

THE
RIDDLE OF RIDDLES,

OR THE

SECRET OF THE RINGS.

BY

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DEDICATION.

To the patient loving soul, for whose natal day the following lines were first written, whose courage and cheerfulness have taught all who know her how a brave soul can endure, and who now nears her reward and final triumph through suffering, thus solving the riddle, these little pages are dedicated.

THE RIDDLE OF RIDDLES,

OR

THE SECRET OF THE RINGS.

Written for The Occult Word.

A young man sat in gloomy meditation over the misfortunes and miseries of human life. He was poor and friendless and obliged to toil early and late to keep soul and body together. He was one of a numerous family and had received as his sole inheritance three rings which he had regarded as of little value, though on receiving them he had been charged never to separate them nor part from them while he lived, there being a tradition in his family that the possessor of these rings might one day fall heir to a priceless inheritance. This tradition had been related to him by his old nurse, but it had passed from his memory with other incidents of his happy childhood.

The young man had no recollection of his father, through whom two of the

three rings had been inherited, but he often thought of the dear, tender mother through whom the third ring had been inherited, and in times of trouble he longed to rest again within her sheltering arms and forget his cares upon her peaceful bosom. He remembered hearing an old physician once say, that if the rings could be united in a certain way, so that they could not again be separated, they would make the fortune of their possessor.

As the young man sat now in the twilight, the recollection of earlier years came welling up from the long ago. To strangers his mother seemed to be of a cold and joyless nature, but the son had discovered a wealth of affection and tenderness in the mother's nature, easily called out by caresses, and when he had faithfully performed his allotted tasks the mother would smile upon him in a way that made his heart glad. As he thought of all these tender memories, all at once he remembered the rings. They had been forgotten and neglected for years, though the casket which contained them, the same in which they had been received, was close at hand. This casket was of very singular workmanship, such as no man now-a-days could produce ; he had grown so accustomed to seeing it that he had never examined it with sufficient care to discover its great beauty and

singular workmanship. Now, when he cleaned it from accumulated impurities, and examined its delicate carving and exquisite color, he wondered how he could ever have neglected it. The key was in the lock, but even thus, it required a master hand to open the casket and gain a view of its contents. The lock might be broken, the key lost, or the casket removed bodily, but neither by violence nor ignorance could its contents be brought to view. Our young friend now carefully turned the key three times around, stopping the last revolution at a certain number on the dial over the key hole, when the lid flew open revealing the rings. The tradition was of three rings, what was now his surprise to find but one. However, upon closer inspection he found the rings had been placed one within the other, though apparently of equal size, and that, during all these years in which they had been forgotten, they had coalesced, so that they could not now be separated without injury to each, or perhaps destruction to all. The outline of each ring could be faintly discovered, and while they were thus, to all appearances united, it was certainly not that peculiar union to which the old physician referred.

Our young friend was greatly perplexed as he endeavored to discover the material

out of which the rings had been made, at length he remembered that the same old physician already referred to had given him an old book, which, after some trouble, he found on an upper shelf, covered with dust, where it had long lain neglected like the casket. He had never before observed the title of the book which now seemed very strange to him. It was as follows :

AN OPEN ENTRANCE TO THE SHUT PALACE OF THE
KING.

As already stated, our hero, for such he will prove to be, belonged to a numerous family. There were older brothers, some of whom had died, even before he was born. Like himself, they had each received as an inheritance three rings, the parents providing impartially for all their children, but as most of his brothers had died in poverty it was quite evident that they had not properly valued their inheritance, or discovered the secret of the rings.

The author of the book had evidently known one of the brothers who had discovered the secret, for only this one family had shared in this singular inheritance. Opening the book our hero found it as much of a riddle as the rings, for it was written in strange characters, though apparently with method and great care. In

turning over the leaves he came to a diagram of the casket in his possession, and presently, to his delight, he found diagrams also of the rings, both separate and united. Remembering now the peculiar form of the key to the casket and the number on the dial already referred to, he soon made the discovery that the casket and its precious contents were really the key to the book, in short, that they belonged to each other, and had he not already, from careful examination and deep study, aided also by natural gifts, learned something of the casket and its contents, he would never have been able to decipher the mysterious book. He now learned that the rings were made originally one of salt, one of sulphur, and one of mercury, and though in their present condition, they bore not the least resemblance to either of these substances, he knew that appearances are often deceitful, and that both names and things have to be studied very carefully to discover their real meaning and nature.

