
WILLIAM LE QUEUX
THE LOST MILLION


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"The Lost Million"

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Chapter One.

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Describes a Man and his Secret.

“See! It’s—it’s in my kit-bag, over there! The thing—the Thing at which the whole world will stand aghast!”

The thin, white-faced, grey-bearded man lying on his back in bed roused himself with difficulty, and with skinny finger pointed at his strong but battered old leather bag lying in the corner of the small hotel bedroom.

“The keys—on my chain—Mr Kemball—” he gasped faintly, his face slowly flushing. “Open it, quick!—ah no! you can’t deceive me, my dear fellow. I’m dying! I heard what the doctor told you—though he only whispered. But, Mr Kemball, although you are a young man, I—I’m going to trust you with a—with a strange responsibility. I—I trust you because you were so very kind to me on board. They all shunned me—all save you! They didn’t know my real name,”—and the old man chuckled bitterly to himself—“and they were not likely to!”

“You were unwell on the voyage, Mr Arnold, and it was surely my duty to—”

“Duty! What duty do you owe to me?—a perfect stranger—an adventurer for aught you know!” cried the old fellow with whom I had formed such a curious friendship. “No, Mr Kemball, you have acted as a real man, as a friend—one of the few friends one meets in this hard, workaday world,” and he clutched wildly at his throat, while his sunken cheeks slowly assumed a hectic flush. “Unlock the bag—get it out—before—before I lose my senses,” he added.

I took from the dressing-table the bunch of keys attached to his steel watch-chain, and was crossing the room towards the bag when he exclaimed—

“Listen, Mr Kemball! I’m a dying man. Will you make a solemn promise to me? Will you grant me one last earnest request? In half an hour—perhaps before—I shall be lying here dead. But I’m still alive—a man who has seen much, who knows strange things—a man who has lived through much, and who has stood by and seen men die around him like flies. God! If I dare only tell you half—but—”

“Well, Mr Arnold,” I asked quietly, returning to the bedside and looking into the pinched grey face, “how do you wish me to act?”

“I have already written it here—I wrote it on board ship, after my first seizure,” he said, slowly drawing a crumpled and bulky envelope from beneath his pillow and handing it to me with trembling fingers. “Will you promise not to open it until after I have been placed in the grave, and to act as I have requested?”

“Most certainly, Mr Arnold,” was my reply. “A promise given to one who is about to pass to the Beyond is sacred.”

His thin fingers gripped my hand in silent acknowledgment. He did not speak, but the expression in his eyes told of his profound thankfulness. I placed the letter in my breast-pocket. Something seemed to be enclosed within.

“Go and open the bag,” he whispered, after a brief silence.

I did so, and within, to my great surprise, found two huge bundles of fifty and hundred pound Bank of England notes,

each packet several inches thick and tied with faded pink tape.

He beckoned me to bring them to him, and when I again stood near the bed, he selected one note, and then said—

“I wish you to destroy all of them—burn them there in the grate—so that I can watch you,” and he gave vent to a harsh, unnatural laugh, a hideous laugh of despair.

I looked at him in hesitation. The poor old fellow was surely mad. In my hands I held notes to the value of an enormous sum. And yet he wished to ruthlessly destroy them!

He noticed my hesitation, and in a quick, impatient tone, asked whether I would not carry out his wishes, at the same time handing me the note he had taken, telling me that it was to pay for his interment.

“As you desire,” I said, with some reluctance.

“But is it just—with so much distress here, in London—to deliberately destroy money like this?”

“I have a reason, Mr Kemball, a very strong reason,” he answered in a low tone.

So I was compelled to untie the bundles, and, separating the notes, placed them in the grate and commenced a fire, which I fed on and on, until the last note had been consumed, and there remained only a grate full of blackened tinder. I confess that I found myself wishing that I had the numbers of some of the notes, in order to reclaim their equivalent from the Bank.

The old man’s wild eyes, full of unnatural fire, watched the flames die down, and as they did so he gave a sigh of distinct relief.

Then, with difficulty, he turned to me and, putting out his hand, said—

“In the bag—at the bottom—you will find a sealed cylinder of metal.”

