THE PURPLE SAPPHIRE

by

EDWARD HERON-ALLEN

Opusculum X
Heron-Allen Society

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CHRISTOPHER BLAYRE IN 1921 AND
REPUBLISHED, WITH ADDITIONAL MATERIAL
BY TIMOTHY J. McCANN AND STEVE FARRAR,
TO CELEBRATE THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S
EXHIBITION, THE VAULT, 2007.

Opusculum X
Heron-Allen Society

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The Heron-Allen Society was formed in 2000 to study and record all aspects of the life and interests of Edward Heron-Allen, 1861-1943, and to promote his work. The Society holds an annual symposium, publishes a Newsletter twice a year and occasional opuscula, and arranges meetings from time to time.

The Heron-Allen Society has a website at:
http://www.nhm.ac.uk/hosted_sites/heronallen/
The webmaster, Dr Andrew S. Henderson, can be contacted through the website or directly by e-mail at:
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Cover photograph:
Edward Heron-Allen's 'Purple Sapphire', on exhibition at The Vault at the Natural History Museum, London from 26 September 2007 until 10 December 2008.
Photograph by the Natural History Museum, London, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

by TIMOTHY J. McCANN

The inclusion of the Purple Sapphire among the exhibits in the new mineralogical exhibition, The Vault, at the Natural History Museum in Cromwell Road, London, which opened on Wednesday 28 November 2007, has occasioned a great deal of interest. A number of national newspapers have published accounts of the history of the stone, including *The Sunday Times* on 28 November by Steve Farrar, and *The Daily Express* on 29 November by Jennifer Selway. As a result of this interest the Heron-Allen Society has decided to reprint Edward Heron-Allen's short story 'The Purple Sapphire', which was first published in *The Purple Sapphire and other Posthumous Papers, Selected from the Unofficial Records of the University of Cosmopoli*, by P. Allan & Co., in 1921. The volume was published under the name of Christopher Blayre, one of the pseudonyms used by Heron-Allen. The story was printed several times, most recently in *The Collected Strange Papers of Christopher Blayre* by Edward Heron-Allen, published by the Tartarus Press in 1998. As well as reprinting Heron-Allen's short story, 'The Purple Sapphire', the present *Opusculum* also includes the note that he filed with the Purple Sapphire, when he deposited the stone in his bank vault, and an enlarged, unedited version of *The Sunday Times* article by Steve Farrar. It also seems appropriate to add an account of Edward Heron-Allen himself, the owner of the stone and the author of the story.

Born in London on 17 December 1861, he was educated at Elstree, by a tutor in Bognor Regis, and at Harrow School. He left school in 1878 to become an articled clerk in the family firm of Allen and Son, solicitors in Soho, 'obsessed' as he put

it, 'by two dominant ideas, the beauty and mystery of the foraminifera whose acquaintance I had made in the Science Schools under Griffiths - and the origin and ancestry of the violin'. Although he was admitted a solicitor at the Supreme Court of Judicature in 1884, he soon abandoned the family firm of solicitors in order to pursue a literary, scientific and musical career. In July 1885 he joined the staff of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, where he concentrated on lives of violinists and astrologers. His friendship with Oscar Wilde and more especially with his wife Constance, a friendship which was to continue in the next generation, introduced him to a number of the characters of the 1890s.

He had already begun to publish and lecture on his first love – the art of violin making. He had started playing the violin at the age of ten and quickly became interested in the history and ancestry of the instrument. The ancestor of the violin was generally supposed to be the Welsh Crwth, but Heron-Allen argued that the crwth was a modified descendant of the Greek lyre, whereas the violin was the lineal descendant of the earliest bow instrument which had originated in China or Ceylon about 400BC. Furthermore, he discovered that there was no authoritative book on how to make a violin. So he became an apprentice to George Chanot, the violin-maker in Wardour Street, and worked in his workshop for two years, where he made two violins which were subsequently played with great appreciation by various virtuosi. Encouraged by Bernard Quaritch, he presented a first version of his theories of the ancestry of the violin to the exlusive dining club, the Sette of Odd Volumes at the age of twenty, and his lecture was printed. Encouraged by Ward, Lock & Co., he contributed a number of articles to their magazine *Amateur Work* on practical violin-making for amateurs. His book *Violin Making as it was and is*, first published in 1884, had already gone through various editions and has been continuously in print

ever since, and remains the standard work on the subject. In 1893 and 1894, he founded and edited the *Violin Times*, and wrote much of the issues during his editorship.

As a result of the success of his history of the violin, he was appointed, at the age of 23, Commissioner for Italy of the Music Loan Exhibition held in London in 1885. He travelled to Italy bearing credentials from the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster to the Papal authorities, and the Prince of Wales to the Civil Government, with plenary powers to collect and forward to England for exhibition, musical instruments, manuscripts and other relevant material. This was an extraordinary confidence for so young a scholar.

He was rather better known, at the time, as a reader of palms and as an analyst of handwriting. He sought to provide a scientific basis for palmistry and tried to show that the character is plainly indicated by the shape of the hands. His books *Chiromancy or the Science of Palmistry* published in 1883, and *A Manual of Cheiroscophy* in 1885, made him popular in London society. Rupert Hart Davis's edition of the Letters of Oscar Wilde showed that he cast the horoscopes of Wilde's children when they were born. He was invited to America to lecture on the subject, and embarked on a lengthy lecture tour speaking mainly on palmistry, and while there began to write fiction. He published one novel in America – *The Princess Daphne* in 1888, and a number of short stories, some verse and some collaborative works with Selina Dolaro. Later he published a number of short stories in England, including *The Purple Sapphire* in 1921, *The Strange Papers of Christopher Blayre* in 1932 and *Some Women of the University* in 1934. In recent years some of his work has been reprinted by the Tartarus Press, including the notorious *Cheetah Girl*, originally published in a limited edition of twenty copies, which was considered obscene.

After returning to the law in 1889, after the death of his elder brother, and eventually becoming senior partner in the firm of Allen & Son, he finally retired and built a house called 'Large Acres' at Selsey in West Sussex in 1906 and there pursued his interests in a number of fields. He had a high reputation as a scientist, though quite untrained. His interests were in marine biology and protozoology, and, together with Arthur Earland, he published a number of studies of foraminifera from Selsey and as far afield as Clare Island (off County Mayo in Ireland), Biarritz, Portuguese East Africa and Antarctica, from 1910 until 1933. Their joint type-slide collection is now at the Natural History Museum in London, housed in a room named in his honour, which also contains the finest foraminiferal library in the world. In 1879 he joined the Quekett Microscopical Club and obtained fellowships of several notable learned societies, such as the Royal Microscopical Society, the Linnaean Society, the Geological Society and the Zoological Society. He was President of the Royal Microscopical Society between 1916 and 1918, and, in 1919, was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, the highest scientific accolade in the land.

During the First World-War Heron–Allen was attached to the Intelligence Department of the War Office, and before that he served as a lieutenant in the 6th Volunteers Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, serving in France in 1918. His extraordinarily detailed diary of his wartime service and the effect of the Great War on his local community was recently published by Harvey & Fitzgerald for the Sussex Record Society.

As an archaeologist and local historian he published *Selsey Bill: Historic and Pre-historic* in 1911 as well as a number of articles in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*. For more than thirty years he was the society's Honorary Local Secretary at

Selsey, and reported on any archaeological discoveries in his area. But he also interested himself in a number of local historical enquiries, such as the early editions of the Chichester Guides, the history of the Long Man of Wilmington and ecclesioclasm in the county. He kept detailed files of newspaper cuttings, photographs and printed ephemera of Selsey from 1908 to his death in 1943 which are now heavily used in the West Sussex Record Office at Chichester.

When he married Marianna Lehmann in 1891, Heron-Allen and his wife began translating various works mainly concerned with music from the German, however she soon became an invalid and died shortly afterwards. He continued translating and made use of his ability as a Persian scholar to translate various versions of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and the lesser-known *Lament of Baba Tahir* from an unusual Persian dialect, which again has recently been republished. He lectured widely on the Rubaiyat and published several essays on the subject, largely concerned with showing that Fitzgerald worked closely with the original quatrains, as well as writing the introduction to the Translation by Baron Corvo.

He continued his earlier interests publishing a series of pamphlets on the history of the violin under the title *de Fidiculis Opuscula*, the last as late as 1941. He was an early member of the Sette of Odd Volumes, for which he took the title Brother Necromancer, and published a number of works on palmistry, finger rings and autographs as well as poetry, the correspondence of Madame de Sevigne and a discourse on the Buddhist religion. He was President of the Sette in 1927 and 1928. He continued to publish in the fields of science, archaeology and local history. He even found time to write a book on asparagus culture, and was President of the National Auricula Society in 1928.

