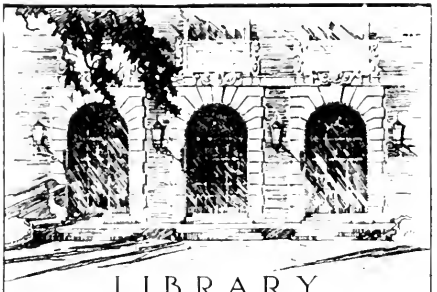


T. L. BARRETT
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THE CHARLATAN

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LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

THE CHARLATAN

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AND

HENRY MURRAY

'*Glendower*. I can call spirits from the vasty deep!
Hotspur. Why, so can I, and so can any man,
But will they come when you do call for them?'
SHAKESPEARE'S *Henry IV*. (Part II.)

'There are repentances more splendid than innocence itself.'
BOSSUET

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1895

PREFATORY NOTE

The following story, founded on the drama of the same name, has been written in collaboration with Mr. Henry Murray; but I was indebted for the original idea, and notably for the sleep-walking incident, to an unpublished sketch by Miss Harriett Jay, the authoress of 'The Queen of Connaught.' The drama was produced at the Haymarket Theatre in January last, and is still running in the provinces, while the story, after appearing serially in newspapers, is now for the first time republished in book form.

R. B.

December, 1894.

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THE CHARLATAN

CHAPTER I.

AT WANBOROUGH CASTLE.

'But surely,' said the Dean, leaning back in his arm-chair, with the tips of his fingers delicately joined together, and his short-sighted brown eyes peering at his interlocutor under knitted brows of questioning surprise—'surely our modern religious thought has progressed far enough to reject such superstitions as these?'

'Thought, my dear Dean,' returned the Earl, 'should reject no kind of human evidence! You will pardon me, I am sure, if, as a layman, I venture upon a modest historical criticism of the Church to which

you belong. Have not men of your stamp, Churchmen who, still holding the more important tenets of revealed religion, are yet to a great degree open to the teachings of modern science—have you not, may I ask, too lightly and easily abandoned, at the bidding of science, many minor beliefs which are sanctioned by a great mass of reliable evidence, though their truth is not to be proved by the scientific paraphernalia of microscopes and solvent acids?'

'That would be a very wide field of controversy,' said the Dean, with a smile. 'Possibly we have, but really, really, my dear Lord Wanborough, astrology —the black art——'

'Were distinctly, in the hands of their noblest followers, theosophic. We have proof—absolute proof—that manifestations of the most extraordinary nature have taken place. For instance, that remarkable man, Dr. Dee, in a *séance* at which Queen Elizabeth was present, raised up the spirit of the first Plantagenet.'

The Dean's brows went up, and he looked at his

companion with a wondering face, in which there was a touch of pity.

'Do you actually believe *that*?' he asked gravely.

'Why should I *not* believe it?' asked the Earl, in return. 'It is a historical fact, like another. You yourself accept miracles. The last sermon I had the pleasure to hear you preach dealt with the raising of the spirit of Samuel before Saul. What could be done once can be done again.'

'Ah, but pardon me,' returned the Dean. 'In that very sermon I was careful to guard myself by the admission that the day of such special manifestations had long gone by, and such glimpses of the Power which rules the world as are now vouchsafed to us come by other channels.'

'How can you say that the days of miracles are over?' said the Earl, now firmly seated in the saddle of his favourite hobby. 'All Nature is a miracle—a daily, hourly miracle.'

'Yes, but reduced to law—to a code of clear and immutable law, which admits of no deviation from

settled order. Although a Churchman—and, I trust, a faithful and consistent one—I cannot blind myself to the wonderful discoveries of modern thought, to the inestimable blessings of modern science. I could, of course, wish—I *do* wish—that men of science would show more tolerance to the sacred mystery of our faith, and would not be so apt to treat it with contempt, and, as you say, regard acids and microscopes as the final court of appeal for beliefs which have been held, and are still held, by so many of the best and noblest of mankind. But even there I see gleams of light. Science is losing its cocksureness. These recent experiments in the Paris hospitals by Charcot and others, and the attention they have received from scientific men all over the world, show that faith in the Unseen—the occult—still survives, and is hard to kill.'

