THE MAN WITH THE MASTER MIND.

Being the Chronicles of Carlton Clarke, Telepatho-Deductive Solver of Criminal Mysteries.

BY FRANK LOVELL NELSON.

Mystery of the Silver Skull

(In this experience of Carlton Clarke the tale is an interweave of Occident and Orient of the most fascinating kind. A silver skull, an Oriental faker and hypnotist, a mysterious murder, and an evanescent prisoner are some of the details of an intensely interesting adventure.)

I HAVE had occasion in the course of these narratives to mention a rather unique tobacco-jar which graced Carlton Clarke's study table. I long felt there was a story connected with it, and I bided in patience the time when Clarke should see fit to tell it.

The silver skull is pictured in my mind's eye as I write; the delicate tracery of its ornamentation; the almost uncanny beauty of the head and bust which formed the handle; the face that always inspired in me reverence and awe. Not so Clarke. I have seen him knock the ashes from his pipe and fill it again from the skull, talking and laughing all the while. It was only after I had been caught several times without tobacco and had suffered the gnawing craving for a smoke that I could bring myself to raise the lid by that beautiful silver head and draw on Clarke's supply.

The skull was that of a woman, polished to the whiteness of ivory and deftly inlaid and ornamented with silver. The workmanship was marvelous. A circular piece had been sawn from the crown, and into this aperture was fitted a silver bowl capable of holding about half a pound of the weed. The edges of this bowl were turned into a rim which concealed the sawn bone and which was inset flush with the surface. So neat was this joint and so accuratery were the convolutions of the bone followed, that except for the difference in color, the skull and the silver seemed one piece.

The circular section removed formed the cover; it was also rimmed with silver, inset as was the bowl, fitting it so neatly as to be practically hermetical. The silver head and bust formed a handle in the center of this cover.

The sutures were delicately edged in silver, inlaid so smoothly that the most sensitive finger could not distinguish bone from metal.

The teeth were perfect and of the whiteness of rice. In one, the right upper incisor, sparkled a small diamond set into the enamel without the aid of gold.

Across the pure white forehead, just over the eye-sockets, was the word "Ynath" beautifully inlaid in silver script. Looking through the eye-socket, it could be seen that the bone was not cut through, but the silver was welded to it by some process with which I was unfamiliar.

"Ynath!" The word stamped itself indelibly upon my memory. A woman's name, I had long decided. Most probably the name of her whose queenly head once enclosed the skull, and perhaps of her whose brilliant eyes once sparkled love or flashed scorn from out those now sightless sockets. Those eyes, what eyes had they looked into; those full, sensuous lips, what lips had they kissed? What clime, what age had been the theater of her loves and hates? The costume told not, for costume there was none. The hair gave no clew, for it was gathered in a glorious, rebellious mass, as Eve might have gathered her tresses against the straying breezes of Eden.

But what was the use of speculation? True to our unwritten, unspoken compact, I must await the time when the spirit moved Clarke to speak. And the spirit came at a most unexpected time, under a most singular guise, and in a most dramatic manner.

We had gone to bed early that night, but it was so insufferably hot that sleep was out of the question. For days the lake breeze, usually Chicago's Summer salvation, had been vainly awaited. It must have been far after midnight when I fell into a fitful slumber. I had watched Clarke's light through the portieres until the hour of 12 struck on the silver chimes on our mantelpiece. I knew that he had not even courted fickle slumber. Then his light went out, and soon afterward I heard, or thought I heard, his regular breathing.

I awoke with a start, conscious that something was wrong. For a few minutes I lay inert, uncertain whether my nerves had tricked me or whether there was a marauder in our little castle. Then a slight turning of the head showed me that, through a rift in the portieres, I had a view of the library by the electric light that filtered in through the bay-windows. The sight I saw for a moment robbed me of all power of voice or motion. A crouching figure was creeping slowly toward me across the library floor with arms outstretched toward the shining silver skull on the table.

Standing in Clarke's doorway was another figure, white robed, and motionless but for the flashing eyes that followed every movement of the intruder's back.

The figure in the doorway was Clarke, clad in white pajamas, standing erect, his arms folded. I was concerned to notice that he had no weapon, while the intruder carried in his right hand a stiletto which flashed in the dim light. My own revolver was in the rack in the dining-room, and as I lay watching the scene, a thousand thoughts flashing through my brain, I could think of no weapon within my reach but a fragile nail-file.

