

Hollow Ash... Hall

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

CHAPTER I.—(Continued.)

"Queer as Dick's hat-band, no doubt. But I don't see how he could be offended if you let the house. There it is, lying idle—no good to him nor any one else. This gentleman has a fancy for seeing ghosts, and pays Mr. Vernon handsomely for it. What more can a man ask for?"

"I do not know," replied the agent, looking thoughtfully into the fire. "And there is no time to write—that is the worst of it. Mr. Vernon is in the Holy Land, and I don't know how long it would take a letter to reach him. Now, this gentleman wants to go in at once. In fact, I am to give him an answer tomorrow. I'm terribly perplexed about it."

"I don't see why. Say yes, of course, and thank your stars for the chance."

"But if Mr. Vernon should be angry?"

"I don't see how he could be. Even if he was, he would have time to get cool again before he met you. I should take the offer, most decidedly."

"Well, I think I will. But I was quite undecided when I came in here, I assure you. But you are a clever man, Grimes, and one can't go far wrong in taking your advice."

"Thank you, sir. And now that business is well off your mind, let's drink the health of the new-comers, and wish them a happy home at Hollow Ash Hall."

Both laughed as they drank the toast. Then the agent rose, buttoned his coat and turned to the door. The landlord saw him out, and after bidding him good night, stood looking out beyond the town, at the hill, where the lonely house was standing, dark, silent and grim.

"Hollow Ash Hall let!" he murmured as he went back to the bar once more. "Well, that is a go, and no mistake! I wonder how soon it will be empty?"

CHAPTER II.

So the thing was accomplished. The haunted house was let.

The next day all Banley knew the tale by heart. The banker's name was Cowley, and the young lady who wished to see the ghost was Miss Rose Cowley, a pretty, fair, little creature, who looked as if she would shriek and run away if a mouse crossed her path. Her elder sister, Catherine (Miss Cowley) was a tall, dark-haired girl, with a high color and flashing black eyes—by far the most proper person, one would say, to encounter a denizen of the other world. But she did not approve of the project, and shuddered at the very name of the Hall. Mrs. Cowley, fat, fair and forty, took the matter easily, though in her heart she considered it a tempting of Providence. But she said nothing. She was devotedly attached to her stout, good-tempered husband, and had been chosen to walk into the crater of Vesuvius. I think she would have given one sigh to old England, and followed meekly in his wake.

Mr. Cowley, having made himself master of the Hall, was not long in paying it a visit. He took his family with him, and though they went in broad daylight, their carriage was escorted to the very lodge gates by a select troop of rosy-cheeked children, who stared at Rose as if she had been the Dragon of Wantley in person.

Only to the gates, however, did this youthful bodyguard venture. When the driver got down and lifted the rusty bolt from its socket the first creak dispersed the rabble like magic. A dire vision of Queen Bess in buff and farthingale, coming down the avenue to meet those who sought to enter, affrighted them; and with one accord they set off at full speed toward the village, never daring to look behind them, or to slacken their pace until they were safe once more at their own mothers' sides.

Rose Cowley watched this exodus with laughing eyes; but her mother and sister looked as if they would gladly have followed the example of the children, and taken to their heels as well.

"Mercy preserve us!" said Mrs. Cowley, looking up at the Hall. "Who would have believed it was such a dismal place? Why, yesterday from the road it seemed pleasant!"

"Dismal, mamma!" said Rose. "I think it is anything but that! Romantic, solitary, lonely, if you will, but surely not dismal!"

"It is only fit for rats and owls to live in," said Catherine, with a look of intense disgust. "What could papa be thinking of when he took it without even paying a visit to the place? However, there is one comfort—he likes snug, warm rooms as well as any of us; and the first glance at the interior of the old shell will be sure to disenchant him. We shall never live here, mamma; so you need not distress yourself at all about it."

"Don't be too certain," remarked Rose. "I was talking with papa this morning about it, and I asked what was to be done if the place should turn out damp and cold. What do you think his answer was?"

"Why, that in such a case we couldn't stop, of course."

"Not a bit of it," replied the mischievous girl. "Papa said that he thought we were all apt to pamper ourselves too much and that it would do us good to miss a few luxuries and comforts for a time."

Mrs. Cowley groaned.