'Ah,' said his lordship, with a smile of triumph, 'so far you are with me! You believe in Hypnotism?'

'Most decidedly. The possession by many individuals of the hypnotic force is clearly a fact. One

might as well doubt the power of steam. I myself possess the force in a certain degree. A year or two ago I hypnotized a servant-maiden, who revealed in a state of trance a number of petty thefts which had taken place in the kitchen. The power of one living will over another I can understand. It is one of the commonest phenomena of life. But I fail to comprehend the power of the living over the dead.'

'Well, well,' said the Earl, laying aside the paper-knife with which he had been absently toying during the conversation, 'that is a subject on which we shall never agree.'

'I fear not,' said the Dean gravely.

The Earl of Wanborough lay back in his chair and bent a sidelong glance on the emerald turf of the lawn beneath the window. He was a man in the early sixties, long, and a little loosely built. He had been one of the handsomest men in England in his day, and his face, though lined with years of thought and study, was beautifully venerable. His smile was singularly sweet, and his voice had the tender reson-

ance of a musical instrument. Dignity and kindliness shone in his every word and gesture. He was carelessly—for a man of his rank and wealth almost shabbily—dressed in well-worn tweeds, and the elf locks of his silky gray hair fell about his face from under a skull cap of black velvet.

The Dean, a personable, jolly-looking divine, who rode some fourteen stone, set his glasses astride his nose, and took advantage of his host's momentary abstraction to examine him closely. The Earl would have been vastly more surprised than pleased could he have guessed what was passing in his old friend's mind.

'He can't be *mad!*' thought the Dean. 'His father and grandfather were as healthy-minded men as ever breathed, and his life has been purity itself. And yet, how *can* a man of his brains and scholarship believe such rubbish as he has been talking?'

'You are expecting Lord Dewsbury down here, you were saying just now,' said the Dean, breaking silence after a rather lengthy pause.

'Yes,' said the Earl, rousing himself from his momentary abstraction. 'I had a letter from him this morning. He is in high feather.'

He selected the letter from a number of others in his jacket pocket.

'He wrote from the House of Commons. Let me see. Where is it? Ah, yes!

'"If the vote to-night goes against the Government —and I am all but certain it will—they must resign, and we are sure of a big reception and a thumping majority in the country. Salisbury regards our triumph as a *fait accompli*, and, although he made no absolute promise, he held out good hopes of a place for me in his Ministry."'

'Excellent!' cried the Dean. 'Why, the Government was defeated by twenty votes!'

'Yes,' said the Earl; 'and if Dewsbury is right in his calculations, the resignation will take place in a day or two, and we shall have him down here to stand

for the borough again. I am afraid,' he continued, 'that his career in the Commons will soon be ended.'

'Is the Earl so ill?' asked the Dean.

'His condition is very serious. Dewsbury writes' —he again referred to the letter—

'"I grieve to say that my father's strength declines daily. He takes hardly any food, and has not left his bed for the last three days. Lawson, after taking the most hopeful view for weeks past, confessed to me this morning that he fears the end is inevitable, and near at hand. Poor old dad! Heaven knows, the prospect of the title is little consolation for his loss!"'

'Dear, dear!' said the Dean. 'Well, it is the common lot, and we can only be glad that he leaves such an excellent successor. Lord Dewsbury is a very fine fellow!'

'Yes,' said the Earl cordially; 'Frank is a very fine fellow indeed!'

'Do you know,' said the Dean—'pray don't think me impertinent for speaking of a family matter—I have fancied that Dewsbury may find his consolation *here*.'

'Isabel?' asked the Earl, with a smile. 'Well, yes; I have thought so myself. Setting aside money—and Dewsbury will have enough and to spare of that—I don't think he could do better. She is a most charming girl, and would make a wife for an emperor. I think she likes Frank, and I am sure he is greatly attached to her.'

'There is no formal engagement between them?' asked the Dean.

