on earth should you think that?" he asked, biting the end of a penholder.

Haydon gave a start. It suddenly occurred to him that he had been exercising a faculty which would be difficult and even inconvenient to explain. Moreover he had notions for making use of it—notions which made it desirable for it to be kept to himself. He therefore answered evasively.

"I don't know," he said. "But he must have had some sort of accident, you know, and that is the most likely."

At this moment a policeman came in and spoke to the second cashier. He was followed immediately by the manager of the bank, who lived upstairs.

The latter went to the front and a colloquy took place, which the two clerks could not hear. Presently, however, the constable went away and the second cashier moved to Mr. Douglas's place, fetched his box from the safe, and unlocked it with a key the manager had given him. The head ledger-clerk was sent for, and took the second cashier's place, counting over his money and initialling his day-book. All the cashiers gathered together in a knot for a few minutes. Then they returned to their places. The manager went to his room. Then the news of what had happened to the chief cashier spread through the office. Mr. Douglas had fallen in getting out of his train at Moorgate Street and had broken his left leg, just below the knee. He had been taken on a stretcher to St. Thomas's Hospital, and his eldest son, on the Stock Exchange (Mr. Douglas was a widower) had been communicated with.

"I say, that's a rum thing, that you should have guessed exactly what had happened," said young Bellamy to Haydon.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the latter. "It's the most likely thing to

happen." But he was thinking violently, and his work suffered in consequence. He made a number of mistakes that morning, and was reproved by the chief clerk for wasting his time.

However, he reflected, as he presently went out to lunch, it was a matter of very small consequence now whether he gave satisfaction at the Bank or not. Dicky was not such a fool as to be unaware that with this sudden, unpremeditated acquirement of his he could become as rich as he pleased.

As rich, literally as he pleased. For, he reflected, as he ordered himself a bottle of Pilsener instead of his usual half-tankard of bitter with his lunch, a man who could remember forwards, a man who could do what he had been doing ever since that memorable hypnotisation last night, had only to apply his faculty to the Stock Exchange and deliberately amass a fortune. Haydon had nearly a hundred pounds in the Post Office. He would draw that and begin operations forthwith. Young Douglas would open a small account for him; his profits would soon enable him to give security for a large one—on margins. And it would be good to be rich. He would chuck the Bank, of course. A man of his means would be a fool to waste his youth on ledgers and pass-books, with a pack of City clerks. He would have a big house, in Bayswater somewhere, and associate with nobs. Yes, and he could get married now, as soon as . . .

After all, *should* he get married? Annie was a nice girl, yes. But her father, a working man who lived in Camberwell, jarred on Haydon's refined tastes already. There had been many moments when he felt that he was condescending a good deal; bank clerks do not, as a rule, become "engaged" to shop-girls whose fathers work with their hands. When he was rich, and dressed for dinner every night, and had ladies in evening dress to dine with him, Mr. Somers wouldn't altogether go down. Even Annie—well, Annie was a nice girl, but was she—to put it to himself as a man about to be very, very rich—was she altogether in his class? He remembered an evening when he took

her to a dance given by the cricket club he belonged to, in her scrappy frock, with an artificial rose in her hair, and her red elbows.

It was early-closing night in Camberwell, and Annie, who "served" in a linen-draper's there, was to meet him this evening. He would have to take her home, and he would see her father and mother—the father in his shirt-sleeves, belike, drinking porter out of a jug. Haydon shuddered. On the whole, it would be best to break off with Annie at once. He resolved, as he finished his lunch and went back to the bank, that he would break off with her that evening.

His work had more mistakes in it than ever, that afternoon, because he was all the time thinking about the meeting he had to go through with Annie. Annie would cry. She would make a scene, and in the street, too! It would never do for him to go home with her. Mr. Somers was one of those low people who are quite capable of being unreasonable about things, and even unpleasant. Possibly he might be violent. Haydon had an uncomfortable feeling in the back.

Annie did make a scene. He managed to pick a quarrel with her, when they met at six o'clock, and then told her that they were unsuited to each other; they had better break their engagement. He magnanimously explained that he underwent the suffering of this decision in her own interest. Nothing could be worse for a girl than to be engaged, to be ultimately married, to a man, when they were unsuited to each other. It was a horrible scene, because Dicky hated to see a girl crying, and he was, moreover, secretly ashamed of himself. But her stupidity—the stupidity with which she utterly refused to see that he was really being very noble and disinterested, annoyed him. He told her not to think of sending back his presents. He wished her to keep them. He would not even take back the ring.

Eventually he got away, haunted by the sight of a very pretty face that had grown red and puffed with crying—so red, that several people who passed them turned round and stared. He acceded

to her request—in a deserted street—that he would kiss her once more, for the last time, before he went.

When, in spite of its reluctance to arrive anywhere at all, the suburban train conveyed him to Victoria, it was already eight o'clock. Haydon had had his tea, and he didn't quite know what to do with himself. What did moneyed men do at night? Why, they put on evening dress and went out somewhere; went out to dinner, and had champagne with it. He took the omnibus home, and changed his clothes. The idea of dining did not commend itself to his imagination. He was not in the habit of being hungry at eight o'clock; the meal which he called lunch, supplemented by tea after leaving the Bank, sufficed his appetite. He would go to a music-hall. He would have a stall. His month's money had been paid him a few days before, so he had six pounds and some silver in hand.

He went to the Cosmopolitan and took a stall in the front row. He had always considered this, from afar, as the height of luxury.