I searched as he directed, and drew forth a heavy ancient cylinder of bronze, about a foot and a half long and three inches in diameter. The top had, I saw, been welded down, but a long time ago, because of the green corrosion about it.

When I had carried it across to him, he looked me straight in the face with those deep-set glassy eyes, which haunted me for long afterwards, and said—

“I trust you with that, Mr Kemball, because—because—I feel assured that you will act as I direct. Do not attempt to seek—to discover what is within. That secret must be withheld—from you. In this I hope—that you will respect my desire—I hope so, for—for your own sake.”

I held the mysterious cylinder in my hand in wonder. Evidently he treasured it even far greater than his riches, and had brought it to London with some distinct purpose which he was now—owing to his heart-trouble—unable to accomplish.

“There are other things—other things in the bag. Bring them to me,” he said, in a low, weak voice, speaking with the greatest difficulty.

I brought the bag over to him and turned its contents pell-mell upon the floor. Among the several articles of clothing were a few old letters which, at his direction, I burned amid the tinder of the banknotes. Then, on searching further, I found a small, and evidently very antique, statuette of a figure standing, holding a kind of

spear. It was about seven inches high, much worn, with a square base, and of solid gold. Around it I noticed an inscription in hieroglyphics.

“That,” my dying friend managed to gasp, “is an ancient image—of the Egyptian God Osiris, son of Seb, and Nut, or Heaven and Earth, and married to Isis. He was held to have gone through sufferings—to have died—to have risen again, and finally to have become the Judge of the Dead, His mysteries and rites were—were the most important part of Egyptian wisdom. The inscription upon it shows that it was made by one Mersekha, in the reign of King Radadef, in the Fourth Dynasty—or about three thousand five hundred years before the Christian era. Take it for yourself, Mr Kemball,” added the old man, his voice distinctly weaker. “It will serve as your mascot and will perhaps remind you of the friendless man whom you have to-day befriended.”

I stood by in silence, for I saw a distinct change had crept over him.

I took a glass in which the doctor had placed some drug, giving me instructions to administer it to him, and I forced a few drops of it between his teeth.

The evening was warm and oppressive. Twilight was just falling, and through the open window came the low hum of the motor traffic a few hundred yards away in the Strand. The hotel in which we were was a quiet, unostentatious little place in Surrey Street, to which, on leaving the ship two days before, he had persuaded me to accompany him. Some one had recommended him to go there, he said, in preference to the Savoy or Carlton.

On board the *Miltiades*, which he had joined at Naples, he had displayed no outward sign of wealth—or that he possessed money to burn. Indeed, his dress was mean and shabby, and by the wardrobe contained in his two ragged bags, one would certainly never put him down as a man of means. It is generally dangerous, however, to judge a man by his clothes.

The old clock of St. Clement Danes struck eight, and a few moments later there came a low tap at the door, and the doctor again reappeared, and bent over his patient anxiously.

He gave him a few more drops of the medicine, but the old man made an impatient gesture, and refused to swallow more.

What request, I wondered, was contained in that crumpled and rather bulky letter which I held in my breast-pocket?

Outside, in the corridor, the doctor told me that the end was quite near, and suggested that I should obtain something from him concerning his friends.

“Mr Arnold has already told me,” I replied. “He possesses no friends.”

And at that the doctor shrugged his shoulders and descended the stairs.

Back at the bedside in the fast-fading light of the hot day of early June, I took the old man’s bony hand in silent farewell.

He turned his eyes upon me, gazing at me with a strange intense look, as though trying to read my very soul.

He endeavoured to speak, but though I bent my ear to his mouth, I could catch no words. His thin nervous hands clenched themselves, his grey beard moved, and he struggled violently to communicate with me, but without avail. Then with his right hand, he made a sign that he wished to write.

Instantly I obtained a pen and scrap of paper which I placed before him.

For a long time his hand trembled, so that he could make no intelligible writing. At last, however, he managed slowly, and with infinite difficulty, to trace very unevenly the words —

"*Remember the name Harford—be friendly, but beware of him and the Hand*."

He watched my face eagerly as I read.