Our visitor was no common burglar. He was dressed in a well-fitting suit of white linen. A Panama hat, with band of pongee, covered his black hair. His face was swarthy, and he wore two little ends of mustaches twisted almost to needle points. All this I grasped in the moment by the dim light, so actively did the scene quicken my perceptions.

Suddenly the tableau broke into a riot of action. The intruder's fingers were closing over the silver skull. Clarke's arm was outstretched, and the one word "Stop!" in unruffled tone broke the silence.

The figure turned and the stiletto flashed in the light. I sprang from my bed and dashed through the portiers. The figure advanced toward Clarke with weapon raised, while I crouched for a spring at his throat. But the steady eyes and uplifted hand of my companion told me that he had the situation in hand.

The arm was raised to strike, still Clarke moved not. But the blow did not fall. The intruder stared into Clarke's eyes, tottered, and the knife clattered to the floor from his nerveless fingers.

"Sahib Clarke!" he gasped.

Clarke snapped on the electric light while I gathered in the knife.

"So you've come for it, Achmon," said my companion, pushing a chair toward our caller, who limply sank into it.

"Come for her, yes. For what else have I traversed these thousands of miles? For what else have I spent ten weary years in your cruel, white man's prison?"

"And for what else did you do for Dr. Ranthan?" interrupted Clarke.

"I did not do it. The sahib knows I did not do it. Ynath slew him. She came to him but she loved him not. She but used the knife to cut the cords that bound her to him. Now she is calling to me to call her, for me only she loves in life or death."

Clarke turned fiercely upon him.

"Fool, keep your child's stories for them that believe. Did you think to come here dressed for the boulevard and rob him who looked through the windows of your lying soul and read the truth? Sexton, reach Inspector Ship by phone and ask him to come here. This case will please him. Achmon, instead of getting the skull, I'm afraid you have treated yourself to another term of years in prison."

"The sahib does not know that new power has been sent me. You can put me in your prison but you cannot keep me there. I have left one; I will leave another. I will get the skull," returned the Hindu doggedly.

I had no trouble locating the inspector at his home and, though he demurred somewhat, he promised to dress and come. When I returned from the dining-room I beheld the unusual spectacle of a man, whose house had just been burglarized, pouring out a drink for the burglar, who had drawn his chair up to the table and was lighting one of Clarke's cheroots.

Achmon and I are old friends, you see," he said to me.

But I noticed that notwithstanding his apparent nonchalance his eyes never for a second left the Hindu.

"Now, Sexton," said Clarke, when he had filled three glasses, "while we are waiting for Ship I'll tell you a little story, and Achmon here will vouch for the truth of it. After the fashion of storytellers, we will serve up the mystery first and then unfold the solution, which, of course we have known all the time. Get my scrap book, the third from the right on the second shelf from the top in the first tier. Now open to page 302 and read the clipping from the New York Sun. Being a reformed newspaper man you will recognize the head letter."

I read aloud the followin:

BELLEVUE STUDENT MYSTERIOUSLY KILLED

"Dr. John R. Ranthan, a graduate-student in Bellevue hospital, was found dead in his apartments near the hospital early this morning. A knife of Oriental design, imbedded by the force of a terrific blow in the breast, was plainly the cause of his death. As the doors were all locked from within, the first theory of the police was suicide, but the angle at which the blow was struck and the force with which it was dellvered seem to suggest murder. Dr. Ranthan was said to be quiet and unassuming and without known enemies. He had traveled extensively and had been a collector of Oriental curiosities."

"That's enough," said Clarke. "If you read the whole story, it will leave nothing for me to tell. Here is the case as I saw it."

"Ten years ago I was serving as an interne at Bellevue. In this capacity I met Dr. John R. Ranthan. He interested me at once; first because of his immense stature—he was six feet five and modeled in proportion—and next, for the reason that he was pursuing special work along lines that interested me—phenomena of the mind and senses.

"When off duty at the hospital I often sat with him in his rooms, which were regular curiousity shops of his travels, and discussed the subjects near to our hearts.