He had married again in 1903, his wife Edith Pepler being

a doctor's daughter and this union produced two daughters. When, in 1930, Armorel, the youngest daughter, was killed in a car accident shortly after obtaining a First-Class degree in Natural Sciences at Oxford, Heron-Allen largely abandoned his scholarly pursuits. He died on 28 March 1943, at his house, 'Large Acres', now sadly demolished. The house contained his magnificent library, well-known collection of silver, Tibetan Gods and printed ephemera, together with a meteorological station whose records are now in the West Sussex Record Office, a maze that he designed, and an archery ground. He listed his interests in *Who's Who* as, 'Persian literature, marine zoology, meteorology, heraldry, bibliography, occasional essays and scientific romances, auricula and asparagus culture'. Above all he was a great collector. Vyvyan Holland wrote that 'apart from his collection of books, which interested him most, he also collected old English silver, glass, china, musical instruments, seals, walking sticks, precious stones and stamps'. A true polymath, if ever there was one.

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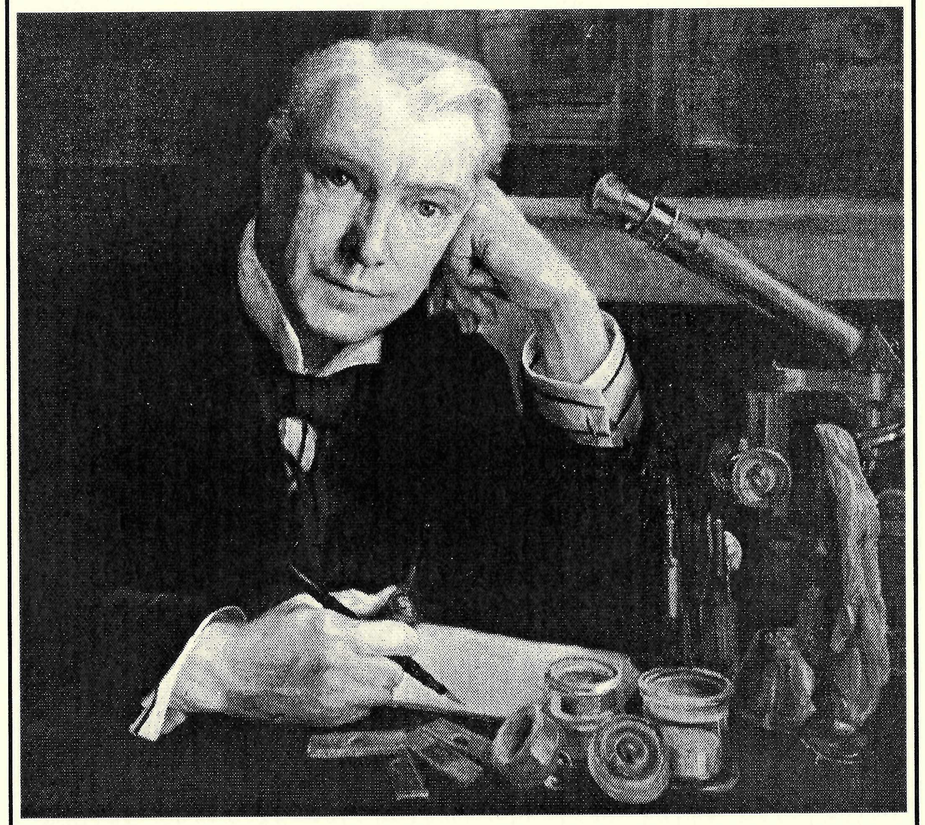

Edward Heron-Allen in his library at Large Acres, Selsey, surrounded by his microscope, samples and foraminifera slides. From a photograph in the Natural History Museum, London, by Winifred E. B. Hardman, 1922.

THE PURPLE SAPPHIRE

by EDWARD HERON-ALLEN

ON THE 24th of June, 18—, a few months after my appointment to the Professorship of Mineralogy in the University of Cosmopoli, I received, as a gift to the Museum from the surviving executor of the late Sir Clement Arkwright, under the most dramatic conditions, the Purple Sapphire. The facts attendant upon its arrival were as follows:—

Sir George Amboyne, the Regius Professor of Medicine, came into my room and deposited upon my table a small package.

"This is for you," he said, "a gift to the Mineralogical Department, made under most unfortunate circumstances. An elderly man has been run over by a motor-car just outside; he was brought in, very badly damaged, though not, I hope, fatally. As I was in the building I was sent for, and have done what I can pending his removal to Hospital. When he recovered consciousness he said with some difficulty: 'The packet—where is the packet?' The porter who had carried him in produced this parcel, which the man had been carrying when he was run over. When he saw it he said: 'For the Museum—Purple Sapphire—give it to them,' and then he lost consciousness again. You see it is addressed 'To the Mineralogist, University of Cosmopoli'. You had better take charge of it."

"Rather an ill-omened way to receive a presentation, isn't it?" I observed.

"Very," replied the Regius Professor. "I suppose we had better open it?"

We did so. Beneath the outermost wrapper was an envelope addressed 'To My EXECUTORS.' It was unsealed and contained a sheet of note paper upon which was written '*It is my earnest wish that this packet shall not be opened until twenty-five years after my death. When that time has elapsed, it is to be delivered to my eldest male direct heir. It contains the Purple Sapphire given to me by the younger son of Colonel George Cardew. Whether by that time its power of doing evil to its possessor will have waned or not, I cannot tell, but I earnestly recommend my heir to get rid of it, if he can, at the earliest possible opportunity.—Clement Arkwright, Bart.*'

"This is very queer," remarked Sir George; "the poor old man downstairs was evidently on his way to deposit it, whatever it is, here. Let us have a look at it."

The removal of the inner wrapper disclosed a sandalwood box. Inside that, closely fitting, was another; inside that, another. There were seven of them, one inside the other. In the last and smallest, wrapped in a piece of curious fine muslin was the Purple Sapphire.

It was without exception the finest stone I had ever seen, perfectly cut, of the most brilliant deep amethyst-purple, and the size of a flattened bantam's egg. It was set in a sort of cage; two silver snakes, with their tails in their mouths, ran round it above and below the circumferential edge, and these were connected and held together by twelve small silver 'plaques' inscribed with the twelve Signs of the Zodiac. On one side were two silver rings, evidently for suspension, and from these hung, so as to cover and conceal the stone, on one side a circular plaque, evidently of very ancient make, of the kind familiar to students of Occultism and of the rites of the so-called Rosicrucians as the Seal of the Tau—a Greek T, surrounded by a flat band on which were engraved the familiar 'mystic' letters ABRACADABRA. This fell over the flat or 'table' side of the stone. Over the other, the faceted side, hung a pair of amethyst Scarabs, evidently early

Egyptian, threaded upon, and held in place by, thick silver wire.

Whether it was the circumstances in which it had reached us, or for some other and inexplicable reason, as I held it in my hand I felt an overwhelming sensation of nausea and faintness. I handed it to the Regius Professor without a word. He turned it over in his hand, raised the Tau and the Scarabs, and then put it down on my table.

"What a *beastly* thing," he observed.

We looked at one another for a few moments in silence, but neither of us gave utterance to the thoughts that were in our minds. Probably we could not have done so if we had wanted to.

I was the first to break the silence—with an effort of which I felt ashamed.

"I think," said I, "we will take it straight up to the Museum."

"Yes," said Sir George, "for God's sake let's get rid of it." He was quite unconsciously reiterating the advice of Sir Clement Arkwright.

Using one of the lids as a tray, we carried the Purple Sapphire up to the Museum, and placed it in the Table-case by the door destined to contain 'Recent Acquisitions' which had not yet been registered and classified. When we came down again, the elderly gentleman had been removed to the nearest Hospital, and his relations, as indicated by letters and cards in his pocket—his name was also Arkwright—had been notified by telephone.

That afternoon the Mineralogical wing of the University Museum was struck by lightning. The damage done was ghastly. Many priceless exhibits were destroyed, and several weeks elapsed before the room could be opened and used again. The Table-case of 'Recent Acquisitions' was untouched.

* * *

It was perhaps a year after this that a card was brought to me bearing the name *Sir Gilbert Arkwright*. I had not forgotten the Purple Sapphire, for the romance of its acquisition stuck to it, and students showed it to visitors as 'The Unlucky Stone,' and invented all kinds of fantastic stories about it. The assistants and even the charwomen hated it. One story went that it glowed at night with an unearthly refulgence—I was foolish enough to go up one winter evening when the lights were turned off to see for myself. I saw nothing—but I confess to having experienced a sensation of—to put it mildly—extreme discomfort. I felt like a child afraid of the dark. Idiotic!