Reading further in the old book our young friend discovered that by some process, only yet hinted at, these three rings of base metal may be annealed, amalgmated, precipitated, clarified and purified so that every semblance of base metal will disappear, and in place of the salt, sulphur and mercury only pure gold remain, a sin-

gle ring instead of three, and possessing wonderful beauty and some strange power. There were references to a wonderful bright light, boundless wealth, and the purest happiness, which he could not altogether decipher.

Our young friend studied long and deeply the problems thus presented. He did not rush blindly into experiments with his rings, knowing that he might thus destroy all his future prospects. A change had taken place in his life. He was as poor and toiled as hard as before, yet his burdens seemed lighter, for his heart was set on discovering the great secret, and happiness and contentment, such as he had never known before, came from the fact that he possessed the rings and at least a clue to their wonderful mystery. Not only was this change manifest in his waking hours, but in the dreams that visited him at night there seemed more method, and he learned to distinguish between those which were readily explained by connection with some well remembered experience, and those that were only phantasy, and on rare occasions, when both mind and body were clear, and pure, and when from poverty he had gone supperless to bed, visions of a higher order came to him, and his understanding was enlightened, and his soul strengthened.

Acting on the few hints he had been enabled to gather from the old book, he from time to time subjected the rings to a gentle heat, and found that they readily changed color. Imagine now his discomfiture, when once having subjected the rings to a more intense heat than usual, he found that they had wholly disappeared and in their place there lay in the casket only a blackened lustreless mass.

Our hero had by this time, however, learned both patience and courage, and in this dilemma he consulted the old volume of hieroglyphics with greater zeal and determination, and soon made out this: "Take the matter which you know and purify it: You must see that it is *perfectly clean*, for nothing impure must enter into it. Wash away the blackness, not with water, but with a gentle and consuming fire; use no violence, watch constantly. The old body dieth and rots, and when it is once purged, and made clean and pure, then are the elements joined in one perfect indissoluble perpetual UNITY.

"Remember, then, this alchemical maxim, namely: 'A sad cloudy morning begins a fair day and a cheerful noontide.' After long contemplation of the subject, and living with it, a light is kindled on a sudden as if from a leaping fire, and being engendered in the soul, *feeds itself upon itself*.

At last, by the will of God, a light shall be sent upon thy matter, which thou canst not imagine."

While he had been thus engaged in deciphering the symbols, a gentle flame had been glowing beneath the rings, and now, as he finished his reading and glanced at the rings, his book fell from his hands, and he sank on his knees before the casket. The former blackness had disappeared, a transformation scene was taking place, his eyes were full of tears and a strange tremor shook his frame, unmixed with fear or sorrow. A luminous vapor had for a moment concealed the contents of the casket, which suddenly disappeared, and there before his astonished gaze lay a circlet of pure gold, woven within and without with precious gems, in the form and color of the damask Violet, the milk white Lily, and the immortal Amaranthus, while in the center of all was set a PEARL, so large and clear that it shone like a Blazing Star, lighting up all the room; a sweet incense, as from unseen censers filled the room, and low, sweet music, such as he had never heard before, seemed wafted to his enraptured ear as by the breath of angels.

Presently our hero recovered from his entranced condition, and discovering the book he had dropped in the first moment of surprise, he picked it up, and as he

opened it again, even here the veil was also lifted, and he read with ease the next sentence.

“The possessor of this Treasure has no occasion to run to kings, princes, lords, nobles or great men, they who do so have none of the secrets, but desire to try conclusions at other men’s charges. The true possessor seeks not after such friendships, nor earthly glories, he is content with his modicum, and has enough even the whole world in his ring, which he can carry about with him wherever he goes. Whatsoever he desires that shall he also obtain; at whatsoever door he knocks it shall be opened unto him, and whosoever shall come near him, shall feel the influence of the jewel he carries concealed from all profane eyes, and grow better and purer, though they know not why.”

It was midnight as our hero extinguished his lamp and sought his pillow, forgetting that he had taken no food since the evening before, and as he placed this jewel near his heart and noticed the pale yet constant glow amid the surrounding darkness, he realized that he had discovered the secret and solved the riddle, and even in his yet waking state, he realized that the land of dream and vision into which he was about to enter could no longer bewilder him.

The pale luster of his Pearl, when viewed by ordinary vision, was akin to the star-beam, and opened up a highway to realms elysian, along which his entranced soul would presently pass from the world of changing shadows, to the real world of essential forms and enduring substance. Attracted there by the same law which holds the needle to its pole, and the planets in their course, his soul would meet and mingle with the pure in heart, whose thoughts are anthems, and whose only impulse, love.

Love lieth at the foundation ;
Over all, Divine Love reigneth.