"We could not agree, however. He was a theorist, while he called me a gross materialist. He had started early in his medical practice upon a crusade of exposure of spiritism, and ended up by becoming a convert to the belief. Then, backed by ample wealth, and hampered by no ties, he searched the East for the secrets it holds. India, China, Persia and even forbidden Tibet he forced to give up their hidden lore.

"'When you have seen the things that I have seen,' he often roared out to me in his thunderous voice, 'you will believe. I have seen an Indian yogi take a tibia and materialize the complete body, raiment and all. What do you think of that?' bringing his ponderous fist down on the table until the windows rattled.

"'I think,' I replied, 'that there are some things that must be seen to be believed, and even then we may explain them on purely scientific grounds.'

"'What would you say if you saw me materialize from this skull the body of her whose face forms the handle'—The sentence ended in an explosion of of earnestness, as he playfully tapped this very skull that Achmon covets so.

"'I should like to see that,' I answered.

"'Ah, but you should have seen her in the flesh,' he resumed meditatively. 'God! but she was beautiful! I found her in the mission at Mussoorie, but she was not born for the hymn-singing trade. Her father was French, her mother a mountain maid of Gurhwal, and she had been up to Simla once and seen life. When I told her of the great world beyond, where the shadows of the Himalayas fell not, her bosom heaved and her eyes flashed like those of the she-tiger that had taken that year a toll of a hundred lives in the foothills. She left the mission and the half-caste Hindu who had dared lift his eyes toward her glorious self and came with me.'"

I saw murder in Achmon's beady eyes, and his chest-muscles swelled at the deep intaking of his breath.

"'And then?' I asked," continued Clarke.

"And then she died. For two short months I showed her in the Calcutta bazaars. Paris, London, New York, were denied the light.

"'Look, isn't it beautiful?' and Dr. Ranthan lifted the silver skull. 'A native Calcutta workman did it, and I stood over him cursing him with a thousand deaths if he marred a line or failed to catch the likeness from the only picture of Ynath I possessed.'

"A few days later I bolted into Ranthan's apartments after a book he had promised me. I had not been accustomed to knock, and as I opened the door I heard the unmistakable swish of skirts, and Ranthan stood before me confused and sheepish. I missed the silver skull from the table.

"'Pardon me, you are not alone,' I said.

"'No—yes—that is, I am alone, of course. The book is in that room. Just step right in.'

"I did so, and I heard him stealthily close the door behind me, but not until I had again heard the frou-frou of a woman's garments. It took but a second to seize the book and return to his study. Dr. Ranthan was calmly seated reading. The room had no other occupant. The door of the third room was open and it was tenantless. The silver skull was on the table in its accustomed place.

"The next night I was calling on Dr. Cartwright, whose rooms were directly below Ranthan's. I had seen Ranthan go up alone; in fact I had walked over from the hospital with him. Soon we heard footsteps overhead, the heavy elephantine tread of Ranthan, and then the light patter of a gentler foot. Through a faulty register we heard, also, Ranthan's stentorious voice alternated with a sweet contralto. The conversation was in an unfamiliar tongue, but one abounding in beautiful intonations.

"Cartwright winked at me. 'A nightly occurence,' he said.

"For some time I saw little of Ranthan. His visits to the hospital ceased and the studies he had taken up with so much ardor seemed forgotten.

"One night about midnight Cartwright burst into my room at the hospital just as I had come from an interesting accident case.

"'Come over at once,' he said. 'Something's wrong with Ranthan. I heard the crash of a falling body overhead. I can't raise him. Both his doors are locked.'

"I hurriedly threw on a coat and followed. The doors resisted all our efforts and we called the police. A lock was smashed and we entered. The place was in darkness. I switched on the electric light and there, prostrate on the floor, lay the huge bulk of Ranthan. The carved-ivory hilt of a knife protruded from his left side. I had often noted the weapon in his collection. The silver skull was gone.

"'Suicide,' was the verdict of the police. The doors were firmly bolted from within; the windows looked into a court, the only egress from which was through the rooms of students on the first floor, all of whom, including Cartwright, were busy with their books when the tragedy occurred. Escape through the hall was improbable, for Cartright had rushed out immediately. Besides, there were the bolted doors.