Of a sudden, the light went out of his grey countenance, the pen dropped from his thin, nerveless fingers, a scarlet spot fell upon the paper, and a deep, long-drawn sigh escaped his ashen lips.

Then a great stillness fell—a great silence broken only by the low roar of the London traffic.

And I knew that Melvill Arnold, the man of mystery, was dead.

Chapter Two.

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Contains Several Surprises.

For some moments I stood gazing upon the dead man’s changed face, not knowing how to act.

I, Lionel Kemball, had, perhaps very unwisely, accepted a strange responsibility. I had acted with complete indiscretion.

On my way home from Australia, where I had been for a voyage for my health, the liner had called at Naples, and Mr Melvill Arnold had joined us. On the day after we had sailed I heard that he had had a sudden heart seizure, and was confined to his cabin, therefore—why, I can’t exactly tell—I sought him out, and spent a good many hours chatting with him, and keeping him company.

Perhaps it was that, having been something of an invalid myself, I knew the weary monotony of being confined to bed; I could sympathise with anybody who was ill.

From the first I realised that Arnold was a man of no ordinary stamp. Possessed of a clear and quick intelligence, he was a cultured man notwithstanding his rather rough exterior, and full of a quiet sound philosophy. To me, it appeared as though he had lived abroad a good many years, and was consequently out of touch with England. Whence he had come he never told me, save to casually mention that he had been a great traveller and had “lived out in the wilds for years.” The possession of the golden god seemed to point to the fact that he had come from Egypt.

“London has nowadays no attraction for me,” he told me one day. “I only go there merely because I am forced to do so. I finished with London long, long ago.”

Surely, as I, a prosaic man-of-the-world, sat in that narrow cabin as we steamed up the Mediterranean towards Gibraltar, I had never dreamed that in his old kit-bag, smothered as it was with faded hotel labels, there reposed a fortune in banknotes.

He had been perfectly frank on one point. He was a man without a single friend. And now I knew that he had an enemy—and that his name was Harford.

Presently I bent to the dead man’s bag—and examining it thoroughly, discovered that one letter had remained unburned—a letter which, by the London postmark upon it, had been written two years ago. It was addressed in a fine, angular, woman’s hand to “Arnold Edgcumbe, Esquire, Post Office, Kingswear, South Devon.”

The name caused me to ponder. Had not he admitted that Melvill Arnold was not his real name? Was it not to be supposed that his actual name was Edgcumbe?

The letter was, to say the least, a curious communication. It bore no address, but on the half-sheet of paper was written, in the same feminine hand, the words: “You, no doubt, saw the newspapers of 6th September, and the sentence of the Court upon the person they know as Lancaster. Rest assured that her betrayal will not go unrevenged by—Her Friend.”

I stood gazing at the missive which the dead man had evidently believed that I had burned. It would not be difficult to search the files of the newspapers for 6th September

1908, and ascertain for what crime a prisoner named Lancaster had been sentenced. The information might, perhaps, lead me to some further discovery.

I placed the letter carefully aside and made a most minute search of the dead man's clothes, and of his other belongings, but found absolutely nothing. Then, crossing the wasted hands, and placing the sheet tenderly over the white face, I left the room, and, descending, informed the hotel manager of what had occurred, while he, in turn, telephoned to an undertaker.

The effects of the deceased were taken possession of by the hotel manager pending the opening of the letter of instructions, while I conveyed to my own room the ancient bronze cylinder and the golden image that was to be my mascot.

Death in an hotel is always the cause of unpleasantness with the management, who declare it to be injurious to the reputation of the establishment, hence the body was conveyed away by night to await interment, while I moved to the Cecil.

But that same night a man from the undertaker's came to me and asked me somewhat mysteriously what I knew concerning the dead man.

"He was my friend," I replied. "Why do you make this inquiry?"

"Well, sir," he answered, "the guv'nor sent me round to say that he's found he wore a false beard. It fell off!"

The man's statement mystified me, more especially when he added—

“The body is that of a much younger man than the gentleman appeared to be. The guv’nor fancies there’s a bit of a mystery about him.”

“Probably he’s right,” I said, but the judicious administration of a golden coin quickly put matters straight, and my visitor bowed himself out.