One of the charwomen declared that one evening when she was 'cleaning up,' a "naked Heathen—and, what's worse, black," had suddenly looked at her over the top of the case she was dusting, and that she would sooner lose her place than ever enter the mineralogical room in the dusk again. Idiotic!

Well, the card of Sir Gilbert Arkwright preceded the appearance of a charming young man of the regulation British athlete type, in the thirties I should say. In answer to my look of enquiry, he said easily:

"I think you have here a Purple Sapphire, which my uncle was bringing here the day he was killed in a street accident."

I was shocked to hear this, and all the circumstances recurred at once to my mind. I murmured some conventional phrases, and the young; man replied:

"Oh! that's all right. It was a terrible thing, of course, but that was the last of it for us. We were none of us ever allowed to see it, but it was supposed to have been, and was called, the 'Curse of the Cardews' in my father and grandfather's time. I only came to bring you this book which turned up the other day in going over a lot of my poor old uncle's papers—we thought you might like to have it."

He laid on my table a small quarto MS. notebook of the cheap American-cloth covered type, the first page of which bore—without more—'THE NAGHPÚR SAPPHIRE,' and the date 1885. I was rather 'thrilled,' and having suitably thanked my visitor, he left me. That night I took the book home with me, and, after dinner, I sat down to read it. There were only a few pages written upon—as is usual with notebooks—but the story they contained was so uncomfortably weird that I offer no apology for transcribing them in full. The original MS. is in the library of the Mineralogical Department (M.M.3.b.36).

The MS. of Sir Clement Arkwright.

I hope and believe that I have made such arrangements and provisions as shall prevent any of my immediate descendants taking the Naghpúr Sapphire into their custody, possession or control. But as there exists a widely spread impression in my family that it is a Jewel of great value and of exceptional beauty—which is indeed the case—I think that in the future some member of my family may be moved by curiosity or cupidity to claim possession of it. I will therefore write in this book my reasons for not wishing this to happen.

One of my earliest recollections is that of Colonel George Cardew and his wife. They lived in a poor little cottage—how poor I was then too young to appreciate—on the outskirts of the village nearest to my father's place in Shropshire. The Colonel used to give me pennies, and his wife cake, but the latter gifts were discounted by the fact that she was everlastingly advising my mother to give us castor oil, and periodically insisted upon our being taken to see the dentist. We children resented this interference—if interference it really was—in the placid lives of an otherwise very happy family. The Colonel was an invalid and very lame, the result of a

wound received in the Indian Mutiny, which continually gave him trouble; his wife was peevish, continually at war with Fate which held from her the position and wealth of a great lady. In fact, as the saying goes, they had seen better times, and were ill-adapted to worse. They had two sons, Richard and George, who were the constant playfellows of my elder brothers. I was too young for them. These two boys, after they left Haileybury School, cut themselves adrift and set out to make their own way in the world by sheer grit and hard work. Richard became a medical student, and as he was a sharp contrast to the lazy, rowdy class which constituted the medical students in those days—the early seventies—he passed his examinations with distinction, and, having no home prospects or capital, joined the Indian Army Medical Service—he was always known as 'Dr Dick.' George won a Cadetship at Sandhurst, and, knowing that he had no one but himself to rely upon, worked hard, did well, and was in due course gazetted to an Indian Regiment, where he rose to be Major and was regarded as a very rising man—he was always known as 'Major George.'

Their sterling merits carried everything before them. In due course Dr Dick left the Army Medical Service and became a successful physician in Simla. Major George, promoted to Colonel, became 'Resident' to one of the Indian Native Rajahs, and was regarded as one of the really notable Administrators under the Indian Government. Their rare visits home were hailed with delight not only by their old parents but by all of us, for they brought home wonderful things from India as presents, and would talk—how they talked! Thrilling accounts of their lives out there, of dangers from rebels, from snakes, from wild beasts, from plagues—we were never tired of listening to them.

Then old Colonel Cardew died, and within a year his wife followed him to the grave. Though their later years were much

ameliorated by handsome remittances from their sons, they were never happy. The Colonel was a terrible sufferer, and they were really unlucky, in small things as in great. If they saved money and invested it, the investments went wrong—people always said that if they had wanted to cultivate weeds, or to encourage rats in their little place, the weeds would have refused to grow, or the rats to be encouraged. It was a sorry business when Dr Dick came home to wind up his parents' affairs, and he returned to India a distressful man. He told us he was afraid to go back, for he felt that his luck was gone. This was quite inexplicable to us, but he was as a true prophet unfortunately. An untoward 'accident' or two in his practice, one fatal one in the treatment of a great Maharajah, dragged him down from his professional eminence, a bank in which his savings were invested—an 'unlimited' concern—failed, and carried with it the whole of his savings; and in the end Dr Dick, who was fortunately a bachelor, was reduced to living in a suburb of London on an allowance made him by Colonel George. After some ten years of an aimless and unlucky existence he fell out of a railway train and was killed. There were those who did not hesitate to doubt whether his tragic death was accidental.

After his death Fate seemed to turn her malevolent attention to Colonel George. He became unpopular with succeeding Viceroys and lost influence and caste in the Service. Finally, not supported as he should have been by his Government, he came to loggerheads with his Maharajah; an insurrection in his native State was attributed to his management, or mismanagement. He was superseded and sent on a punitive expedition to the borders of Afghanistan. In this affair he failed utterly and unaccountably. The natives, soldiers and civilians alike seemed to hate him, and of the few faithful Sikhs whom he commanded only one returned with him. The rest had been killed—his other troops had practically deserted

him. It was amazing, for until the death of Dr Dick he was almost worshipped by the natives, both civil and military. On his return to Madras he twice escaped assassination by a miracle, and in the end he was 'retired' and came home to live on an inadequate pension, with his wife and two children. The change, I suppose it was, preyed upon his wife, and she went mad. His daughter died—apparently of what was not then recognized as appendicitis, and his son having gone utterly to the dogs, fortunately emigrated to New Zealand and was never heard of again.

It was then that I came into the story. Colonel George was, as I have indicated, some six or eight years my senior, but this did not count so much when I was thirty and living a rather luxurious bachelor life in London. Colonel George often came to my rooms and we used to talk over old times, and, on occasions, to dissipate mildly together. He was always cheerful, and seemed quite resigned to the ill-luck that pursued him—he said that it did him good to be with me, for my 'good luck' was proverbial. I had health, wealth enough, and a reliance upon my 'lucky star' that never betrayed me—'let me down' is, I believe, the modern expression.

One day, when I had made a preposterously lucky 'hit' over a horse race, we were celebrating the occasion at dinner at the now extinct St. James' Restaurant. I said to him, cheerfully:

"Now, why can't you strike a streak of Fool's Luck like that?"

"Well, Clement, my boy, I've a good mind to tell you. I have often thought of telling it to someone."

I rather quailed. Was my ideal Colonel George going to confess some shady episode of the unknown past that was dogging his footsteps, embittering the present, and making the future ominous?

However, he changed the conversation, and after dinner he asked me to go back with him to his rooms—up near Regent's Park, a wretched place—instead of coming back to mine, and I did.

When our pipes were lit, he sat looking at the empty fireplace for a little while, and then got up and went into his bedroom. When he returned he had in his hand the Naghpúr Sapphire—the most splendid stone I had ever seen. I thought it was an amethyst, but he told me no; it was a purple Sapphire—jewellers some times call them 'Oriental Amethysts.'

(*Here in the MS. follows a long description of the stone and of it's setting, practically as the Professor of Mineralogy has given it above. C.B.*)

I said to him: "You don't leave this about, do you, in a place like this?"

"Yes; it always lies about on my dressing-table."

"Aren't you afraid of having it stolen?"

"No; it has been stolen three times."

"How did you get it back?"

"I didn't get it back. I didn't want to. It *came* back. It always comes back."

"What do you mean—you didn't want to?"

"I'd give all I possess (it's not much) to get rid of it. Instead of which, I have given all I possess for keeping it. This is 'the Curse of the Cardews.' "

"My dear George," I said, "you are raving!"

"No, I am not; you asked me at dinner about my bad luck. Well, you hold it in your hand. That stone has ruined my whole family in turn."

I protested. "Such things only happen in books."

"Listen to me. You know what a distinguished servant of 'John Company' my old father was. He looted that stone off a statue—an idol if you like—of Vishnú at Naghpúr, a stronghold of the Mutiny. The whole Shrine was razed to the ground by order; not a trace of it left. Next day he got his wound—one of those mysterious wounds that never heal. His never healed; it tortured him to his dying day. A month later he was on his way home—'Invalided out of the Service' they said at home—but do you know what they said at the Secretariat in Calcutta?"