"But Cartwright and I both knew that Ranthan's hand never struck the blow that sank 12 inches of blade and three inches of hilt into his own heart just at the left armpit. A left-handed blow was out of the question. A right-handed blow at that point would lack the force.

"A closer examination of the locks showed me that the one which was intact, while seemingly bolted, might be passed with a key, as the ring into which the bolt shot was a false one, hinged at the top and kept in place by a spring, evidently the half-baked invention of some previous tenant.

"Recalling hints dropped by Ranthan, the case gradually began to take shape in my mind when Cartwright, who had assumed charge of the dead man's papers, came to me with this in Ranthan's well-known hand:

"'Read it Sexton, page 401 of the scrap book:

"'For the benefit of science, I, John R. Ranthan, hereby declare, that if I am slain, it will be by the hand of Ynath, half-caste maid of Gurhwal, whose body I have repeatedly materialized in the flesh from relics in my possession. I have sworn not to write the secret. Let him who would learn it seek out one Yangmal, a hermit yogi, whose cave lies in the foothills of the Himalayas, in the province of Sikhim, ten leagues north of the temple of Darjeeling. I have spoken.'

"He of the damned soul lies. He had the secret from Tibet where I myself learned it," muttered Achmon.

"Well," continued Clarke, ignoring the interruption," as I said, I pieced together the story. The false bolt, and the fact that Cartwright had left immediately to summon me, seemed to indicate that an escape were not impossible. From India, I reasoned, vengeance had reached Ranthan and to India would his slayer return. I watched the docks and nabbed Achmon. In his possession, and carefully guarded, was the silver skull. This alone convicted him, for I knew it was useless to tell an American jury what I read behind those eyes, that would slay me now if they had the basilik's power. The sentence was life, yet here he is."

"Then we can save the state of Illinois something by returning him to New York," said Inspector Ship, who had arrived in time to hear, with staring, incredulous eyes, the most of Clarke's story.

"Not until I have made an experiment," said Clarke. "Achmon, you say you have the secret. Prove it, and the skull is yours."

"I know not if the conditions be right, sahib, but I will try," returned the Hindu.

Rapidly he cleared the table of all save the silver skull, which he placed in the center. At his direction Clarke then lighted the gas, turned it down until only a point of flame showed, and put out the electric light. He then ranged us in a half-circle before the skull. The inspector, who at first declined to be a party to the impromptu seance but was finally persuaded, was on the right. Then came the Hindu, then myself, and then Clarke. At the medium's orders we then clasped hands and waited, our eyes on the grinning skull before us. No sound broke the silence save our regular breathing, which shortly fell into unison. The Hindu's hand in mine burned like a coal of fire. My nerves began to feel the strain. I was relieved when, with a sidelong glance of the eye, I noted that Ship's free hand was in his side-pocket, and I felt sure he fingered the butt of a revolver. The fitful light seemed to crown the bust on the skull with a phosphorescent aura. The diamond in the upper incisor flashed like a point of fire. Clarke's hand in mine was as steady as the cylinderhead of a marine engine.

Suddenly the Hindu began to intone monotonously and seemingly without end:

"Ynath, come! Ynath, come! Ynath, come!"

On, on, on until my brain reeled and my whole being revolted at the refrain.

My eyes were glued to the face on the skull. Could it be? Yes, the skull gradually was fading from view and the silver bust was rising and growing, larger, larger, and nearer, until—

A GLORIOUS FIGURE STOOD BEFORE US

I stole a glance at the inspector; he saw it as well—a glorious figure stood before us, the eyes flashing, the nostrils distended and the breast heaving with sentient life.

The power of description is palsied at the attempt to picture her. Loosely clad in folds of shimmering silk, through which every line and curve showed as in bas-relief, she was the living presentment of the face on the skull; but added to the cold beauty of line she had the warm loveliness of life and color that even the ghostly gaslight could not conceal. A diamond flashed from her right upper incisor when she opened her red lips in a smile. Two other diamonds were set in the sides of the nostrils, after the fashion of the dancing girls in the temple of Trichinopoly.

Then she spoke, doubtless in her native Hindustani. The words were unintelligible, but the sweetness of the voice was as of a maid singing in the twilight.

"Ynath, I have called thee," answered Achmon. "I would question thee. Answer in the tongue thou learned in the Feringhee mission. What hand slew him of the damned soul, who was called Ranthan?"