Sorely was I tempted to tear open that letter which the mysterious man, now dead, had with calm forethought prepared, yet on the envelope was boldly written the words: “Not to be opened until after my burial.” That plain injunction deterred me.

Yet on the following morning I went down Fleet Street to the office of the *Daily Telegraph*, and there asked to see the file of the paper for September 1908.

It was not long before I was turning over the pages of the news of the day in question. For some time I searched, until my eye at last caught the name of Lancaster in the report of a trial at Old Bailey.

The report was headed—

“LADY LETTICE LANCASTER

“Amazing Life-Story of an Adventuress.

“The story of a woman adventuress is always interesting, and that of Lettice Earnshaw, *alias* Lady Lettice Lancaster, is no exception. She is a woman of mystery. Born thirty-four years ago in the West of England, she has lived the greater part of her life more or less by her wits. Always a woman of mystery, she has used many names and lived in many districts, generally changing her name and abode when the attentions of her creditors became too pressing. Many attempts have been made to trap her, but she has always

escaped, until yesterday, when she was convicted at the Old Bailey of removing furniture in order to cheat her creditors, and was sent to gaol for nine months.

“The discoveries made by the police reveal a remarkable romance. Her birth has always been shrouded in mystery, but it is probable that she was to a certain extent entitled to rise the name Lancaster. Her father, believed to have been a distant relative of a well-known man of title, married an actress. Needless to say, trouble was occasioned by the advent of a child. The family naturally attempted to hush up the marriage, and the little infant was sent to Camborne in Cornwall, where her mother had a brother who was a policeman. Lettice grew up into a knowing and pretty child, looking much older than her real age, and in 1890 she met a medical student, who was staying in the neighbourhood. Although at this time she was only fifteen, she looked some years older, and on 9th April she was married at Exeter, to the student, whose name was given as Henry Earnshaw.

“At this youthful age the young bride started her long list of aliases. According to the marriage register she was nineteen years of age—a jump of four years—and her name was given as Edith Jane Lucy Haddon, the surname being that of her nurse’s daughter. Her actual life immediately after marriage is not known, but about a year later she was living at Manchester, where, according to the prosecuting counsel in the case heard yesterday, she was obtaining her living by acting in a pantomime. Her stay in that city was perhaps her longest in any one district, and she did not obtain notoriety until some years later. In Manchester she was known as the Hon. Lucy Huntingdon, and also as Lady

Ella Earnshaw. The Hon. Lucy was unmarried, but Lady Ella had entered the bonds of wedlock.

“With her many aliases and a husband and foster-brother, who conveniently changed places as the occasion demanded, Lady Lettice Lancaster, to give her the name by which she is best known, has nearly always contrived to enjoy life at the expense of others. When the bills began to arrive, she denied responsibility, the husband or brother to whom the creditors were referred was not to be found, and yet, when a suitable opportunity occurred, she herself disappeared, only to bob up elsewhere, and continue the same game. The story of this amazing woman’s extraordinary life has never been published, but we are now in a position to give many interesting facts as to her career.

“The name Lady Lettice Lancaster was not used until about six years ago, when she blossomed out in London, took a flat in Hyde Park Court, and was frequently seen driving in the West End. She then started a more clever system of defrauding her creditors.

“Here is a list of some of her abodes, each of which she left somewhat hurriedly—

“1903.—Tufnell House, Teddington.
1903.—Skelton, York.
1903.—St. Catherine’s, Guildford.
1904.—Hackthorn, Lincoln.
1904.—Kiltoon, Athlone.
1905.—Saham Toney, Thetford.
1906.—Gloucester Terrace, London.
1907.—St. John’s, Woking.
1907.—Stuston Hall, Chelmsford.

1908.—Portleven Mansions, Maida Vale.

1908.—Brancaster, Norfolk.

“It was while golfing at Brancaster that Lady Lettice was arrested and brought to London under the Debtors Act in connection with her stay at Maida Vale.

“While she had many residences, they were few in comparison to her different aliases. Here are some of the names by which the extraordinary woman has been known —

“Lady Lettice Lancaster, Lady Ella Earnshaw, Hon. Lucy Huntingdon, Hon. Mary Trelawnay, Mrs Emily Dewar, Mrs Gertrude Curtis, Mrs Evans, Mrs Shaw, Lettice Leyton, Alice Lethbridge, Grace Fane, Grace Fitzjames.