"No; what?"

"'Cashiered for cowardice in face of the enemy.' It was hushed up, first (I hope) on account of his past services, and then on account of the probable effect upon the loyal native troops. On the way home his skull was fractured by a falling block—he was trephined and got over it, but his brain was never really clear again. You know how we lived down there in the little old house—pretty wretched, wasn't it? But what none of you knew was that my mother loathed the sight of my father—they never saw one another excepting in company. He was weak in the brain, as I said, but his nightmares were awful. I didn't know until afterwards that he was haunted by the phantom of a Hindoo Yoga."

As he paused, I put in, uneasily: "Of course sick men do invent such things."

"He didn't invent this one. It was the Attendant of the Shrine at Naghpúr, whom he had cut down himself. And my governor knew that it was after the Purple Sapphire."

"Why didn't he get rid of it?"

George Cardew smiled.

"You have a short memory, Clement," he said. "I told you just now we can't get rid of it. The governor sent it out by post

to a man stationed near Naghpúr and told him to restore it to the Temple, or Shrine, and, if he couldn't do that, to sell it. It came back with the notification that there was no trace or record of the Shrine, and the jewellers in the bazaars refused to buy, or even to touch it. My father sent it out again to another man, told him to bury it at Naghpúr; six months later it came back by post—the man had buried it just as he received it with my father's letter—whoever dug it up got his address from that."

"Why didn't he send it out without a letter to an imaginary address?"

"He did. It came back through the Dead Letter Office, straight to our village post-office, and of course they knew us there."

"I'd have got rid of it somehow."

"Would you? I'd like to see you try."

A brilliant idea occurred to me.

"Give it to me," I said, "and I'll undertake to get rid of it."

"You wait till you've heard the rest of it. When the old man died, and then my mother, it came to Dick. Well, you know what happened to *him*. I was at the zenith of my career when Dick died. Good God! Clement, my boy, but I was just on the point of stepping up to goodness knows where. And then I had to take over the Purple Sapphire. On hearing of Dick's death I spent eight pounds on a cablegram telling them to put it away, and on no account to send it out to me. I was too late it had started. The day after he died —before he was buried—they sent it off. It arrived with his watch and chain and his shirt-studs. The rest of his chattels only just paid for his funeral and a few small bills. Well, you know what happened to *me*. I had the bright idea to present it to my Maharajah, who had millions worth of gems. He refused it, and he began to mistrust and hate me from that

day. I offered it to the Government Collection, but they looked upon it as a sort of attempted bribe to cover the mess I was making of things. I can't tell you what plans I made to get rid of it—scores—but it always came back, and there it is."

He paused, and after lighting his pipe again, he smiled and said:

"Do you still want to have the damned thing?"

"Rather!" I said. "You know my luck; it's impregnable."

"Don't say that, for Heaven's sake; it's an awful thing to say."

"But I mean it," I cried. "I defy ill-luck, and if I can't get the better of a mere stone—"

"Nobody ever will," he interrupted, quite gravely.

We argued the matter for some time, and in the end I persuaded him. I took a cab home in the small hours, delighted with my splendid new toy.

Two years passed during which, personally, I was quite unaffected by any malevolent influence attributable to the Purple Sapphire, but I am bound to confess that there was something about it which passed comprehension and defied investigation.

To record an instance or two: I was deeply interested, as a hobby, in the elucidation of a curious text, half Persian and half Urdú (but this has nothing to do with the story), and a young Hindú scholar was sent to me by the Professor of Arabic and Persian in the University of Cosmopoli, with a view to the discussion of some obscure points, and to the augmentation of his income (he was a clerk in an Anglo-Indian House in the city), and he arrived one evening about 8.30. He was called Mr. Something Ghose, I remember. I had the books out on my study table, and we had been at them about half an hour, during which I thought Mr. Ghose the most incompetent

and absent-minded fraud I had ever met. At the end of that time he rose and said, with a little bow:

"You will excuse. I cannot work. I do not like this house. I go away."

I was very much astonished, and not a little annoyed, and expressed myself with some succinctness. All he said was, as he made for the door:

"I am sorry—very. I did not know. You must excuse. I go."

And he went!

Shortly after this my friend the Professor of Arabic dined with me, always a delightful occasion for me, for he had been for many years Principal of a Muhammadan Madrassah in India, and was a delightful talker. As we sat before the fire smoking after dinner I noticed that he looked all round the room at intervals, uneasily as it seemed to me. I said:

"Are you looking for anything?"

"No," he replied. "No; I don't think so. Tell me, though, do you collect Indian curiosities?"

"No; I think them, as a rule, hideous."

"You haven't got a Tirthankar in the house, have you? One of those little squatting alabaster idols one sees in the curiosity shops?"

"No. I've seen hundreds of them, and I hate them."

"You are not far wrong," replied the Professor, "they're beastly things."

"How?"

"Oh! they are uncanny things to have about," and he changed the conversation.

Five minutes afterwards he looked round again, rose suddenly, and looking into the dark end of the room he exclaimed:

"I thought so! I felt it! *Kaun hai? Kiyá mangta?*" ("Who are you? What do you want?")

"For heaven's sake, what is up?" I said.

"Haven't you seen *That* before? A Hindú squatting on his heels, naked excepting for a loin-cloth, scrabbling at the carpet—there in the corner?"

"My dear fellow," I observed. "I know you are not drunk, nor are you mad. What is it?"

He did not answer me at once, but extending his hand in the direction in which he was looking, he called sharply:

"*Jáó!*" ("Go away!")

He sat down again with a short laugh, and relit his pipe with a shaky hand.

"I don't wonder you are surprised," he said. "I'm sorry for this exhibition, but I've been so long in India; these things get into one's blood, I think. It's very stupid. You are sure you haven't got any Temple loot about the place? There is a lot of it about."

I thought at once of the Purple Sapphire, and, rising, I took it from the drawer of my dressing-table and put it into his hand.

"Good Heavens!" he said. "Of course this is it. This is what he is after. It's the pectoral gem of a Hindú God. Where did you get it! And how long have you had it?"

I gave him an outline sketch of the history of the Purple Sapphire—which he had put down on the table by his side—and when I had finished he said:

"Of course that explains it—if anything can be said to explain the inexplicable. My advice to you, my earnest advice, is to get rid of this thing as quickly as you can."

"Why?"

"Because—for goodness' sake never tell anyone of this incident or of this conversation—it will hurt you—smash you, sooner or later."

We spent the rest of the evening in a most "gruesely" conversation. The Professor told me a number of stories in point, and if I had been an imaginative or nervous person I should have been very much upset.

But I am not, and I wasn't. That was the last time the Professor dined with me until—afterwards.

There were other such incidents, greater or lesser in degree, but I never saw any Yoga, and suffered no ill effects from being the custodian of the Purple Sapphire, which gradually acquired a romantic and rather fearsome interest among my friends. I pass on to the night when I gave a dinner-party which we shall all of us remember to our dying days. We were eight—B. a rising young author; and a charming young actress Miss C., of whom he was the temporary 'enamourite,' to quote Burton (of the *Anatomy*); his sister (married), and G., a man in the Foreign Office, asked on account of one another; Mrs—I will call her Smith, as she comes back into the story later on under tragic and unforgettable circumstances; and Mrs A. and her husband (recently married, after a double divorce). Mrs A. was a queer woman. It might be said that she had not an enemy in the world, but was rather disliked by all her friends. She dabbled in Occultism and led her rather sheepish husband reluctantly to séances. She liked to flatter herself that she was 'a strong Medium.' She interested me, but I always regarded her as a fraud—a semi-unconscious fraud perhaps. But we had a jolly dinner, and afterwards congregated in the library. Mrs A., as usual, forced the conversation upon the Occult. She talked very well, and was always rather 'thrilling' to people who had not heard it all before.

B. said suddenly: "I say, Arkwright, haven't *you* got a wonderful jewel or something that evokes spooks, and murders people in their sleep?"

At once there was a chorus of delighted curiosity, and finally I produced the Purple Sapphire, which sparkled with remarkable vividness that night. At that moment one of those things that happen to the electric light happened—it is, I believe, when they change the accumulators or the dynamo at the generating station. At any rate the lights went down to about half their normal candle-power. The Purple Sapphire seemed to flame even more brilliantly in the subdued light.

"Oh! do give it to me," exclaimed Miss C. And with a view to making light of the whole thing I tossed it into her lap. She immediately held her hands up and away from it, as if it had been a spider or a mouse, and shrieked to B. who was sitting beside her: "Take it away! Take it away!" B. picked it out of her lap and handed it back to me. After this she sat closer to him for the rest of the evening, holding one of his hands in both of hers.