"I shall have rheumatic fever, I know. Mr. Cowley will never be mad enough to live here. The house is like a well."

"Don't fear, mamma," replied Catherine, with an air of composed certainty that was peculiarly provoking to Rose. "By the time papa has had to go without breakfast and dinner once or twice, because the chimney will not draw, he will be ready enough to go away. Men may be stoles and ascetics and philosophers in theory easily enough. But all their fine doctrines go to the wall, I observe, when their stomachs come in question."

As she spoke, they drew up before their new home, and even Rose was obliged to confess in her own heart that it might have been a pleasanter one, when she looked up at the fast-closed door, and the blank range of dusty windows. Mrs. Cowley groaned again. The place was even worse than she thought, and she was wicked enough to pray secretly for a fit of the gout, or a smart twinge of lumbago, which should lay her lord and master flat on his back, and thus enable her to take him to Brighton—to town, even—rather than to this modern "Castle of Udolpho," which shocked her almost more by its outward dirt and discomfort than by the ghostly tenants which it held within.

"Now, my dear, let me help you. Jump out, Rose, and see which of us will find the haunted chamber first," said Mr. Cowley, coming to the door of the fly, his round, red face beaming with delight at the evident trepidation of his wife and eldest daughter. "Jump out and see how you like your future home. You are as good as the lady of the manor now, Mrs. C. What do you think of that? Did you ever expect to attain to such dignity, even in your wildest dreams of the future?"

"I certainly never expected to come to such a place as this," said Mrs. Cowley, piteously, as she left the fly. "Queer old den, isn't it, my love?"

"Very queer!"

"But I dare say you will like it in time. It is a fine airy place, I can see. Catherine, you will have cheeks like cabbage-roses in no time."

"Papa, you cannot think of living here!" said that young lady in dismay.

"Can't I, my dear? But I do, and for this very reason—the world is getting far too romantic and fanciful to suit me. What with spiritualists and table-turning, and men who float in the air, and men who see things in a crystal, and haunted houses, and acas who make almanacs and all the rest of it, England seems to be going stark mad. I used to give my countrymen a little credit for common sense, but I can scarcely recognize them now, and I hold that any one who makes a firm stand against this new-fangled nonsense is a public benefactor. I mean to do it, and to make you do it too. For this reason I take this house, which the silly idiots about here say is haunted. Not one among them dare come near the place. I'll show them that I'm not afraid to live here. And then, perhaps, they will come to their senses again, and learn that people in the other world are glad enough to get quit of this. Ghosts, indeed, I have no patience with such nonsense!"

"But, papa, if they come?" suggested Rose, with a timid glance at the close shut house.

"If they do, I'll pinch their noses with the tongue!" said Mr. Cowley, solemnly, and Rose burst out laughing.

"But, papa," said Catherine, "the house is so damp!"

"Damp? Nonsense! It is as dry as a bone. Don't you see that it stands on the top of a hill? How could the water get up here, I should like to know?"

"I am sure it does, and you will have lumbago and mamma rheumatism and Rose a sore throat and I a perpetual influenza. Dear papa, do give up this scheme and take us to Brighton instead!"

"Oh, yes, I think I see myself doing it!" was the grim reply. "Take you to Brighton to wear a pork-pie hat on the sands, and show your ankles on the pier! No Brighton for you at present, miss. You will stay here and do your fellow-countrymen a service, if you please, by disabusing their minds of a stupid prejudice, by means of your own experience. Driver, have you got the key to this door?"

"Here it is, sir," said the man. But he fell to the rear after presenting it. He was a lad of nineteen and had heard too much of the place: no, to keep at a respectful distance during the first moment of investigation.

"This lock has not been oiled since the year 17!" said Mr. Cowley, puffing and blowing as he tried to turn the key. "Hang the thing, how it sticks! Bear a hand here, my good fellow, will you? Hallo!"

