

# A PRODIGAL EGO

*THE Markham net slowly weaves its coils about the man Hoag. What is the secret power of the Markham organization? What means could a man like Hoag, penniless, psychic, alone, devise to circumvent that power? This instalment depicting Hoag's experiences alone on an island, shows how he began to develop the opposition.*



His arms were dead, with surges of electric vibrations all over his body.

ONE of those in Markham's coach the night of the holdup knew just what happened when the phantom man rushed through. But Hoag himself as he scudded across the fields back to the city realized vividly that he had not only seen Helen Munro in the flesh, but he had touched her as he went through.

One of his first conscious acts after he had read the newspaper stories of the holdup was to write Helen a brief note in which he said:

I only wanted to save you from being exploited for advertising. I am sorry if I interfered with your happiness. It was a simple thing to do; but it cost me more than I can tell you. I had vowed to myself never to see you again except in a movie or a dream; and never to touch you. I have broken both. That has no moral meaning to me. It just means that the progress I had made is all to be made over. I am not well. But I shall be—I can't tell you how. Being well with me is not what it is to most people. Please don't worry. You will probably not get this until I am nearly recovered. I am going out of town. Not far. Just across the bay. How long I don't know. But I want to be alone.

Hoag carefully folded that letter into an envelope and put it in his pocket. He said to himself that the reason he had written it then instead of when he wanted to mail it was that pen and ink are no spirit means of communication.

HOPEFUL leading citizens were given a pentecostal thrill by Henry Markham, chairman of the Trustee Board of the new Public General Hospital. This was handsomely staged up. First meeting of the newly elected Board after the report had been read, discussed and adopted, the chairman rises and with magnificent enthusiasm in his voice makes a formal presentation to the trustees on behalf of the city of The New Nervous Ward.

This was a splendid hobby of Markham's. He had, as he said, seen so many people harassed by modern high pressure that he longed to see some better provision made for the treatment of nerve cases. He believed that many people were bundled off to asylums before they were proven in-

sane. The nervous ward, donated and endowed by Markhams Consolidated, would have for one of its especial objects the penetrating care of patients who were to be saved to civilization and from the asylum.

HELEN MUNRO read about this in the newspapers; a long swelling report in five of them; in the Clarion only a paragraph and an editorial. She had not discussed the matter with Henry, who since his return from Ottawa and the East without her had been somewhat taciturn, though quite pleasantly polite. She surmised who had telephoned the report of the episode on the train. When she had demanded to be taken back to the depot she knew that Markham had fully recognized the phantom who rushed through the coach. It was the first time she had ventured to issue an order to Henry Markham. He was naturally angry about it. But since he had come back never a word; and from Gretchen Malone nothing but studied sweetness. Helen had begun to suspect Gretchen—without knowing why. After her marriage, she would keep her at a becoming distance. In fact Henry had shrewdly intimated as much in one of his bursts of confidence.

But Helen now believed that Hoag was in danger.

A STRUGGLE between two Principles expressed by two Opposite Personalities. Hoag is an Agent of the Unseen, a believer in what some people call psychics—which he did not pretend to understand. Henry Markham is an Agent of the Hidden Hand, a believer in an Earthly Force whose power has a right to make him a slave.

Hoag is offered a large salary by Henry Markham to be a spiritual spy among Markham iron-workers. He refuses. He becomes labor reporter on the Clarion, an organ of the working-men, and Saturday editor of a psychic and socialistic column entitled "Other Worlds Than Ours." Markham discovers an iron mine and carries out a new cycle of steel industries. Part of his scheme is marriage to Helen Munro, life-long friend of Martin Hoag. The lean shadow-man, absorbed in psychics, in democracy of the imagination, in dreams, in moving pictures, sets himself the task of circumventing Markham, who uses newspapers, philanthropy, politics, business—everything to gain his purpose. In a recent instalment, Mrs. Bartop, landlady, puzzled by Hoag's ghostly movements in her house, is still further puzzled by his location of a pair of scissors while walking in his sleep. Hoag gets a letter from Helen, whom he visualizes as a phantom. A Board of Trade banquet glorifies Henry Markham, who makes a brief speech.

Hoag discovers something unusual about his nerves. The doctor calls it neurasthenia. Mrs. Bartop tries to understand Mr. Hoag's diagnosis of himself, in which he makes fun of the doctor. Gretchen Malone, sister of Markham, tells Helen Munro how, by making herself part of the Markham organization, she can become a magic woman. In one of the movie houses a film is shown depicting the Markham iron industries. Helen Munro has a three-seconds dream warning her not to go on the trip inspecting the iron and steel plants of Henry Markham. She yields to the persuasion of Markham, engineered by his sister, and goes. The train is mysteriously stopped just outside the city. And the man who stopped it was Hoag.

## What Happened to Hoag

By THOMAS TOPLEY

How, or how far she scarcely knew. Or precisely from whom. But Henry Markham regarded Hoag as a menace.

HOAG paid Mrs. Bartop two months rent for his room in advance and asked her to take care of his books. He was surprised when she broke into tears.

"My good woman," he said embarrassedly.

"I can't fall on y'r neck—ye're such a whiffit any more I'd break ye down," she cried shuddered. "Oh, dear man, why don't ye have human doctorin' and care and—?"

Gently Hoag touched her thick, hard arm. She stopped crying and looked at him in amazement. She tried to escape from his hand. She could not. With no more than a touch it had a queer, irresistible, fascinating strength—without violence.

"Please don't worry about me, Mrs. Bartop," he said evenly. "I'm only just going out of town to get tuned up. I shall be back. Perhaps I shall send things to the paper. But that won't matter for a while."

AFTERWARDS in her amazement Mrs. Bartop blabbed about this to some one of her lodgers. She had no idea that doing so in this case

was like throwing a stone into a pond. The stone widened its circle of vibrations till the last but one got to the sphere of influence occupied by Gretchen Malone; from whence it lost no time in transmission to Henry Markham. These two were almost like positive and negative of a battery. The item was duly recorded: that on a certain obscure occasion—hereafter to be noted in detail—one Martin Hoag, conceding that he was unwell, had proven himself capable of enormous physical strength. Referred to the head physician in charge of the nervous ward. All necessary evidence to be prepared around this case. Mr. Markham desired to keep in touch with the institution. Men who spent fortunes on such things had a right to pry into science and religion and such things. Outwardly a fine bit of personal interest. Patient a former employee of Mr. Markham who was naturally anxious to do him good—characteristic of Markham. Even a scientific doctor could be convinced of this.

EDITOR POUNDEM offered Hoag the free use of his bungalow on the island and gave him the key. He understood that the man was unwell and just about half understood his case.

"Get back as soon as you can," he said. "We need you. Help yourself