"I slew him, Achmon. I loved him not. He lured me with his tales of the cities of men, as the flame lures the moth. I followed him and happiness was mine for a space. And then I knew I was a woman of lost caste, in, but not of the life around me. I pined for the hills of Mussoorie. I passed and was free until he learned the great secrt of the master-knot."

"Does he not then offend thee in the ethereal world?" questioned Achmon.

"No, Achmon, he passed out into utter darkness, and moreover, the freed soul is at liberty to seek onty its affinities. I am weary, Achmon, and would return."

"Go, then, light of my soul, and await my call."

Slowly the vision faded. Through the hazy folds of the silken robe again appeared the dim outlines of the skull on the table. Clarke released my hand and the electric lights flashed up. The inspector sat as in a trance, his eyes still glued to the skull.

"I have won, Achmon!" cried Clarke.

"I saw nothing and you know it. I keep the skull."

"I bide my time," returned the Hindu sullkily.

The light of dawn was beginning to show through the windows. The inspector sprang up with a sudden access of energy.

"Well, well!" he said. "Got to be getting this chap to the station. You'll make a charge, of course, Mr. Clarke, in case New York don't want him. Be around about ten. Here, my man, I guess we'll just put the bracelets on you. You won't try any of your A. P. A. tricks with them."

Achmon meekly extended his hands. I thought it was largely bluster, and was not surprised when, just as they were ready to start, the inspector turned to Clarke and in a perfectly audible whisper said:

"Mr. Clarke, couldn't you come on with us? I don't mind admitting I'm a bit creepy."

"It is not in the least necessary," returned Clarke. Ghosts don't walk in the daytime, and besides, haven't you your driver outside?"

"Didn't you see her?" I asked Clarke after the inspector had departed with his prisoner and we were completing our previous hasty toilets.

"I saw nothing and heard nothing but the Hindu's one-sided nonsense."

Then I told him what I had seen and what I was sure the inspector had also witnessed.

"Now, how can you explain it," I asked.

"Dr. Hudson has already explained it pretty well. At least, he has given us a working hypothesis. Your senses were under the control of the subjective mind while I was normal. In other words you were hypnotized. A young Englishman once snapped a camera on the rope-trick as performed by a Hindu faker. His eye saw the faker toss the rope into the air until the end was lost in space. The faker's boy climbed the rope until he also disappeared. He appeared again and climbed down. The faker then hauled down the rope and passed his hat for annas in the crowd. The dry plate, when developed showed nothing but the pantomime of the faker. You were the deceived eye while I was the infallible dry plate."

After a rather neglected breakfast and a nap to recover the murdered sleep of the night before, we proceeded to the station to complete the formalities of the Hindu's arrest. When we arrived, Inspector Ship met us with a lugubrious countenance and mysteriously ushered us into his private office and closed and locked the door.

When he had assured himself that no unbidden ear was listening he turned to us and said:

"He's gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Clarke. "You don't mean to say you allowed him to escape hand-cuffed, between our place and the station?"

"No, I got him here safely enough. The lockup-keeper took him downstairs and I went along and took off the bracelets. Then I saw him put into the center cell in the north tier and the door turned on him. The lockup-keeper says he was there when he had up the bunch for morning rollcall. About 15 minutes ago I went down for something and took a look into his cell. It was empty. The lock hasn't ben tampered with; there is lock hasn't been tampered with; through. Now how did he get out?"

"He may have had a confederate," I suggested.

"And I suppose the confederate has keys to the cells and could walk into a crowded police station in broad daylight and take his man out. No, sir, that fellow just faded away through the iron and stone and you'll never make me believe anything else. Now, gentlemen, if this ever gets out I'll be the laughing-stock of the force. Luckily I didn't book him, and I've sworn the lockup-keeper to secrecy on pain of his job. I want to ask you to keep it dark."

We gave the promise. Later and under most peculiar circumstances was this ban of secrecy lifted—but that is another story.

"I think I can find your man again," said Clarke.

"You needn't find him for me," quickly returned the inspector. "I wouldn't touch him again for the site of the City Hall."