The key turned suddenly as he spoke, the lock yielded, and the door flew open with such violence that Mr. Cowley landed on his nose in the hall. Seeing this, his wife forgot her fears and ran to pick him up. Rose and Catherine followed, and so at last they stood together beyond the threshold of the haunted house. While Mrs. Cowley and Catherine were helping the head of the family to his feet, Rose gazed around her with breathless awe, half expecting each moment to see some dim shade approaching to wave them

away. But no one came. All was still and quiet. They stood within a small, square hall, very dusty and dirty and lighted only by the faint light over the door. A worn mat covered the floor, there was a small iron stove in the center of the hall, and, leaning against it a curiously carved walking stick, resembling the wand of a magician rather than the ordinary cane of a gentleman in the nineteenth century. Rose took this in her hand, but quickly laid it down. It did not seem "canny" to hold it, though why she could not say.

Mr. Cowley rubbed his head, felt his nose carefully all over, and pronounced himself quite sound.

"What made me fall, I cannot tell," he remarked. "It really seemed as if the door was jerked from my hand by some person inside. Do you know, my dear, I incline to the opinion that some evil-disposed person has harbored here at some time or another and taken advantage of the popular belief in ghosts to carry out all manner of iniquity in perfect safety. For aught we know, such a person may be within hearing now."

Mrs. Cowley gave a little shriek.

"Then we are all safe to be robbed and murdered: Dear George, do let us leave this place and get home as soon as possible!"

"Nonsense, my dear; don't interrupt me, if you please! Robbed and murdered, indeed! Is that likely while you have me to protect you? I merely made that remark as a warning in case such a person should be concealed here. I recommend that person not to come too near, whoever he may be; and I add, for his further information, that I shall sleep here with a revolver, loaded and capped, by my side, and if he begins any of his tricks upon travelers, I'll give him pepper, by Jove! Now, Mrs. C., come along and look at the rooms."

Trembling and disgusted, the good lady followed her truculent spouse, as he opened door after door within the mansion. The rooms were all dark and dingy, it is true, but they had high ceilings and plenty of windows with pleasant aspects. Soap and water, and afterwards pretty curtains and bright furniture, a piano, and a few pictures would make quite another place of it, as Mr. Cowley said.

CHAPTER III.

Nevertheless, as the party progressed from room to room, a silence fell over them all—a nameless weight seemed to rest upon every heart. Mrs. Cowley looked really ill, Catherine was very pale, Rose ceased to laugh and jest, and even Mr. Cowley pursued his investigations in a nervous, fidgety way, as if he was ill at ease.

Did you ever visit an empty house, dear reader, by yourself? A lonely country cottage, for instance, with no evil tale hanging over it like a dark cloud—nothing to mar its beauty—nothing to take from its aspect of home and peaceful repose? Passing from room to room, with the bunch of keys dangling from your hand, did you not begin to feel that something unseen, but not unfit, was bearing you company—something that opened the doors and looked out of the windows and pointed at the corners of the apartments as if to illustrate a story which you also felt, but did not hear? Did not that unseen companion become almost too real—almost visible at the last, and actually drive you from the place—not frightened—not nervous—oh, no!—only with pale lips and hurried steps and a hand that shook a little as it gave the keys back in the agent's office, and wrote down the direction to which the agent might apply.

All this, and more than this, did the party at the Hall experience. Something—nay, more than one something—was beside them. No one spoke of the presence, yet all were conscious of it, though they tried to laugh it off, even in the recesses of their own minds.

(To be continued.)