“Each of these names was used by her, while she had a habit of giving one of the other names as reference. In the case for which she has now been convicted, she was using the name of Mrs Gertrude Curtis, and had given Lady Ella Earnshaw as a reference.”

The report then went on to give an example of the clever way in which this extraordinary woman escaped paying her creditors, which showed what a remarkable adventuress she was.

“Early last year,” the journal continued, “she took a fine furnished mansion, Stuston Hall, near Chelmsford, in the name of Mrs Gertrude Curtis, and almost immediately afterwards a man who was known in the village as Hoare, and was thought to be her groom, arrived on the scene. About two months later Mrs Curtis came down from town, but by this time there was a considerable sum of money owing. Certain sums were paid on account, but before very

long the tradespeople were getting anxious about their money, and a number of county court summonses were issued. These were allowed to go by default, and after judgment had been given, the woman and a man, who was known as Ralph Lancaster, and was said to be her foster-brother, were found to have removed the furniture and antiques to London, where it was sold. The defence to the charge was that Hoare was really Earnshaw, the woman's husband, and that he was responsible for the debts, which were on his account, he having given the orders.

"In the witness-box, Mrs Curtis admitted that Hoare was her husband, and that his real name was Earnshaw. She took the house in the name of Curtis because she was anxious to get away from her husband, who when drunk was very cruel, and on one occasion broke her arm. He, however, found her out, and, as a matter of fact, went down to Stuston Hall, a long time before her advent there. She claimed to have 'a moral right' to use the name Lady Lettice Lancaster, but 'for family reasons' refused to divulge why. If she did, her income would be discontinued. She added that she was receiving five pounds per week from a firm of solicitors in London. The defence did not prevail, and both the woman and Ralph Lancaster were sent to gaol for nine months.

"The way the three persons mixed up their relationship is decidedly interesting. Earnshaw or Hoare is the son of an officer who held high rank in the Navy, and was known as groom, butler, chauffeur, husband, or foster-brother, while Ralph Lancaster was referred to as foster-brother, husband, or stepbrother. The real husband was nearly always treated

as if he were the groom, and when the three were living in Yorkshire, Lady Lettice was summoned for keeping a man-servant without a licence—the man-servant was her husband! This was not the only occasion on which the Inland Revenue took action against Lady Lettice. Once when the woman was prosecuted for keeping a dog without a licence, Lancaster represented her at the police-court. He then said he did not know whether she was the daughter of a Duke or of an Earl, but she was his wife.

“While living near Lincoln, the woman came into prominence for an unusual assault on a butcher’s salesman, who had been sent to obtain payment of an account. He found the gate of the house locked, and rattled it to attract attention. Lady Lettice then came out of the house with a hunting-crop in her hand, and shouted to her daughter: ‘Let loose the dogs, and they will kill and devour him.’ The dogs, however, neither killed nor devoured him, but the woman hit him on the head with a hunting-crop, and knocked him over his bicycle. This little amusement cost her two pounds and costs at the subsequent police proceedings.

“Lady Lettice was always interested in horses, and she generally had some good animals in her stables. For some years she, in conjunction with Ralph Lancaster, had been running a riding-school in the West End, and it is stated that her income from this source was nearly 500 a year. When at Woking, in 1907, she was known as the ‘lady horse-dealer,’ and was very popular locally, until pressing creditors caused her to seek fresh fields and pastures new. When she was at Stuston Hall, she stated that she had taken the place for the purpose of teaching riding, and receiving hunting guests.

But although she had several horses there, the only persons to use them were Lady Lettice, the two men, and the children. The eldest of the children, a girl of sixteen, frequently attracted attention by her plucky riding, and she is now earning money as a rider.

