

# The Power of Imagination

By C. J. WINTER.

**I**F anyone, in the course of conversation with Greville Basset, happened to mention anything about the power of imagination, he was generally favoured by that gentleman with a peculiar cold and searching stare, intended to find out if the observation was made in pure innocence, or if the person making it had heard things connected with his past, and was pulling his leg.

The fact of the matter was that the subject was somewhat painful to Greville Basset, Esq., M.P. and to speak truth he had every reason to feel sensitive about it, although not one soul in the world had the least compassion for him respecting the matter excepting myself, the reason being that no one—save me—knew the whole facts of the case.

I am now about to impart them for the first time, and so the reader will be in the peculiar position of knowing the whole matter while all the principals concerned in its transactions, only know in part.

On the sixth of November 1901, while dining at Lady Maurice Ransome's, someone dropped a chance remark about the effect on the mind of certain illusions, giving as instances various phenomena vouched for by people of the very highest standing.

It frequently happens that a remark of this kind starts a conversation that takes a long time to beat dry, and in the present case some dozens of curious happenings were hauled into the light with the result that long after the ladies had left for the opera, and the room was draped in a fleecy curtain of tobacco smoke, the subject rolled merrily on.

Factions were formed: there were those who held that all the so-called authenticated mysteries had no real substance, but were simply an effect on the mind which could be accounted for by hard facts, while others stoutly averred that miraculous occurrences did actually take place under certain conditions.

One sceptic was boldly to the fore in all these latter cases: this was Basset. Shrewd and level-headed, possessing a very matter-of-fact mind, he constantly reiterated the same retort—"pure imagination, my dear fellow, you thought you saw it, it didn't really exist, you know," and so forth.

"I remember," said Colonel Thurston, "on two separate occasions and in different parts of India—once in Mysore and once in Bombay—I saw the famous mango trick, and nothing to my dying day will persuade me that the little plant did not actually grow up in front of my very eyes: moreover I'll find you half a dozen honourable English gentlemen who will bear me out."

"Simply an effect of the imagination, Colonel," replied Basset. "I will not believe of course that you really believe it yourself, but the whole affair is too marvellous to have actually taken place: your imagination was worked upon that is the only explanation, and your eye deceived you. I can recall an instance which happened to my own wife," continued he. "It was after that unfortunate affair of my son, when he suddenly left—you will excuse me going over it—but by wife woke me up one night and told me she had just seen Robert standing by the bed, and had had a long conversation with him, in which he had asked her to plead with me for pardon and the rest of it, and to let him know if he might return home again. Of course it was pure imagination, she had dreamed it, but nothing will shake her opinion that either he, or his spirit in tangible form, came into our room that night."

"Now you know, either a thing happens—in which case something always occurs to prove its reality—or it is nothing more than a vision of the mind—a delusion with nothing to confirm it and absolutely no existence except in the abnormally sensitive or perhaps hypnotised mind of the one who sees it: I have a book or two on the subject, and as I have an appointment with Dr. Stegeman in half an hour and shall be near home, I will call in and bring them round to prove my point."

After a little more talk on the subject Greville Basset rose and left saying he would be back inside the hour.

It was not often he referred to the unfortunate incident in his life as he had done to-night: the subject was of course most painful to him. It will be remembered that his son Robert who was known privately to be leading a very fast life, had suddenly disappeared leaving a note to his father in which he said he could not face him on account of the debts he had contracted and various other entanglements. This was some five years ago and the blow had almost broken the heart of the boy's mother. Everything had been done to try to find him but without avail, and although Basset had lately moved into another house, and done all in his power to try to take his wife's mind off the sad subject, yet, mother-like, she continued to grieve, her health had broken down, and she was not the same woman as of old. It was to the doctor who attended her that Basset now went and after the consultation he drove home to get the books he had promised to take back to convince his friends.

At the time the above conversation was in full swing, the garden of the newly-acquired house belonging to Greville Basset, lay in profound quiet. The well-trimmed and bushy laurel hedge gave no unusual sound when shaken by the keen east wind which had sprung up and brought with it a touch of frost which hardened the paths and dried the stones as white as linen. Everything looked exactly as usual, when suddenly a husky voice—modulated to a heavy whisper—broke the stillness. "Gent," said the voice, "I reckon

now's the time; and with your permission we'll get to business."

Another voice answered and a covert conversation was kept up for two or three minutes, at the end of which the bushes were stealthily parted and there issued therefrom two figures; one tall and stalwart, the other thin almost to emaciation. Both wore long overcoats, and if all the five millions of people in London had seen them, not one perhaps would have guessed that these same overcoats were literally lined with steel in the shape of highly-tempered and cunningly constructed burglars tools; yet such was the fact.

These two men represented the summit of the old and dishonourable profession of burglary.

The younger and bigger man, by his upright and gentlemanly appearance, might easily have been taken for a titled gentleman. The other however was a very different person: He could never have passed for anything but a member of the "lower five" for notwithstanding his fine clothes, there was something about him suggestive of the slums. His keen ferret face and small bead-like eyes coupled with a certain startled and nervous demeanour, although stamping him with extraordinary acuteness, gave him an undoubted air of the low-down corksney.