"Give it to me," said Mrs A. in her most impressive tone, "I am accustomed to these things." I gave it to her and she laid it, with the cover-flaps open, on her knee. She began to yarn about 'maleficent talismans,' but the evening was spoilt. We were all uneasy. Mrs. Smith alone did not say a word, but sat looking at the Purple Sapphire and at me, in turns. Presently the preliminary murmurs of impending departure arose, and then some amazing things happened. Mrs A. leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Then she cried out:

"Something is coming. Something is here! Everybody except Sir Clement go out of the room."

They all sprang to their feet and scuttled into the hall. Mrs A. said in a stifled voice: "Oh, God!" and fainted. At that moment the disturbance at the main righted itself and the

electric lights blazed up again. I went to the door and called A.

"Your wife has fainted," I said; "come in." He came in, and with him Mrs Smith, uninvited. The rest were whispering together in the hall.

Mrs A's eyes were now open, and she said: "It fell upon me, it fell through me." With one hand she was still holding the Purple Sapphire on her knee. We comforted and reassured her as best we could, but she declared that something had fallen into her lap and disappeared. "It went through me," she said, over and over again. We got her on to her feet, and to prove to her that she was mistaken we pushed back the low armchair in which she had been sitting.

On the floor beneath it lay a small scarlet disc, faintly luminous in the strong light, about two and a half inches in diameter, on which were figured in black, exactly as on the flat flap of the Purple Sapphire, the Sign and Letters of the Tau! We all gazed at it, horror struck. I was the first to pull myself together. I got the tongs from the fireplace, with a confused idea of picking the Thing up and flinging it into the fire! But even as we four looked at it, it turned white and clear of markings, and appeared to volatilize.

The others came in—and then they went away. As a newspaper report would say "the meeting broke up in confusion." They did not all go away, though; Mrs Smith remained. I may say at once that round this lady for some time all my thoughts had been concentrated. I shall write of her again. We talked, she and I, long into the night. At 2 a.m. a ring came at the front door and I opened it. It was B. He said:

"What *am* I to do with Marie C.? She won't go home. We have been driving all over London in a hansom. She is there now, outside. She says she dare not go home to her rooms alone. Damn your infernal stone."

Edward Heron-Allen's 'Purple Sapphire', on exhibition at The Vault at the Natural History Museum, London until 10 December 2008. Photograph by the Natural History Museum, London, 2008.

I might have remarked that it was he who had insisted on its entry upon the scene. I forbore, however, and in the end Mrs Smith came out and took Miss C. home to her house to sleep with her. B. walked home, and I went to bed, I confess, rather shaken up. As Mrs Smith left, she put her hands on my shoulders, and looked into my eyes searchingly. The others had gone outside.

"Didn't *you* see the Indian Man squatting on the floor behind Mrs A's chair?"

"No, I didn't."

"I swear to you he was there. Please don't go back and sit in the library. Promise me."

I promised her—indeed, I do not think anything would have induced me to do so. As I say, I went to bed.

I was out to lunch next day, and on my return home I found a letter waiting for me, delivered by P.O. Express. It was from A. In it he wrote: "I feel that I must send you the sequel to last night's extraordinary occurrences. About 3 a.m. my wife woke me, and said that something was burning her where the Jewel had lain upon her knee. I tried to soothe her to sleep, but she insisted so strongly that we switched on the light, and turned down the bedclothes. Sure enough, those letters round a capital T were burnt black upon, and through, her night-gown. We cut out the piece and I enclose it herewith—and on her leg, exactly the same thing, bright red, as if done with a hot iron. We dressed it with vaseline, but it is there this morning. We will show it to you when you like."

To avoid returning to this matter I may say that Mrs A. wears this 'brand' to this day. She makes no bones about showing it to people, and I need hardly say that her account of my dinner-party does not lose in the telling. Her enemies say she did it herself with a red-hot needle. Her husband says that he always knows, when she puts on her daintiest lingerie that

she is going to tell someone the story of the Purple Sapphire—as far as she knows it.

I now reach the dark and terrible part of my record. I have intimated that I was deeply devoted to Mrs Smith, who was one of the most beautiful, the cleverest, and by virtue of her husband's wealth, one of the most fastidiously luxurious women in London Society—which was literally (as the saying goes) at her feet—which were exquisite!

We had a vast community of interest, and were as inseparable as a decent regard for conventionality permitted us to be, I do not think I flatter myself when I say that I must have been a relief after her husband. As to that gentleman, I was, and am, no doubt, prejudiced, but he combined in himself the millionaire, the lout, the drunkard, and the fool. I was ultra-careful never to compromise Mrs Smith in any way, for, as I repeatedly warned her, I would not have trusted her husband out of my sight for a moment, and was always prepared for him to lay some dirty trap or other for her. He encouraged our friendship, however, and threw us together continually. *Timeo Danaos!*

It made me therefore very uncomfortable and very unhappy when Cecile, at our next meeting after my dinner-party (next day, in point of fact) implored me to *give* her the Purple Sapphire. Though I had no fear of the thing for myself, I was frankly horror struck at the idea of its passing into her possession. She argued with me—how she argued!

"You brag about your invariable luck," she said. "Well, look at me, am I not the luckiest woman in London by common consent—in everything but my marriage. Am I not brave? Then why do you want me to be a coward? I thought *you* were brave. Then why are you a coward now? You do not believe the thing is bewitched. Then why do you behave like this now? I have never asked you for anything since we first met, have I? And now that I do beg a gift of you, you refuse it.

Be very sure, my friend, that I shall never under any circumstances ask you for anything again. No, not if I were starving in the gutter."

These words came back to me most bitterly when she *was* starving in the gutter, and when she did come to me for help. But what was I to do ? One is only flesh and blood, after all, and in certain circumstances *"Ce que femme veut—!"* In the end I gave her the Purple Sapphire.

I will pass as quickly as I can over the miserable history which followed. Men and women of my generation have not forgotten the Splendour and Decadence of Cecile Smith. In a phrase, everything went wrong with her. Her whole nature changed, she became hard, reckless, unsympathetic. She gambled frenetically and lost vast sums; she got money to pay her debts by every means, fair and foul; she bought fabulous jewels, her transactions with which would have landed her in gaol had not her friends accommodated the situations into which she recklessly flung herself. People whispered of lovers of low degree, of orgies, of drink, of drugs, of all the degenerate horrors of a decadent civilization. And meanwhile Smith was on the watch, to jerk the rope when she had had rope enough to hang a score of women.

This was not the affair of a moment—it took two years. All that time, though we seldom met now, for our paths had widely separated, I was continually imploring her to give me back the Purple Sapphire. I believed in it fundamentally at last. But she would not. She clung to it with a superstitious obstinacy. In a letter from St Petersburg, where she had drifted as partner (?) in a gambling enterprise (which failed of course) she wrote:—

"The Stone is the last thing I had when I was Queen of my Race—and I *was* a Queen! It is the only thing I ever asked you for. Nothing shall part me from it.

P.S.—The Yoga is here all right; thank God he costs nothing for railway fares and hotel expenses."

Once, in reply to a passionate appeal for money from Madrid, I offered her £1,000 for it. Same result.

Time went on. We heard of her occasionally—twice that she was in prison. I was very unhappy about her, worn out indeed, but there was nothing to be done. To distract my thoughts I went an aimless voyage round the world, on which I met the lady who is now my wife. I returned to England in the spring of 18—. Passing through Paris I read to my horror that an unknown woman who had shot herself in a tenement house in La Vilette a few weeks before had now been identified as the once beautiful and notorious Mrs Smith of London, Paris, Rome, St Petersburg—and where not? It was a ghastly shock, and in spite of the light that was breaking on my own horizon I returned to London a sad and distracted man.

A huge correspondence awaited me that my Secretary had been incompetent to deal with in my absence. Among the heap was an official packet—it was from our Consul in Paris. The letter said:—

"The enclosed packet, sealed up and addressed to you, was found among the effects of the late Mrs Smith who, as you may have heard, died recently in this city, in tragic circumstances. Kindly acknowledge," etc., etc.

It was the Purple Sapphire. Wrapped round it was a slip of paper on which Cecile had written: "It has downed me—take it back. I have tried to sell it, but no one will buy it. Even thieves won't have it. *Sayonara. Ave atque vale!* CECILE."

And so it came back. A month later, when I had settled down, burglars got into my house, and carried off property of great value, including the Purple Sapphire. They left me on the floor of my dining-room with a bullet in my neck which all but closed my earthly record.