“While Lady Lettice was living at Stuston Hall, the house was regarded more or less as a house of mystery, and strange tales are told of how the woman disregarded the canons of convention during the hot weather. Moreover, the hours kept were hardly regarded as usual by her neighbours. Stuston, being a small village, is generally asleep fairly early, but if the statements made to callers are to be accepted as correct Lady Lettice frequently retired for the night as early as six o’clock. Nevertheless, it is stated that she was sometimes seen walking in the grounds during the night in a garb that can only be described as scanty. Naturally the house was watched by the local tradespeople with some care, and it was due to this watching that the removal of the furniture was discovered. The local postman and grocer, to whom she owed nearly ten pounds, saw the furniture being removed, and followed it to London, where it was sold. The police, in the course of the evidence, also hinted at the probability of other and more serious charges of crime being preferred against them on the expiration of their sentences.”

In the centre of the report was given the photograph of “Lady Lettice,” taken by one of the news agencies, the picture being the head and shoulders of a good-looking woman, smartly dressed in tweed country-hat and tailor-

made coat—a woman whose type of features was certainly aristocratic, and would never be adjudged an adventuress.

When I had finished reading the report—which I here reproduce in order that you shall be more thoroughly acquainted with every detail of the strange adventures which befell me—I purchased a copy of the paper, and carried it back with me to my room at the Hotel Cecil.

Who was that mysterious correspondent of the dead man who had sworn vengeance. Who was the friend of Lettice Lancaster? For what reason had that letter been written? What connection could the quiet-mannered, unassuming old gentleman have with such a trio of clever swindlers?

It was fortunate, perhaps, that the letter had not been burned, for it had, at least, placed me in possession of some curious facts which must otherwise have been hidden.

During the next three days I was greatly occupied by my own affairs, which had been neglected by my year's absence at the Antipodes. Yet time after time I felt the keenest anxiety as to what could be contained in the dead man's letter of instruction, and in that corroded cylinder of bronze.

At last, however, I followed the mortal remains of my mysterious friend to Highgate Cemetery, the sole mourner, and after I had seen the coffin committed to the grave I returned to the hotel, where the statue of Osiris stood upon my table, and there, with impatient fingers, tore open the letter.

I read it through.

Then I stood staring at the unevenly scribbled words—staring at them like a man in a dream.

What I read there held me aghast, amazed, stupefied.

Chapter Three.

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What Mr Arnold Left Behind.

The letter, written upon the notepaper of R.M.S. *Miltiades*, was dated four days prior to our arrival in London.

Perhaps I cannot do better than reproduce it in its entirety.

“To Lionel Kemball, Esquire.

“Dear Mr Kemball,—Now, after my death, I desire here to place on record my great indebtedness to you for your kindness and sympathy. You knew nothing of me, yet you took pity upon my lonely and unfortunate self. You have, in addition, made solemn promise to me to act as I direct. At the outset I desire to be perfectly frank with you and to confess that I was not what I represented myself to be. Certain chapters of my eventful life must be for ever hidden, even from you, who are acting as my friend. This I greatly regret, but to reveal all must only bring unhappiness upon one who is innocent. For that reason I die carrying my secret with me.

“How long I shall continue to live after penning this request I cannot know. Therefore, I will make matters as plain as possible, and earnestly request you to act as follows:—

“To be present at the railway station of Totnes in Devon at five o’clock on the evening of the 20th of June next, and there meet a certain man who will come in secret in search of you. He will wear a red tie, a carnation in his coat, and will carry an ebony walking-stick. He may be watched,

therefore do not approach him unless he unbuttons his gloves and removes them. To him hand the enclosed letter, and if you wish further to serve the interests of one who herein expresses his deepest and most heartfelt gratitude, watch him, become his helper, and act as he directs—but do not trust him implicitly.

“Some of the circumstances may strike you as extraordinary and unwarrantable, but I beg of you not to attempt to solve mysteries which must, for ever, be hidden. The person in question may be in sore need of a friend to give assistance and advice, therefore rest assured that such favour shown to him will not go unrewarded.

“As regards the bronze cylinder, be extremely careful of it, and in all security hold it unopened in trust for me until six months from the date of this letter—namely, on 3rd November—when you will hand it without question to the person who comes to you and lays claim to it.

“What is enclosed addressed to yourself please accept as a trifling token of the great esteem in which you have been held by the lonely and forgotten man who, in later life, was known as—

“Melvill Arnold.”