'None, so far; but I think they understand each other. I have noticed his letters by Miss Arlington's plate at breakfast every morning for the last two months at least, and she makes no secret of their correspondence.'

'There is still no news of her father?' continued the Dean.

As he spoke, he raised his eyes to a picture hanging on the wall above the Earl's head.

It was the portrait of a man in the prime of life, with prematurely gray hair and moustache, and clad in military undress. The face was handsome, but sad and stern, with a far-away, dreamy look in the eyes which somewhat contradicted the expression of the set brows and resolute mouth and chin. The Earl's eyes mechanically followed in the same direction.

'No,' he said, with a sigh. 'Nothing has been heard of him since the last letter from Thalak, nearly two years ago, announcing his intention of crossing the centre of Thibet.'

'A wild scheme,' said the Dean.

'I don't like to think about it,' said the Earl. 'It is wonderful to me how Isabel keeps up her health and spirits.' He paused a moment. 'You and I, Dean, think differently on many subjects. Tell me what you think of what Isabel said this morning. She came down to breakfast radiant. I had never seen her look so beautiful or so happy. I questioned her, and her reply was, "My father is alive, and is coming

home." "You have heard from him?" I asked. "You have received a letter?" "No," she replied; "but I have seen him. He came to me in my sleep. He was haggard, and ill, and worn. His dress was all in rags, and there was a great scar upon his face. He spoke to me; I heard his voice as distinctly as you can hear mine at this moment. He said, 'Have no fear, child, my task is accomplished, and I shall soon be with you again.'"'

'God grant it!' said the Dean fervently. 'We can ill afford to lose such men as Colonel Arlington.'

'But the dream,' said Lord Wanborough. 'What do you think of that?'

'What can one think of it?' asked the Dean. 'There are more things than are dreamed of in our philosophy. I have known dreams quite as extraordinary come true. It may have been a Divine message of comfort to the poor young lady. Let us hope so.'

'I spoke of it to Madame Obnoskin,' continued the Earl. 'She accepts it as an actual truth, and

prophesies that we shall hear from Colonel Arlington very shortly.'

'God grant it!' said the Dean again. 'So Madame Obnoskin is still here?'

'Yes; and will stay for some time yet, I hope. A remarkable woman, my dear Dean—a *most* remarkable woman. You must meet her. If any arguments can lead you to consider the eternal mysteries from another point of view, hers will. I owe Madame Obnoskin a great debt, intellectually and morally. A woman of extraordinary attainments. She is in direct communication with the occult powers of Nature.'

'Indeed! And these communications — how do they come?'

'In many ways. Sometimes by direct intuition, sometimes by post.'

The Dean did his best to restrain an irrepressible chuckle.

'This is indeed remarkable.'

'What is remarkable?' asked the Earl.

'That spirits should use postage-stamps.'

'My dear Dean,' said his lordship a little testily, 'the matter is perfectly simple. Spirits can only work through material conditions.'

'Quite so—quite so!' said the Dean with recovered gravity. 'And this lady—Madame Obnoskin—what kind of person is she?—young?'

'Yes, comparatively. Not more, I should say, than thirty, at most.'

'Handsome?'

'Distinctly. A very charming woman. She would be an acquisition in any society.'

'A widow?' asked the Dean.

'Yes; a sad experience, I fear. Her husband was a Pole, like herself; a very able man, and an adept in the religion she teaches; but I gather from hints she has dropped that they were not happy together.'

'H'm!' said the Dean, with a slight pursing of the lips and another lift of the eyebrows.

'You must meet her, my dear Dean,' continued his lordship.

'I shall be delighted. Your description of the lady has quite fired my curiosity.'

'Since you are here,' said Lord Wanborough, 'why not stay to dinner?'

'Thank you exceedingly, but I fear it is impossible. I have a Church meeting in Wanborough at seven o'clock, and I promised faithfully to attend. But as Madame Obnoskin is staying on, I shall drop in some evening *sans cérémonie*, and ask for an introduction.'

The apartment in which they sat was a long gallery, traversing almost the entire length of Wanborough Castle, and lit at regular intervals by windows of the height of the walls. The autumn night was falling, and the long perspective was gradually fading as the shadows rose along the walls, adorned by family portraits and groups of statuary.