During what remained of the first part, he sat solemnly in his seat. At the interval he made his way with some difficulty to the crowded bar, and was served with a bottle of champagne. When the bell rang, he went back to his place, and sat out the performance.

Afterwards he went to a restaurant in the Strand for supper—a very good supper, too, and more champagne. But the champagne got into his head. He had a dim appreciation of some trouble over the bill. Then there was a blank, and presently he found himself without his hat, having an altercation with a policeman, near Piccadilly Circus. He remembered that one night, ever so long ago, when he had been to a theatre with Annie—ah, poor Annie, how she had cried this afternoon!—they saw a young man in evening dress also hatless, and having just such an altercation with a police constable. That young man had been marched off eventually; and, yes, Haydon was being marched off now! Everything seemed very dull and confused. He could not hear very plainly; and he remembered vaguely that once

before, when he had drunk some champagne somewhere and had become a little tipsy, he had felt just like this.

An interview with the impassive inspector of Vine Street hurried past his consciousness. He was not very clear even about his appearance before a magistrate next morning, except that he found enough money in his pocket to pay his fine. He had also enough money to pay for a cab home, his overcoat buttoned up to the neck to hide his evening tie.

As he drove to Carruthers Street, he pulled his wits together. He would have to explain, at the Bank, his absence that morning. If he chose to exercise that new power of his—the power of “remembering forwards”—he could tell exactly what would be said to him by the Manager. But he did not care to foresee this. The main thing was to get home and change his clothes. He would send a telegram to the Bank and go to bed. He would say he was ill. He, indeed, felt very ill.

When, after carrying out this programme, he presently woke up, at a knock, and was told that a gentleman wished to see him, he felt a good deal refreshed, and dressed quickly. While he dressed, he was thinking, and it surprised him, presently, that he had not foreseen who the gentleman waiting for him was.

It was his eldest brother. Dicky looked at him for a moment and turned sick.

“I didn’t know it was you, John,” he said. But I know what you’ve come to tell me.”

His brother stared. “Are you still drunk?” he inquired coldly. John had always been hard on his younger brother.

Dicky shook his head.

“How have you heard, then?” his brother asked. “What do you mean?”

“I know,” said Dicky, huskily.

“You know that this disgraceful affair of yours has got into the papers, and that it has about killed our mother?”

Dicky nodded.

“Who told you?”

“No one. I know.”

“Oh you fool and liar! Yes, you know that it was enough to break her heart, but you don’t know that she is actually, physically ill—that she fell down in a fit when she saw the paper, and hasn’t recovered her senses since.”

“Yes,” said Dicky, in a flat, toneless voice; “she will come to herself about eight o’clock to-night, and die almost immediately.”

John Haydon stared at him disgustedly.

“You evidently *are* drunk still. You had better come out to see your mother as soon as you are sober,” he said, and left him brusquely.

Dicky sat for half an hour before the fire, staring at it, and hardly conscious of any thought.

Presently he went upstairs, and got out what money there was left. He washed and made himself tidy. Then he repaired to a neighbouring shop, where he had sometimes bought photographic chemicals—a hand camera was among his hobbies—and procured a small quantity of cyanide of potassium. The report of a recent inquest had told him that this poison killed without pain and unscandalously.

Then he went back to his bedroom.

Yes. There was nothing for it but this. He had made a fearful ass of himself. He had thrown away his chance of being rich and happy and a great man. He was fit for nothing. He had no right to go on living. A man who had killed his own mother—his conduct amounted to, at all events, moral manslaughter—was not fit to live. It would not be tolerable to go on existing. What an ass he had been—he, who might have made his mother happy and comfortable for the rest of her life! But he had never given a thought to anyone but himself. He hadn’t even cared how much he hurt poor little Annie, so long as his own turn was served! Assuredly he was not fit to live. The only thing that remained was to kill himself as quietly and as painlessly as he could.

He put the poison to his lips. What happened to people after their death? he

wondered. Ah, it would not do to think of that, or he would become frightened, perhaps be afraid to kill himself at all. It would never do, that—to go on living, with this fatal gift of remembering forwards, this gift of prophecy.

Then suddenly a strange feeling came over him. Something was blowing in his face, and he heard a lot of voices. He became aware that his eyes were closed, and opening them, found himself in the Psychological Research Laboratory, with electric lights burning and the kind young professor smiling at him.

"Come, wake up," said the latter. "You have been having quite a snooze, after the ambulatory stage, and—what was it he kept saying, Jenson? Yes, that you could remember backwards and forwards, or something!"

Haydon rubbed his eyes, and stared at the men round him. He had been dreaming, then! It was all a dream—all a misunderstanding! He had been here all the time, and nothing had happened to him at all. He was alive and well; his mother was all right, too. How he longed to see her! He had

been rather neglectful of late. He would go there to-morrow night.

No. To-morrow night was Annie's night—poor Annie, so pretty and so loving! He wondered whether it would be fine, and if Annie would care to go for a long walk in the country, Dulwich way? And the next night he would assuredly go home to his mother's.

The professor had considerably turned away, for a few moments. Now he returned. "You are tired, Mr. Haydon," he said. "I think we have given you too long a sitting. I won't bother you with any questions to-night. You'd better get away home."

"Thanks. I am rather sleepy," said Haydon. "I was talking in my sleep, you say? A fine lot of nonsense, I expect."

"Oh, nothing much! Something about having your memory made to work forwards—whatever that may mean—so that you could prophecy things, you said. We're not quite equal to that, you know."

He smiled as he shook hands.

"Heaven forbid!" said Dicky Haydon, piously.