Incongruous as was their appearance, they were evidently in perfect consonance with regard to their nefarious undertakings. Many were the jobs they had brought to a successful conclusion.

Of course they were well known to the police, not by their appearance but by their work. Their bold and daring schemes, and their consummate skill in carrying them out, had convinced Scotland Yard that two of the most expert regues of modern times were on the war-path.

For a moment they remained taking stock of the windows in the house, listening intently the while, then noiselessly they entered the back door and disappeared within.

No sound fell from their feet as they boldly traversed the passage and mount-

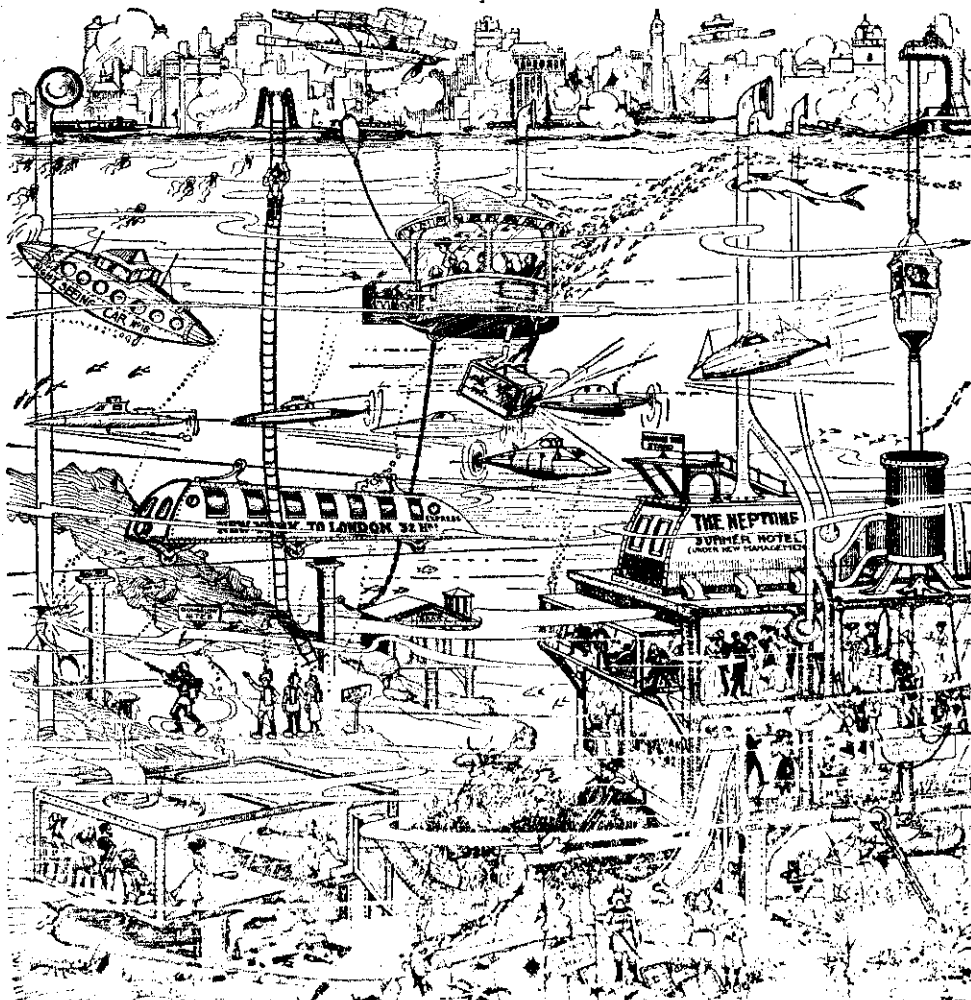
ed a flight of two of stairs. They tried one or two doors all of which were open, and finally selected one which was evidently a study. Quick as lightning, but without sound, each fell to his appointed task. The thin, keen-faced man—at a nod and muttered "there's your department" from the other—dropped on his knees in front of the safe and began dexterously plying the thin bright skeleton keys, while the taller man went over to the desk, pulling the drawers noiselessly out, turning them upside down on the floor and securing everything of value that came to light. Small choice ornaments and costly relics speedily found their way into his keeping, and while the other was patiently working away at the safe, he opened another door and found himself in an elegantly furnished bedroom. He soon returned with a precious store of jewels and valuable ornaments which quickly found their way into the canvas bag which had received the things already collected.

Meanwhile the door of the safe swung silently back and the eager but cautious fingers of the thin man removed the cashbox which at once followed the other spoils. A keen glance revealed a bundle or two of papers and these were also secured.

Another room was visited, more drawers emptied and more valuables added to the already costly store.

So quickly and systematically had they worked that in twenty minutes they had gone through all three rooms and amassed enough to satisfy even their rapacious instincts. It had been a phenomenally easy job from the first. All drawers had been found open, nothing had to be broken, they had struck lucky from every point of view, and a moment afterwards saw them stealthily disappearing, carrying with them perhaps a thousand pound's worth of valuables, and leaving behind them a scene of indescribable confusion.

Soon after the disappearance of the two men, Greville Basset arrived home. He went straight to the library, secured a couple of books and was just going to leave when he remembered that there



DOWN THE BAY—A VISION OF THE NEW YORK OF THE FUTURE.