

THE SOUL-HUNTER¹

I BOUGHT his body for ten francs. Months before I had bought his soul, bought it for the first glass of the poison—the first glass of the new series of horrors since his discharge, cured—cured!—from the “retreat.” Yes, I tempted him, I, a doctor! Bound by the vows—faugh! I needed his body! His soul? pah! but an incident in the bargain. For soul is but a word, a vain word—a battlefield of the philosopher fools, the theologian fools, since Anaximander and Gregory Nazianus. A toy. But the consciousness? That is what we mean by *soul*, we others. That then must live somewhere. But is it, as Descartes thought, atomic? or fluid, now here, now there? Or is it but a word for the totality of bodily sense? As Weir Mitchell supposed. Well, we should see. I would buy a brain and hunt this elusive consciousness. Just so, luck follows skill; the brain of Jules Foreau was the very pick of the world’s brains. The most self-conscious man in Europe! Intellectual to an incredible point, introspective beyond the Hindus, and with the fatal craving which made him mine. Jules Foreau, you might have been a statesman; you became a sot—but you shall make the name of Doctor Arthur Lee famous for ever, and put an end to the great problem of the ages. Aha, my friend, how mad of me to fill my diary with this cheap introspective stuff! I feel somehow that the affair will end badly. I am writing my defence. Certainly that excuses the form. A jury can never understand plain facts—the cold light of science chills them; they need eloquence, sentiment. . . . Well, I must pay a lawyer for that, if trouble should really arise. How should it? I have made all safe—trust me!

I gave him the drug yesterday. The atropine was a touch of almost superhuman cleverness; the fixed, glassy stare deader than death itself. I complied with the foolish formulæ of the law; in three hours I had the body in my laboratory. In the present absurd state of the law there is really nobody trustworthy in a business of this sort. *Tant pis!* I must cook my own food for a month or so. For no doubt there will be a good deal of noise. No doubt a good deal of noise. I must risk that. I dare not touch anything but the brain; it might vitiate the whole experiment. Bad enough this plaster of Paris affair. You see a healthy man of thirteen stone odd in his prime will dislike any deep interference with his brain—resent it. Chains are useless; nothing keeps a man still. Bar anæsthesia. And anæsthesia is the one thing barred. He must feel, he must talk, he must be as normal as possible. So I have simply built his neck, shoulders, and arms into plaster. He can yell and he can kick. If it does him any good he is welcome. So—to business.

- 10.30. A.M. He is decidedly under the new drug— η ; yet he does not move. He takes longer to come back to life than I supposed.
- 10.40. Warmth to extremities. Inhalations of λ . He cannot speak yet, I think. The glare of eyes is not due to hate, but to the atropine.
- 10.45. He has noticed the plaster arrangement and the nature of the room. I think he guesses. A gurgle. I light a cigarette and put it in his mouth. He spits it out. He seems hardly to understand my good-humour.
- 10.47. The first word—“What is it, you devil?” I show him the knife, *et cetera*, and urge him to keep calm and self-collected .
- 10.50. A laugh, not too nervous. A good sigh. “By George, you amuse me!” Then with a sort of wistful sigh, “I thought you just meant to poison me in some new patent kind of way.” Bad; he wants to die. Must cheer him up.
- 11.10. I have given my little scientific lecture. The patient unimpressed. The absinthe has damaged his reasoning faculty. He cannot see the *a priori* necessity of the experiment. Strange!
- 11.10. Lord, how funny!—he thinks I may be mad, and is trying all the old dodges to “humour” me! I must sober him.
- 11.15. Sobered him. Showed him his own cranium—he had never missed it, of course. Yet the fact seemed to surprise him. Important, though, for my thesis. Here at least is one part of the body whose absence in nowise diminishes the range of the sensorium—soul—what shall we call it? “*x*.”

Some important glands, of course, rule a man's whole life. Others again—what use is a lymphatic to the soul? To "x"?

Well, we must deal with the glands in detail, at the fountain-head, in the brain.

