

(Continued from Page 7.)

curtain, which had hitherto hidden the stage from our view, rolled up and discovered the professor standing with his hand resting upon an easel, on which was placed a large blackboard.

I think the general feeling in the room was that of disappointment. I know that I, for one, had hoped to see something more interesting than the usual paraphernalia of a lecture on astronomy or geology.

Professor Selamowsky, too, was not at all as impressive a person as his name had led me to expect. He was short and thick-set. His close-cropped hair was of the undecided color which fair hair assumes when it is beginning to turn gray, and a heavy mustache of the same uninteresting hue hid his mouth. His jaw was heavy and slightly underhung, and his neck was thick and coarse.

Altogether his appearance was remarkably unprepossessing and commonplace.

In a short speech, spoken with a slightly foreign accent, which some way or other struck me as being assumed, he begged to disclaim all intention of conjuring. His performance was solely and entirely a series of experiments in and illustrative of the wonderful science of hypnotism: a science still in its infancy, but destined to take its place among the most marvellous of modern discoveries.

As he spoke, his heavy, uninteresting face lit up as with a hidden enthusiasm, and my attention was attracted to his eyes, which I had not noticed before. They were of a curious, bright metallic blue, and are the only eyes I have ever seen—though one reads and hears so perpetually of them—which really seemed to flash as he warmed to his subject.

As he finished I looked at Aunt Phæbe, who shrugged her shoulders and smiled incredulously. It was clear that she was not going to be imposed upon by his specious phrases.

It is unnecessary to worry my readers by describing at length how the usual preliminary of choosing an unbiassed committee was gone through, nor how, after the doctor, the rector, Mr. Melton (the principal draper in Bishopstrop), and several other of the town magnates, all men of irreproachable honesty, had been induced to act in this capacity, the professor proceeded, with eyes blindfolded and holding the doctor's hand in his, to find a carefully hidden pin, to read the number of a bank-note and to write the figures one by one on the blackboard, and to perform other experiments of the same kind amid the breathless interest of the audience.

I frankly admit that I was astonished and bewildered by what I saw, and I had a little uneasy feeling that if it were not all a piece of gigantic humbug it was not quite canny—not quite right.

What struck me most was the unfussy, untheatrical way in which it was all done. Every one of the professor's movements was marked by an air of calm certainty. He threaded his way through the crowded benches with such an unhesitating step that, only that I had seen the bandage fastened over his eyes by the rector and afterward carefully examined by the doctor, neither of whom could be suspected of complicity, I should have said he must have had some little peephole arranged to enable him to guide his course so unfalteringly.

There were, of course, thunders of applause from the six-penny seats when the thought-reading part of the entertainment came to an end.

"Well, Aunt Phæbe," I said turning to her as the professor bowed his thanks, "what do you think?"

"Think, my dear!" she repeated. "I think the man is a very fair conjurer."

"But," I protested, "how could he know where the pin was, and you know Mr. Danby himself fastened the handkerchief?"

"My dear Elizabeth, I have seen Houdin do far more wonderful things when I was a girl, but he had the honesty to call it by its right name—conjuring."

I had not time to carry on the discussion, for the professor now reappeared and informed us that by far the most interesting part of

the performance was still to come. Thought-reading and mesmerism, or, some people preferred to call it, hypnotism, were, he believed, different parts of the same wonderful and but very partially-understood power. A power so little understood as not even to possess a distinctive name: a power which he believed to be latent in everybody, but which was capable of being brought to more or less perfection, according to the amount of care and attention bestowed upon it. "I," said the professor, "have given my life to it." And again I fancied I saw the curious blue eyes flash with a sudden unexpected fire.

"In the experiments which I am about to show you," he went on, "I am assisted by my daughter, Anna Selamowsky," and, drawing back a curtain at the back of the stage, he led forward a girl who looked to be between sixteen and eighteen years old.

There was no sort of family resemblance between father and daughter. She was tall and slight, with a small, dark head prettily poised on a long, slender neck. Her face was pale, and her large, dark eyes had a startled, frightened look as she gazed at the sea of strange faces below her. Her father placed her in a chair facing us all, and turning once more to the audience said:

"I shall now, with your kind permission, put my daughter into a mesmeric or hypnotic trance, and while she is in it I hope to show you some particularly interesting experiments. Look at me, Anna—so—"

He placed his fingers for a moment on her eyelids and then stood aside. Except that the girl was now perfectly motionless and that her gaze was unnaturally fixed, I could see nothing different in her appearance from what she had been a few minutes before.

The professor now turned to Mr. Danby, who was seated beside me, and said: "If this gentleman will oblige me by stepping upon the stage, he can assure himself by any means he may choose to use that my daughter is in a perfectly unconscious state at this moment: and if it will give the audience and himself any more confidence in the sincerity of this experiment, he is perfectly at liberty to blindfold her. Then he will be kind enough to go through the room and touch here and there any person he may fancy, my daughter, at a word from me, will in the same order and in the same manner touch each of those already touched. I myself will, during the whole of the time, stand at the far end of the hall, so that there can be no sort of communication between us."

So saying, Selamowsky left the stage, and walking down the room, placed himself with his back against the wall and fixed his gaze upon the motionless form of his daughter.

As I looked back at him, even though separated from him by the length of the hall, I could see the strange glitter and flash of his eyes. It gave me an uncomfortable, uneasy feeling, and I turned my face again toward the stage, where the good-nature rector was following out the directions he had received, ready to see the conclusion of the experiment.

He lifted Anna Selamowsky's arm, which, on his relaxing his hold, fell limp and lifeless by her side; he snapped his fingers suddenly close before her wide-open eyes without producing even a quiver of a muscle in her set face. He shouted in her ear; shook her by the shoulders; but all without succeeding in making her show sign of consciousness. He then tied a handkerchief over her eyes, and, leaving the stage, went about through the room, touching people here and there as he went, pursuing a most tortuous course, and ended at last by placing his hand upon Aunt Phæbe's diamond necklace. He then bowed to the professor, to intimate that we were

Selamowsky moved forward about a pace, beckoned with his hand, and called, not loudly, but distinctly, "Anna!"

Without a moment's hesitation the girl, still blindfolded, rose, walked swiftly down the steps which led from the stage to the floor of the hall, and with startling exactness reproduced Mr. Danby's actions. In and out through the benches she passed amid a silence of breathless interest, touching each person in exactly the same spot as Mr. Danby had done a few minutes previously.