As soon as I was convalescent—that is to say about six weeks afterwards I found that the burglars had been apprehended as the result of another burglary, the last of a long series perpetrated by this particular gang, which had hitherto completely baffled the police. Their master-mind had had a serious accident when on a professional tour, and had been arrested; the rest of the gang fell out among themselves, and partly by treachery and partly by mismanagement the burglary for which they were awaiting trial, which had been postponed for my evidence, proved to be their last. It was the only beneficent action which can be laid to the score of the Purple Sapphire.

After these unhappy men had been sentenced, the solicitor in charge of the defence handed me a small packet. I knew, without asking, what it was. He accompanied the restoration with the words:

"My clients instructed me to return this to you. It is the only one of your jewels which they were unable to dispose of. They attribute—you know criminals are notoriously superstitious—solely to it the unfortunate position in which they find themselves to-day. It was, in fact, their unaccountably rash efforts to get rid of it that gave the police the clue they have been seeking for a year past."

And so it came back, and from that moment things began to go wrong all round me. My power to control the Purple Sapphire was gone. My solicitor absconded with a loss to me of several thousands of pounds which he had in his hands for investment. I also broke a leg and a collar-bone riding along a

simple country path. I spare you the rest of the catalogue of disasters, major and minor. They were many and varied.

I set about the task of getting rid of the Purple Sapphire. I sold it to a second-hand-jeweller in Wardour Street who knew me well, but did not the less on that account offer me the value of a common Scotch amethyst of the same size. A week later he brought it back saying that his wife (who was Scotch), to whom he had given it, would not have it in the house; she had a 'scunner' on it. I pawned it for £2. A month later the pawnbroker failed, and his trustee in bankruptcy sent it back to me "as the sum for which it had been pledged was obviously inadequate, and he felt it his duty," etc., etc.

Finally I took it to the National Museum of Cosmopoli, and offered it as a gift to the Keeper of Jewels, He turned it over and over, looking at me curiously, as I thought, and then said:

"This is a marvellous jewel—we have nothing like it—and you may think it odd, but I don't think we want it."

"For Heaven's sake, why?" I asked.

"You *will* think it odd, but I am a firm believer in the malevolence of certain stones which have been the witnesses or causes of tragedies. I am convinced that this is one of them. Why do you want to get rid of it?"

There was no help for it—I was too broken in spirit—I told him.

He listened very attentively, and when I had finished, with a suggestion that I should smash it up and scatter the fragments, he said:

"No, don't do that. As it is, you know it, you can recognize it, and can be on your guard; if you smash it, it will come back to you, somehow, in pieces, re-cut, that you will not recognize, and you may unconsciously hurt someone. Now do not think

that I am mad—though I admit that my colleagues in the Museum think I am, to say the least of it, eccentric upon this subject—but you must follow the direction of the old books on Magic and Witchcraft; there is much more in them than most people think, or will admit. You must drop this into a tidal river at the exact moment of dead high water; it is the only thing you can do, and I warn you that even that may fail."

I confess I felt extraordinarily relieved at the suggestion; this surely must be final! We got out a Nautical Almanack and calculated the time of dead high water in the Thames on a particular day, and on that day and at that minute I dropped the Purple Sapphire into the river from the middle of Charing Cross Bridge.

All went well with me for about three months. The happiness I had seen approaching on my world tour seemed well on its way to realization. My nerves regained their equilibrium. Life was once more worth living.

Then one day as I was working in my library my parlourmaid announced: "A man with a note from Mr. X." This was my jeweller friend in Wardour Street. The note said:—

"The bearer has a curious jewel for sale, which was once in your possession. I do not know how he may have come by it, but send him to you as you may care either to re-purchase the article, of which he does not know the value, or to hand him over to the police."

I looked up, and the man, a common working 'navvy,' produced from a wrapping of dirty rag the Purple Sapphire.

I was stunned. I sat looking stupidly at the cursed Thing, and it seemed to me as if someone else's voice said to the man:

"Where did you get this from?"

He began a whining rigmarole. It had been in his family from father to son for many generations; they had come down in the world. He had come to London to seek work, had got it—good work, highly paid, but he had lost it, luck had turned against him, one of his children had died, his wife was ill, they were starving. At last, with great reluctance, they had decided to sell the old 'amethyst'— that's what his father had said it was. Worth lots of money. He had taken it to Mr. X., and Mr. X. had sent him to me as I was a gent who gave good money for curios.

My interruption startled him. I sprang to my feet and shouted at him:

"You liar!"

"Come, governor, none of that. Give me back my curio."

"Not till I've got the truth out of you. If you try to get away I give you to the policeman outside. Now then, out with it. How did you get this out of the bed of the Thames?"

He fell into a chair as if he had been shot, stammering:

"Christ! it's witchcraft, that's what it is. Devils and that. It's just bloody witchcraft."

"You see," said I, "I know something. You had better tell me the rest."

It took him several minutes to recover his normal self, and then he told me. It was amazing. The extraordinary network of underground railways—'the Tubes' they came to be called, later—was just then beginning to be constructed. One of them passed under the Thames from Charing Cross to Waterloo Station. This man was employed in the caissons under the river mud, pushing forward foot by foot in compressed air chambers, digging out the river-bed and passing the debris back to shore. He had caught the glint of this Thing in one of

the scoops as it came home, and watching his opportunity, he (to use his own words) "pinched it—and pouched it."

"I give you my word, governor," the wretch went on, "I've never had a good hour since. It's the fust thing ever I pinched, and it's got back on me. I've tried to sell it—no one will buy it from the likes of me. I've tried to lose it—it's brought back to me. I believe the police is after me on account of it. For Gawd's sake, Mister, take it off my hands."

My heart went out to the poor devil.

"I know the stone," I said. "I lost it. I'll take it back. Here's a fiver for you. Go home and good luck to you. You'll get along better now."

His gratitude was pathetic.

"I *feel* better already, governor," he said. "Gawd knows it'll be a lesson to me."

And so it came back.

I knew now that any effort of mine to get rid of it would be in vain, and I decided that after all it would be better to know where it was, than to dispose of it and feel that any day or hour it might turn up again. So I wrapped it up in the piece of Indian muslin in which George Cardew had given it to me and put it into its nest of boxes. I have forgotten, in writing this, to record that shortly after Colonel George made it over to me he sent me a 'nest' of seven sandal-wood boxes of Indian make, fitting closely inside one another, the smallest and innermost of which exactly held the Purple Sapphire. Whether he, or his father, or Dr. Dick had them made I never knew, or, if I did, I have forgotten. I then wrote a note of instruction to the executors of my will directing that the Purple Sapphire should not see the light of day until twenty-five years had elapsed after my death. I little supposed that by that time its power for evil would have, so to speak, evaporated, but at any rate I

could make sure that it should not fall into the hands of my children (if I had any) until they were old enough to have read this manuscript and to judge for themselves what was the next thing to be done with it. (*The Professor of Mineralogy has transcribed this letter of instructions in the early sheets of his record, so it is not necessary to repeat it here.—C.B.*) With a view to enforcing the performance of my wish I set aside by my will a sum of £10,000, the income of which followed my residuary estate, with a provision that, in the event of the parcel having been opened before the prescribed time, the capital sum was to be transferred at once to one of our larger hospitals. I felt that the Governors of that Hospital would keep an eye upon the parcel and see from time to time that it was intact. At the end of the twenty-five years the £10,000 is to fall into residue. I wrapped up and sealed the parcel and took it to my bankers, where I deposited it for safe custody in their vaults. The manager, a charming man and a personal friend of mine, received it in the ordinary way, and I need hardly say that I did not give him any inkling of its contents or of my motives for the deposit. Whether it was a coincidence, or *otherwise,* I cannot tell, but from that moment the affairs of that branch of my bank went wrong in many ways. One of the cashiers absconded with a large sum of money, loans which the bank had made went wrong, commercial houses which they had financed failed and involved them in heavy losses, and of course the manager got the blame, and he was forced into retirement on a small pension, a broken and disappointed man. I had my own uncomfortable ideas on the subject, but it is obvious that I could not go to the head office and say it was all my fault for having deposited in the vaults a parcel containing the Purple Sapphire. They would rightly assumed that my brain was softening.

And there it lies to this day. I am happily married and I have two charming children, a girl and a boy. I sometimes

wonder whether it will be he, or his son, upon whom will devolve the awful responsibility of taking the Purple Sapphire from its resting-place.

CLEMENT ARKWRIGHT,

31*st December,* 18—."