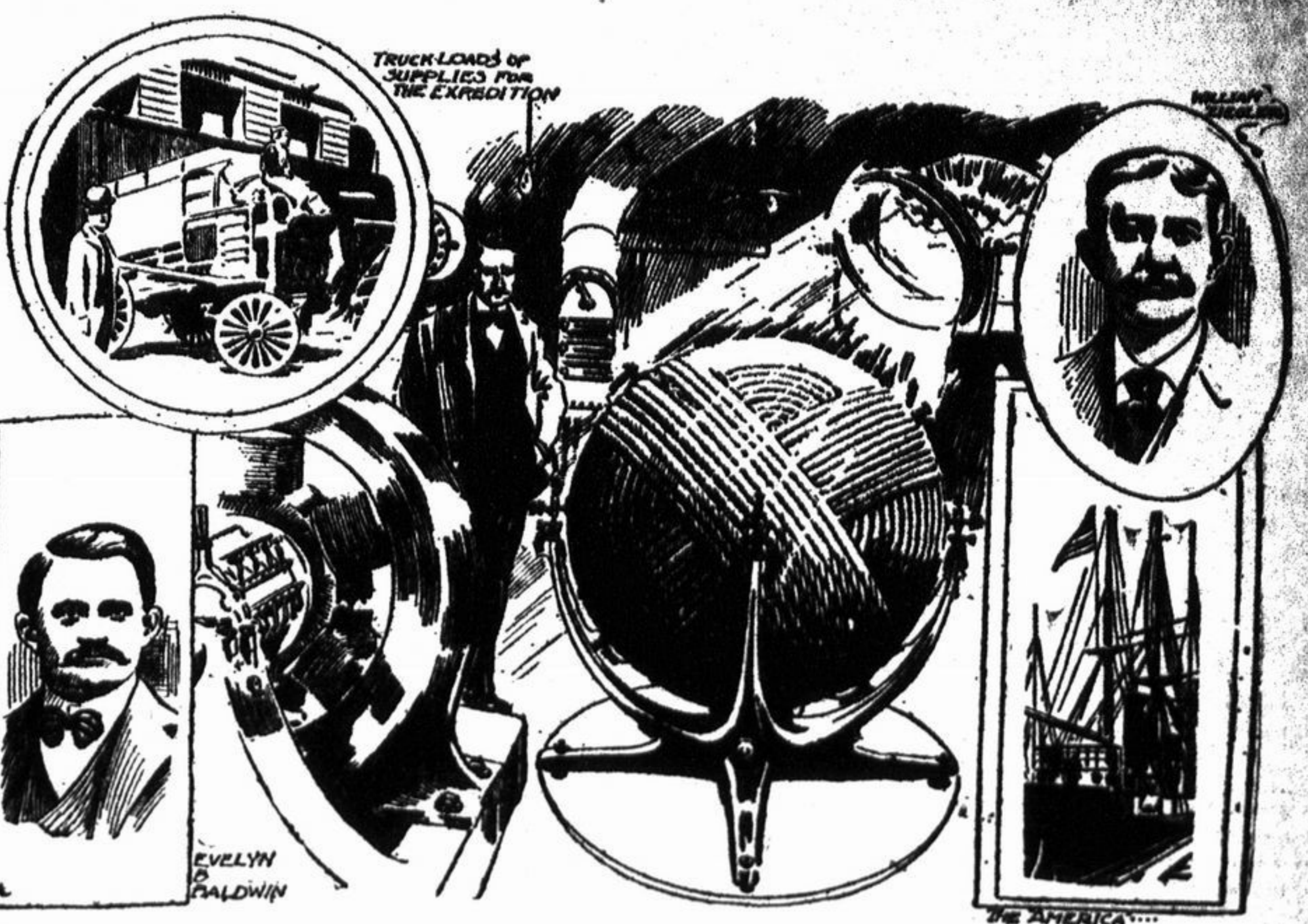
BUNKER HILL MONUMENT.

A Public Dance Gave Material Aid in Completing It.

Few people are aware that it was a public dancer who gave material aid in completing the Bunker Hill monument. This aid came from the noted Fanny Ellsler, who, as Dr. Holmes puts it, "danced the capstone onto Bunker Hill monument, as Orpheus moved the rocks by music." She danced at a great benefit performance, which realized enough to warrant the managers going on with the obelisk on Breed's Hill, which is the proper name for the historic battlefield of the Revolution, in Charlestown. The monument's corner stone was laid in 1825 by General Lafayette, and on this occasion and at the grand dedication, June 17, 1842, Daniel Webster made two of his greatest orations. The Ellsler sisters were two famous dancers, born in Vienna in 1808 and 1811, respectively, of whom the younger, Fanny, became the most celebrated. From 1830 to 1851 the career of Miss Fanny was one continuous ovation. While at Paris she is said to have eclipsed even Taglioni by her wonderful dancing of "La Cachucha." After visiting London in 1838, she came to the United States, where her triumphant progress was marked by many advantageous offers of marriage, all of whom she declined. She retired to a villa near Hamburg, Germany, 1851, having amassed an enormous fortune, and died in 1884. Her sister contracted a morganatic marriage in 1851, with Prince Adalbert of Prussia, and was subsequently ennobled.

Who does the best his circumstances allow, does well, acts nobly; angels could do no more.—Young.

WOULD HARNESS AURORA BOREALIS.