There had been several impatient taps at the inspector's door and so we departed. As we were leaving the station Clarke turned to me with a worried expression and said:

"We must hurry home. Why didn't I think of it before. The skull! It's Oyama's day off." Oyama was our own name for our Jap servant.

We lost no time getting home. The door seemed to be all right, in fact it was fastened with a tumbler-lock which would have given the most experienced burglar a bad half-hour. We had no fear of the rear door, which was secured by chain-bolt.

We entered and took a hasty view of the library.

The silver skull was gone!

The windows gave no more clue than had the doors.

"What do you make of it, Clarke?" I demanded.

"I regard it as a worthy basis of serious investigation," he answered meditatively.

It was years afterwards and in a strange land that Clarke and I again rolled a cigarette from the silver skull—but that, also, is another story.

[The next story in the series of adventures of Carlton Clarke, entitled "The Soul of the Blue Bokhara," will appear next week.]

Darwinian Theory and High Collars

THE life of Darwin gives no support to the theory of Dr. Osler as to man's uselessness after passing 40 years of age. Darwin was born in 1809, and it was 1859 before he published his ingenious theory and the investigations that made him famous.

Mr. Darwin never attempted to explain the origin of man or of life. His main contention was, first, that there are no fixed boundaries confirming or defining species in the animal kingdom. In the human species he contended that there are more differences between its two extremes than there are between man and the next species below man. If an ape were to be suddenly changed into a man capable of reason and voluntary opinion and expression, the accomplishment would be looked upon as a miracle. But if the same result transpires in the course of time it is looked upon as merely natural, and, in fact, all the species of which the animal kingdom consists have, according to Mr. Darwin, arisen in that way.

Natural selection means that some things fall for lack of appreciation sufficient to furnish them a support from the supporters, while other ventures succeed because they are appreciated by those who hold the means of subsistence. The law is the same for a crab, a peacock or a magazine.

As to the origin or nature of life, or who furnishes it, or as to when existing species will be replaced by others further advanced, Darwin is silent. He does claim, however, that it has required many millions of years to furnish the present species of man as he is found on this planet.

Darwin knew that it is as impossible for something to come out of nothing, gradually as it is impossible for something to come from nothing suddenly. He also knew that one condition is developed from another, each from a prior one. Darwin does not try to travel backward to the first condition of the universe, nor forward to its final condition. Hence he is not in opposition to the first verse of Genesis nor to the last in Malachi, or in the book of Revelation.

Darwin insists on the absolute law of change. But the changes, whether of growth or decay, are always changes in accordance with order—the order of the universe. Darwin opposes the idea of suddenness in natural changes, because all order requires a succession of conditions, and these conditions all require the lapse of time. It is not possible for bread to be made out of stones, except by a long process, involving many changes according to infinite wisdom, made by a manipulator who has all means at his command and who makes no mistakes.

Even Darwin was obliged to admit the existence of many causes for the great variety of changes he found in the universe. If there had been fewer causes there would have been fewer effects manifested today. If the peacock's tail had lost its brilliancy the species would have died out. The old style oranges will soon be replaced by the seedless orange, because the latter pay better. Other freak varieties of fruit will come into favor for the same reason.

Human caprice sometimes interferes temporarily with the laws of Nature. Thus, some leading fashionable woman once had something ugly on the back of her neck. She made a high fancy collar to cover it up. And now women who have beautiful necks imitate the one who had the ugly neck, and they wear stiff, ungraceful collars extending up behind their ears, entirely hiding every vestige of the neck. But the beautiful neck will soon assert itself, according to the Darwinian theory, and the temporary condition will pass with the circumstance which produced it.

He's Learning.

Chicago News.

I'm not at all a callow youth,
I've had experience to burn;
And yet I find, to tell the truth,
That I've an awful lot to learn.
It doesn't matter where I go,
Life takes an unaccustomed hue,
Colored with facts I didn't know;
I'm always learning something new.

I've traded horses in my day
And thought that I was hard to beat;
But lately I have cause to say
My knowledge still is incomplete.
The same in politics, I'm free
To say that there I missed my cue.
They made a monkey out of me.
I'm always learning something new.

In every blessed phase of life
Some novel little kink appears.
I have been married to my wife
A matter now of twenty years.
It's odd that I should have to change
Concerning her my point of view.
But her last notion's mighty strange.
I'm always learning something new.