* * *

The manuscript of Sir Clement Arkwright stopped here. He lived for many years after the date which he appended. There follows in the notebook a further entry in another hand which reads:—

"1*st January,* 1920. The twenty-five years since the death of my brother expired yesterday, and I went to the bank and claimed the parcel, which we found—the manager and I—dusty but intact. I opened it in his presence and read the letter of instructions, but I did not open the sandal-wood boxes. I am not superstitious, but somehow I—well, at any rate I did not open them. We wrapped up and re-sealed the parcel and left it again where it had lain for over forty years. I must record, by way of postscript to my brother's account, a curious, and to me very ominous, circumstance. During the Great War the staff of the bank, those of military age that is to say, had been largely replaced by women, several of whom are still in the employ of the bank. As the manager was seeing me to the door I said to him:

" 'I suppose you will be gradually getting rid of these young ladies?'

" 'Yes,' replied he, 'and I shall be very glad when we see the last of them. One can never rely upon their work, their hearts are not in it, for they know that it is not their life's work

and that they can never rise to the administrative grades in the service. They make the most annoying mistakes, and one has to have their work continually checked by the men. And as a culminating touch, what do you think? There is a mad idea among them that makes them absolutely refuse to go down into the vaults when we want to send for anything. They say the vaults are haunted! Two of them (we have got rid of them) declared that they had seen an apparition of a naked Indian who grinned and gibbered at them down there. Did you ever hear of such hysterical idiocy? Oh! I shall be glad to get rid of them.'

"I said nothing beyond what might be conventionally expected of me, but I drove home feeling very uncomfortable.

"Is this horrible Thing, after lying quiet for forty years, going to wake into renewed activity? I suppose I ought to deliver it to my nephew and god-son, Sir Gilbert Arkwright, but frankly *I am afraid to do so*. Fortunately he is still abroad, in the Army of Occupation in Germany. I shall let matters rest as they are until he comes home.

GILBERT ARKWRIGHT."

Following upon this was a further entry in the same hand which reads as follows:—

"23*rd June,* 1920. My nephew Gilbert has returned home, and I have made him read this record in his father's hand. He is a splendid fellow, and he laughs, of course, at the whole thing. 'At any rate,' he said, 'let us take it out and have a look at it.' I begged him not to insist upon anything of the kind, and at last, after many long arguments, which I fear have convinced him that I am suffering from senile decay, he has consented to the plan which I have proposed. This is, that I

should take the parcel just as it is to the Professor of Mineralogy in the University of Cosmopoli and present it to the University Museum. It may be presumed—or at least hoped—that, placed among a large collection, many specimens in which may possibly have histories no less mysterious than that of the Purple Sapphire, its evil powers may be as it were diluted, if not dissipated. In any case, I take it to the University to-morrow, and there I sincerely trust that, so far as our family is concerned, the history of the Purple Sapphire is at an end.

GILBERT ARKWRIGHT."

* * *

It was very late when I had finished reading through the pages of the black notebook. The handwriting of the main record left much to be desired in places, having evidently been written under the influence of strong emotion. And no wonder! I felt that the writer was compelling himself to a violent effort all the time, omitting much, passing lightly over incidents which it must have been very painful for him to record. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

Next day I went up into the Museum and looked at the Purple Sapphire. There it lay, appropriately labelled: "Sapphire (Purple) Alumina. Corundum. Refraction, 86°4′ '. Hardness, 9. Sp. gr. 3.9—4.16." A bald description of what is perhaps the most remarkable stone in the collection.

There is no reason why any student should ever refer to the little black notebook, but I do sometimes wonder whether anyone, browsing among the shelves of the library, will ever take it down and read these records. And then I wonder many things.

COPY OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY
EDWARD HERON-ALLEN (1861-1943)
ACCOMPANYING AN AMETHYST
(ALSO KNOWN AS THE DELHI PURPLE SAPPHIRE)
PRESENTED BY HIS DAUGHTER, MRS MAIR JONES,
TO THE THEN BRITISH MUSEUM
(NATURAL HISTORY), JANUARY 28 1944

To – Whomsoever shall be the future possessor of this amethyst.

These lines are addressed in mourning before he, or she, shall assume the responsibility of owning it.

* * * *

THIS STONE is trebly accursed and is stained with the blood, and the dishonour of everyone who has ever owned it. It was looted from the treasure of the Temple of the God Indra at Cawnpore during the Indian Mutiny in 1855 and brought to this country by Colonel W. Ferris of the Bengal Cavalry. From the day he possessed it he was unfortunate, and lost both health and money. His son who had it after his death, suffered the most persistent ill-fortune till I accepted the stone from him in 1890. He had given it once to a friend, but the friend shortly afterwards committed suicide and left it back to him by will. From the moment I had it, misfortunes attacked me until I had it bound round with a double-headed snake that had been a finger ring of Heydon the Astrologer, looped up with Zodiacal plaques and neutralized between Heydon's Magic Tau and two amethyst scarabœi of Queen Hatasu's period, brought from Der-el-Bahari (Thebes). It remained thus quietly until 1902, though not only I, but my wife, Professor Ross, W. H. Ryder, and Mrs Hadden, frequently saw in my library the

Hindu Yoga, who haunts the stone trying to get it back. He sits on his heels in a corner of the room, digging in the floor with his hands, as if searching for it. In 1902, under protest I gave it to a friend, who was thereupon overwhelmed with every possible disaster. On my return from Egypt in 1903 I found she had returned it to me, and after another great misfortune had fallen on me I threw it into the Regent's Canal. Three months afterwards it was brought back to me by a Wardour Street dealer who had bought it from a dredger. Then I gave it back to a friend who was a singer, at her earnest wish. The next time she tried to sing, her voice was dead and gone and she has never sung since. I feel that it is exerting a baleful influence over my new born daughter as I am now packing it in seven boxes and depositing it at my bankers, with directions that it is not to see the light again until I have been dead thirty years. Whoever shall then open it, shall first read this warning, and then do as he pleases with the jewel. My advice to him or her is to cast it into the sea. I am forbidden by the Rosicrucian Oath to do this, or I would have done it long ago.

(Signed) Edward Heron-Allen
October 1904

OUT OF THE CUPBOARD AND CALLING TO YOU: THE CURSED DELHI PURPLE SAPPHIRE

A gemstone 'stained with blood and dishonour' haunted anyone who owned it. This week [November 28 2007] it goes on show for the first time at The Natural History Museum's new Mineralogical Exhibition, *The Vault*.

by STEVE FARRAR

"THIS STONE is trebly accursed and is stained with the blood, and the dishonour of everyone who has ever owned it." The words leapt off the page that Peter Tandy held. He glanced down at the large amethyst that the type-written letter accompanied. Tandy had chanced upon the jewel while working among the great lines of specimen cabinets in which the vast mineralogy collection of London's Natural History Museum is kept. From a scientific perspective, the stone was nothing special, though its setting was rather bizarre, bound by a silver ring decorated with astrological symbols and mystical words with two scarab-carved gems attached. Indeed it was the letter that had caught Tandy's eye. He read on. The note baldly stated that the amethyst, known as the Delhi Purple Sapphire, carried a curse and had left a trail of bad luck and tragedy in its wake. Its last owner claimed to have been so disturbed that he had it surrounded with supposedly protective charms and sealed it inside seven boxes. The letter concluded: "Whoever shall then open it, shall first read out this warning, and then do as he pleases with the jewel. My advice to him or her is to cast it into the sea."

The young curator was intrigued. "It was a really interesting tale but I'm a sceptic," Tandy says, almost 35 years after that first encounter with the stone. A few of his colleagues were aware of the story, referring to the jewel as "the blasted amethyst", but like Tandy, none took the threat seriously. All agreed, however, that this was a secret that the

museum would be wise to keep. "We didn't want to advertise its presence, not because we were frightened but because we didn't want every crank blaming us for every misfortune," Tandy says.

But now the secret is out. The Delhi Purple Sapphire has been removed from the storage cabinet in which it has sat for 60 years. On Wednesday it will go on permanent display to the public for the first time and its label will proudly declare its reputation as "trebly accursed".

The amethyst's story is bound up with that of Edward Heron-Allen, one of the most remarkable individuals ever associated with the Natural History Museum. The words of the warning letter were his. A latter-day Renaissance man, even a list of Heron-Allen's achievements makes for compelling reading. Independently wealthy, he trained as a solicitor while simultaneously learning the art of violin making – his book on the history of the instrument, published in 1884 is still in print. He studied Persian and wrote a prose translation of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. A variety of asparagus that he cultivated over seven years was further developed by a leading seed company and now reputedly is the basis for the modern cultivated crop. During World War I, Heron-Allen wrote propaganda based on articles from German, Austrian and Turkish newspapers that he translated into French with a pro-British spin to be subsequently dropped from balloons behind enemy lines.