Evelyn B. Baldwin, who expects to plant the Stars and Stripes on the North Pole, sails for Norway to join the ships America and Frithjof, which have been fitted out by William Ziegler, the wealthy ex-Arctic explorer, who will supply funds to the amount of \$1,500,000. The above illustration shows how electricity may be extracted from the Aurora Borealis, according to the theory of Mr. Baldwin. From close observation of the Aurora Borealis, he believes that it is a great force, which can be placed in control of human ingenuity. He believes that this force is electrical and that the polar regions hold great reservoirs of it, which could be utilized in the propulsion of machinery and the working of dynamos. The America is to carry the expedition.

Herron to Wed Miss Rand.



Mrs. E. D. Rand and her daughter, Carrie E. Rand, have nearly completed their plans for leaving Grinnell, Iowa, and moving to New York, where, it is said, Miss Rand will be married to Dr. George D. Herron, the noted Socialist. Dr. Herron is now in New York and the Rands will go there in a few days, having sold their extensive property holdings in Iowa. The judge who granted the Herron divorce refused to sign the decree until the check for \$60,000 was in his hands. The Rands were received coldly on their return to that place.

Miss Rand is Dr. Herron's wealthy patroness, who has been prominently mentioned in connection with the Herron divorce case. She has purchased a house on Fifth avenue and Forty-fifth street in New York, where Dr. Herron is residing.

According to published plans, her family will go to Europe soon, and from this it is assumed that her marriage to Dr. Herron will take place soon. In fact, it is so admitted by close friends.

The marriage will be the outcome of the causes that have led up to the social reformer's divorce from his wife a few weeks ago. Miss Rand is in sympathy with Dr. Herron's work. She is reputed to be worth almost \$1,000,000.

ticularly troublesome just at present for several reasons. Its finances, which were fairly well managed during the earlier part of its history, are now in a deplorable condition. Recent governments have been extravagant in the matter of expenditures, and the treasury has suffered especially through a famous state railway scheme which ended in dead failure.

Meantime the country has had a series of bad harvests, so that while the demand for taxes has increased the ability to pay them has decreased. As a result the problem of meeting the charges on the public debt has become a very serious one, and the government has been obliged already to pass some of its obligations. Naturally, therefore, its foreign creditors are very nervous, and resorts to new for-

eign loans in lieu of taxes are not the promising expedient they once were. The situation would be quite serious enough without political complications, but Bulgaria has these in abundance. The science of ministerial government is so poorly understood that ministers come and go in quick succession, and thus encourage the rise of factions. Furthermore, the capital, Sofia, is the seat of a foreign conspiracy. From this place a Macedonian committee engineers its plots against Turkey and seeks to embroil Bulgaria with that country.

The Macedonians inhabit the southwestern provinces of Turkey, none of which is now known by their name, and the agitators demand an entirely new arrangement between their people and the Porte. Their scheme includes a dozen concessions and reforms which they have set forth in a memorial to the great powers, but although the memorial hinted at danger of a revolution they have gained nothing by their appeal.

In Bulgaria public sentiment concerning them is divided. Though they have a numerous body of sympathizers the government hesitates to cast in its lot with theirs, because it fears the interposition of the powers, by whose will Bulgaria exists as a quasi-independent state. The fate of Greece is a warning which is not yet forgotten in any part of the Danubian principalities.

Late in March there was a comic opera invasion of Macedonia by a few score men from over the Bulgarian frontier, but on the sixth of April the president of the Macedonian committee and some of his associates were arrested in Sofia. This would indicate that after considerable wavering the authorities had finally decided to clear themselves from all suspicion of a connection with the conspirators.

The emperor of China is now said to be suffering from the effects of too much tobacco. According to reports he smokes cigarettes continuously and as many American cigars as he can get. Nearly all the tram conductors in Valparaiso are now women.

Banyan Tree of India.

The banyan tree of India is one of the most wonderful trees that grow. The picture represents the main trunk of the banyan and some of the secondary trunks. The banyan, as doubtless all boys have read, sends down-



Bulgaria Recalls the Eastern Question.

The regular perennial eastern question has been somewhat obscured during the last year by the far eastern question, but the Balkan states are still an object of continuous anxiety to European cabinets. One of these, the principality of Bulgaria is par-