- 11.20. My writing seems to irritate him. Daren't give drugs. He flushes and pales too easily. Absence of skull? Now, a little cut and tie—and we shall see.
N.B.—To keep this record very distinct from the pure surgery of the business.
- 11.22. A concentrated, sustained yell. It has quite shaken me. I never heard the like. "All out" too, as we used to say on the Cam; he's physically exhausted—*e.g.*, has stopped kicking. Legs limp as possible. Pure funk; I never hurt him.
- 11.25. A most curious thing: I feel an intense dislike of the man coming over me; and, with an almost insane fascination, the thought, "Suppose I were to *kiss* him?" Followed by a shiver of physical loathing and disgust. Such thoughts have no business here at all. To work.
- 12.0. I want a drink; there are most remarkable gaps in the consciousness—not implying unconsciousness. I am inclined to think that what we call continuous pain is a rhythmic beat, frequency of beat less than one in sixty. The shrieks are simply heartbreaking.
- 12.5. Silence, more terrible than the yells. Afraid I had an accident. He smiles, reassures me. Speaks—"Look here, doctor, enough of this fooling; I'm annoyed with you, really don't know why—and I yell because I know it worries you. But listen to this: under the drug I really died, though you thought I was simulating death. On the contrary, it is now that I am simulating life." There seemed to me, and still seems, some essential absurdity in these words; yet I could not refute him. I opened my mouth and closed it. The voice went on: "It follows that your whole experiment is a childish failure." I cut him short; this time I found words. "You forget your position," I said hotly. "It is against all precedent for the vivisectee to abuse his master. Ingrate!" So incensed was I that I strode angrily to the operating-chair and paralysed the ganglia governing the muscles of speech. Imagine my surprise when he proceeded, entirely incommoded: "On the contrary, it is you who are dead, Arthur Lee." The voice came from behind me, from far off. "Until you die you never know it, but you have been dead all along." My nerve is clearly gone; this must be a case of pure hallucination. I begin to remember that I am alone—alone in the big house with the . . . patient. Suppose I were to fall ill? . . . Was this thought written in my face? He laughed harsh and loud. Disgusting beast!
- 12.15. A pretty fool I am, tying the wrong nerve. No wonder he could go on talking! A nasty slip in such an experiment as this. Must check the whole thing through again. . . .
- 1.0. O.K. now. Must get some lunch. Oddly enough, I am pretty sure he was telling the truth. He feels no pain, and only yells to annoy me.
- 2.10. Excellent! I suppress all the senses but smell, and give him his wife's handkerchief. He bubbles over with amorous drivel; I should love to tell him what she died of, and who. . . . A curious trait, that last remark. Why do I *dislike* the man? I used to get on A1 with him. (N.B. to stitch eyelids with silk. Damn the glare.)
- 2.20. Theism! The convolution with the cause-idea lying too close to the convolution with the fear-idea. And imagination at work on the nexus! About 24 μ between Charles Bradlaugh and Cardinal Newman!
- 2.50. So for faith and doubt? Sceptical criticism of my whole experiment boils up in me. What is "normality"? Even so, what possible relation is there between things and the evidence of them recorded in the brain? Evidence of something, maybe. A thermometer chart gives a curve; yet the mercury has only moved up and down. What about the time dimension? But it is not a dimension; it is only a word to explain multiplicity of sensation. Words! words! words! This is the last straw. There is no conceivable standard whereby we may measure anything whatever; and it is useless to pretend there is.
- 3.3. In short, we are all mad. Yet all this is but the expression of the doubt-stop in the human organ. Let me pull out his faith-stop!
- 4.45. Done; the devil's own job. He seems to be a Pantheist Antinomian with leanings towards Ritualism. Not impressive. My observation-stop (= my doubt-stop nearly) is full out. (Funny that we should fall into the old faculty jargon.) Perhaps if one's own faith-stop were out there would be a

- fight; if one's reception-of-new-ideas-stop, a conversion.
- 5.12. I only wish I had two of them to test the "tuning-up" theory of Collective Hallucination and the like. Out of the question; we must wait for Socialism. But enough for the day is the research thereof. I've matter for a life's work already.
- 7.50. An excellent scratch dinner—none too soon. Turtle soup, potted char, Yorkshire pie, Stilton, burgundy. Better than nothing. To-morrow the question of putrefactive changes in the limbs and their relation to the brain.
- 3.1. Planted bacilli in left foot. Will leave him to sleep. No difficulty there; the brute's as tired as I am. Too tired to curse. I recited "Abide with Me" throughout to soothe him. Some lines distinctly humorous under the circumstances. Will have a smoke in the study and check through the surg. record. Too dazed to realise everything, but I am assuredly an epoch. Whaur's your Robbie Pasteur noo?
- 12.20. So I've been on a false trail all day! The course of the research has let right away from the "x-hunt." The byways have obscured the main road. Valuable though; very very valuable. In the morning success. Bed!
- 12.30. Yells and struggles again when I went in to say good-night. As I had carefully paralysed all sensory avenues (to ensure perfect rest), how was he aware of my presence? The memory of the scented handkerchief, too, very strong; talked a lot of his wife, thinking here with him. Pah! what beasts some men must be! Disgusting fellow! I'm no prude either! If ever I do a woman I'll stop the Filth-gutter. *Ce serait trop.*
- 12.40 Maybe he did *not* know of my presence; merely remembered me. He has cause. How much there is in one's mind of the merely personal idea of scoring off the bowlers. And every man is a batsman in a world of bowlers. Like that leg-cricket game, what did we call it? Oh! bed, bed!
- 5.0. Patient seriously ill; plaster irks breathing; all sorts of troubles expected and unexpected. Putrefaction of left foot well advanced: promises well for the day's work if I can check collapse.
- 5.31. Patient very much better; paralysed motor ganglia; safe to remove plaster. Too much time wasted on these foolish mechanical details of life when one is looking for the Master of the Machine.
- 6.12. Patient in excellent fettle; now to find "x"—the soul!
- 11.55. Worn out; no "x" yet. Patient well, normal; have checked shrieks, ingenious dodge.
- 2.15. No time for food; brandy. Patient fighting fit. No "x."
- 3.1. *Dead!!!* No cause in the world—I must have cut right into the "x," the soul.
The meningeal—

[Dr. Lee's diary breaks off abruptly at this point. His researches were never published. It will be remembered that he was convicted of causing the death of his mistress, Jeannette Pheyron, under mysterious circumstances, some six months after the date of the above. The surgical record referred to has not been found.—EDITOR.]

NOTES:

1. Unpublished pages from the diary of Dr. Arthur Lee—"the Montrouge Vampire."