With the exception of his time with military intelligence, he refused to wear any coloured clothing and was given personal permission by Lord Baden-Powell to fashion his own black uniform as a leading figure in the Boy Scout movement. Baden-Powell henceforth dubbed him the "black commissioner". A charismatic man, Heron-Allen was a star of the social circuit. Among those he counted as friends were

Oscar and Constance Wilde, whose son Vyvian Holland was one of the most frequent visitors to his home in Selsey, Sussex, along with such figures as Sir John Gielgud and Ivor Novello.

But it was as a scientist that Heron-Allen forged the strong bond with the Natural History Museum that would ultimately see the cursed amethyst wind up in South Kensington. He worked tirelessly studying foraminifera, single-celled aquatic organisms that create exquisite, microscopic shells. It was a lifelong passion. By his death in 1943, Heron-Allen had already given a great deal of material to the museum, including the world's finest library of works on foraminifera which today bears his name. But in October the same year, a box arrived that no-one had been expecting. The mysterious package came with the note that Peter Tandy was to encounter three decades later. In it, Heron-Allen told the story of the Delhi Purple Sapphire. It had, he said, been brought to the UK by a Bengal cavalryman Colonel W Ferris after being looted from the Temple of Indra in Cawnpore – now Kanpur – during the Indian Mutiny in the mid 1850s. The soldier thereafter lost money and health, his son doing likewise after inheriting it. A family friend who possessed it for a short time committed suicide. Heron-Allen said he accepted the stone in 1890 and was immediately beset by misfortunes until he had it bound in the charms that it still carries today. He also claimed to have seen an Indian spirit digging at the floor of his library "as if searching for it". He twice gave the stone to friends who had asked for it – one "was thereupon overwhelmed by every possible disaster", the other, a singer, found "her voice was dead and gone and she has never sung since". He even claimed to have thrown the amethyst into Regents Canal only for it to be returned to him three months later by a dealer who had bought it from a dredger. In 1904 he had had enough. He declared: "I feel that it is exerting a baleful influence over my new born daughter", had it packed into seven boxes and

shipped to his bankers with instructions that it be locked away until 33 years after his death.

Polly Tucker, museum archivist and records manager, says the museum was not concerned about any possible curse when the package arrived. "But it did want to respect the wishes of Heron-Allen," she says. Nevertheless, the package only remained unopened for four months as permission to breach Heron-Allen's last request was sought. The boxes were then discarded, the jewel placed in a drawer in a cabinet filled with an array of other amethysts of uncertain provenance and the letter simply filed alongside the museum's latest acquisition.

It may have remained out of sight and mind if its remarkable story had not caught the imagination of museum staff working to relaunch the museum's public mineral gallery. Called The Vault, it will feature many precious stones and metals taken from the national mineral collection that have more than just scientific value. A supernatural tale might seem to sit a little uneasily in one of the world's great scientific institutions. But according to Alan Hart, head of collections in the mineralogy department, such narratives give the collection a cultural dimension that appeal to visitors. "It is an amazing object – the story behind it is fantastic," he says. "People ascribe precious stones with all sorts of legends. All it needs is for one owner to declare it to be cursed or lucky and the story will remain with the stone as it is passed from person to person through history."

The Koh-I-noor diamond that is part of the British Crown Jewels is reputed to be unlucky for the men and lucky for the women who own it. The Hope Diamond, at the Smithsonian Museum in the USA, is also said to carry a curse.

That the Delhi Purple Sapphire was cursed was never doubted by Heron-Allen's family. Ivor Jones, his grandson, refuses to handle the jewel. "My mother certainly wouldn't

touch it and she recommended that we didn't either because of the curse," he says. Mr Jones, a 77-year-old former Royal Navy officer, recalls his grandfather with great affection and admiration, not least his ability to tell a good story. "He had a terrific imagination and the sort of presence that would almost make you believe," he says. That included short stories, including one inspired by the amethyst, published in a collection called "The Purple Sapphire and Other Posthumous Papers" in which a mysterious jewel with a turbulent past is given to a university library which is promptly wrecked by a lightning bolt. Despite being elected a fellow of the Royal Society, the greatest accolade in British science, Heron-Allen always had a profound interest in the supernatural. He published a best-selling manual of chiromancy, read the palms of the famous, including Bram Stoker, author of Dracula, and was asked by Wilde to cast a horoscope for his first son Cyril.

John Whittaker, former head of micropalaeontology at the Natural History Museum, wonders whether he might have been affected by the curse. Seven years ago, he took the amethyst to the first annual symposium of the Heron-Allen Society, an organisation founded to discuss the man's life. On the way home, though, he says he had reason to question the wisdom of his actions. "The sky turned black and we were overtaken by the most horrific thunderstorm I've ever experienced," he says. "It was so bad we considered abandoning the car and my wife was shouting why did you bring that damned thing?" The following year, Whittaker was taken violently ill with a stomach bug the night before the second symposium and he missed the third year when he developed a kidney stone. The fourth symposium, in 2004, was held at the museum. "We were all a bit apprehensive on the eve of the meeting," he says.

It is over a century since Heron-Allen sealed the amethyst

away. But Joan Navarre, a US academic currently researching his biography, believes he would have enjoyed the story resurfacing. "I suspect he is asking, why now – what took so long?", she says. "To quote his friend Oscar Wilde, 'the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about'."

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HERON-ALLEN SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Opusculum I *Notes upon the Literary, Scientific, and Artistic Activities of Edward Heron-Allen, F.R.S.* Extracted from his Diaries and other Documents by Christopher Blayre (2000).

Opusculum II *Edward Heron-Allen*. A Talk delivered by his grandson Ivor E. Jones at the first Heron-Allen Symposium, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, July 2001 (2001).

Opusculum III *The Quest for the Heron-Allen Society.* A Talk delivered at the first Heron-Allen Symposium, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, July 2001, by Timothy J. McCann (2002).

Opusculum IV *"The Beauty and Mystery of the Foraminifera". The Foraminiferal research of Edward Heron-Allen FRS, with an assessment of his scientific career*. Based on a talk delivered on the beach at West Street, Selsey, to members of the Heron-Allen Society and guests of the West Sussex County Council, following the unveiling of a plaque in honour of Edward Heron-Allen by Ivor Jones, 15 July 2002, by Richard L. Hodgkinson and John E. Whittaker (2003).

Opusculum V *Reflections on Heron-Allen's War Journal*. Talks delivered at the second Heron-Allen Symposium, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, July 2002, by Brian W. Harvey and Carol Fitzgerald (2003).

Opusculum VI *'Portraits and Persia: Bookplates and Bognor': Proceedings of the third Heron-Allen Symposium, 2003,* edited by Timothy J. McCann. Talks delivered at the third Heron-Allen Symposium, The Allen Room, Dean Street, London, July 2003 by Bryan Burrough, Claire Powell, Peter Allpress and Timothy J. McCann. (2004).

Opusculum VII *'Edward Heron-Allen FRS: Scientist': Proceedings of the fourth Heron-Allen Symposium, 2004,* edited by John E. Whitaker. Talks delivered at the fourth Heron-Allen Symposium, The Natural History Museum, London, July 2004, by Richard L. Hodgkinson, Michael A. Kaminski, Clive Jones and Andrew S. Henderson & John E. Whittaker (2005).

Opusculum VIII *'Edward Heron-Allen and Friends': Proceedings of the fifth Heron-Allen Symposium, 2005,* edited by Timothy J. McCann. Talks delivered at the fifth Heron-Allen Symposium, The Allen Room, Dean Street, London, July 2005, by Timothy J. McCann, Joann Fletcher and Richard L. Hodgkinson (2005).

Opusculum IX *'Edward Heron-Allen and Music': Proceedings of the sixth Heron-Allen Symposium, 2006.*, edited by Peter Horton. Talks delivered at the sixth Heron-Allen Symposium, The Royal College of Music, London, July 2006, by Brian Harvey, Pamela Thompson, Peter Horton, Joan Navarre and Garry Garrard (2006).

Opusculum X *'The Purple Sapphire': by Edward Heron-Allen.*, first published under the pseudonym Christopher Blayre in 1921 and republished, with additional material by Timothy J. McCann and Steve Farrar, to celebrate the Natural History Museum's exhibition, The Vault, 2007 (2008).

Copies of these Opuscula cost either £5 (*Opuscula 1-VI and VIII*) or £10 (*Opusculum VII, IX and X*) each from Ivor E. Jones, Treasurer of the Heron-Allen Society, Sweets Farmhouse, Stour Row, Shaftesbury, Dorset. SP7 OQH.

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