I tore open the envelope addressed to myself, and therein found four Bank of England notes for five hundred pounds each. My mysterious fellow-traveller who had money to burn had presented me with the sum of two thousand pounds.

The other enclosure, a letter secured by three seals of black wax, was addressed to “Arthur Dawnay, Esquire.”

My trust was indeed a strange one, increased by the dead man’s request that I should befriend a man who was friendless, and at the same time warning me against placing too great a trust in him.

I tried to conjure up in my mind what kind of person I was to meet so mysteriously away in Devonshire. Why, I wondered, could not Mr Arnold’s affairs be settled in a proper manner by his lawyers? But perhaps, so mysterious was he, that to trust solicitors would be to reveal his identity. One thing, however, was evident. He had already made a secret appointment with Mr Dawnay. In all probability he had travelled to England expressly to see him.

From him I should probably learn something concerning the Man from Nowhere who had made me that very welcome present of two thousand pounds.

That the grey beard was not his own, and that he was somewhat younger than the age he had assumed, were, in themselves, facts which caused me a good deal of deep reflection. He was a complete mystery, and more could not be said.

Many times had I taken the ancient cylinder in my hand wondering what it really contained. As far as I could judge it was of metal, half an inch thick, for the cylinder was well made, and had apparently been drilled out of a solid block. The welded end had been very carefully and neatly closed, and it had evidently lain in the damp, or more probably under water, for many years, judging from the rough corrosion upon it.

My instructions were to guard it with all zeal, yet I was to hand it without question to whoever, on the 3rd of

November, should ask for it.

I turned it over in my hands time after time, wondering what could be the nature of this, the greatest treasure of a man, who had undoubtedly been wealthy.

I confess to you that I entertained certain misgivings. Out of mere pity I had made the acquaintance of Melvill Arnold, never dreaming that I should be led into so strange an executorship. Again, there being no will, I began to wonder what was my actual position in law.

The mystery surrounding the dead man had been increased both by the discovery of his disguise and by the frankness of his letter, in which he plainly admitted that he was not what he had represented himself to be. Why had that letter been sent to him threatening revenge for the sentence upon the adventuress who called herself Lady Lettice Lancaster? What connection could he have had with such swindlers?

The whole affair formed a complete enigma. Perhaps I had acted very foolishly in mixing myself up with a perfect stranger, and as day succeeded day this thought became the more and more impressed upon me.

I suppose in order that you should understand matters aright I ought here to say something concerning myself.

I, Lionel Kemball, was aged twenty-seven. My father, a well-known London surgeon, who had been knighted for his services in the interests of surgical science, had died two years ago, leaving me with a comfortable old house, called Upton End, near Newport Pagnell, in Buckinghamshire, and an income of about a couple of thousand a year. Three years prior to his death he had retired and given up the house in

Cavendish Square, preferring life in healthier and quieter surroundings. I had studied medicine, and had passed my preliminary examinations at Edinburgh, when I found myself troubled slightly with my lungs, and had been advised to take a trip to Australia. To my satisfaction I had returned in the very pink of health and perfectly cured.

I had visited Ceylon, the cities of Sydney, Brisbane, and Perth, had witnessed some of the wonders of New Zealand, and now, on my return, had become involved in this most curious and perplexing romance.

The day on which I opened Mr Arnold's strange letter was the 8th of June, therefore twelve days had to elapse before I could go down to Devonshire to meet the mysterious Mr Dawnay.

Those were hot, exciting days. Such blazing weather in June had not been experienced in London for years. It was hot by day, succeeded by oppressive, breathless evenings, with that red dust-haze seen only in our great metropolis. The Derby had been run and London hotels were crammed. The colossal Cecil, at which it was my habit to stay, was filled to overflowing by crowds of Americans, and the West End ran riot with gaiety and extravagance, as it always does each season.

Perhaps fortunately for me, for it prevented my mind being too much concentrated upon my remarkable trust, I found myself involved in some trouble concerning some land down at Upton End, and I had a number of interviews with my late father's solicitors. A lawsuit was threatened, and it looked much as though I should be the loser by several hundreds a year.