It was with a little shock of surprise that the Dean suddenly perceived that he and the Earl were no longer alone. No sound of opening or closing door, no footfall on the thick carpet, had announced the presence of a lady, who stood within a few feet of him.

The red glow of the dying sunset fell full upon her, and lit her face and form with a strange brightness, which, taken in conjunction with the suddenness of her appearance, had something weird in it.

She was taller than the average height of women, and of a rather full but graceful figure. Her features were regular and beautiful, her eyes black, brilliant, and inscrutable.

'Ah!' exclaimed his lordship, rising, 'this is fortunate. My dear Madame Obnoskin, let me present to you Dr. Darley, the Dean of Wanborough. He is burning to make your acquaintance.'

'Delighted to meet you, Dean,' said the lady in a clear contralto voice, with a very faint and very piquant foreign accent.

The Dean bowed, and murmured that he was enchanted.

'I have heard so much of you from the Earl that I can only regret that, owing to my annual holiday, our meeting has been so long delayed.'

'You are very good,' said the lady, crossing to his

lordship's side, and bending over his chair. 'You are well to-day, dear friend?'

'Perfectly, I thank you,' he answered.

'I have news for you.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes; good news—great news.'

'You interest me profoundly. May I ask——?'

'I might have told you some days ago, but I delayed till I was certain. The intimations I have received to-day put the matter beyond doubt, and I can speak without the fear of raising false hopes. One of our most powerful personalities will soon be here; if I am not mistaken, an Adept.'

'An Adept?' queried the Dean. 'Pray, Madame Obnoskin, what is that?'

'An Apostle of our religion,' answered the lady; 'a person full of the effulgence of spiritual life, capable of communicating with spirits from beyond the grave.

The words were addressed to the Dean, but the lady's eyes were fixed upon the Earl.

'Dear me!' said the Dean a little fatuously.

Madame Obnoskin spoke with such a perfect calm, with so little recognition of the strangeness of her utterance in ordinary ears, that he was for the moment quite nonplussed.

'May I ask,' he continued, 'how you received this news? By letter?'

'No.'

'By wire, perhaps?' he slyly suggested.

'No,' she answered again, with a smiling shake of the head. 'By an intuition. I have had similar intimations before, and they have always announced the arrival of one of the Adepts. But this is the strangest I have ever felt. The impression has been overwhelming.'

'Dear me!' said the Dean again. 'And this person—is he a spirit or a ghost?'

'Neither; a man like yourself—a mere human being.'

'But, my dear lady——'

'He is a being who has discovered the secrets of the spiritual world. Still wearing the vestments of the

flesh, he is, to all outward seeming, a corporeal projection like ourselves.'

'H'm!' said Dr. Darley, 'and you—are you also a corporeal projection?'

'My dear Dean!' exclaimed the Earl.

'Certainly,' said the lady, with a little laugh.

'A very charming one.'

The lady laughed again.

'And the charming dress you wear—is that also——'

'Of course! All that you behold, all material phenomena, is simply the Kama, adumbrating the ethereal or astral body!'

The Dean gave a sounding cough, and crossed his legs.

'My good friend Dr. Darley,' said the Earl, 'is a little sceptical.'

'Yes?' said Madame Obnoskin, with her little laugh, and the odd, pleasant accent in full play. 'Ah, well, perhaps we shall convert him!'

'I fear it is a little too late in the day for that,'

said the Dean, rising, and glancing at his watch; 'though I should be delighted to receive instruction from so charming a tutress. I trust, madame, that we shall meet again.'

'I hope so, indeed,' she answered, frankly extending her hand. 'And I warn you to prepare your weapons of controversy; I shall convert you if I can.'

The Dean bowed and smiled, then turned to the Earl:

'I was going to ask your lordship, when I was so agreeably interrupted, if you had a copy of Burckhardt's great work on the "Apostolic Succession."'

'Yes; you will find it in the theological section of the library, on the third shelf from the ground, to the left of the oriel window.'

'Thank you. I wish to verify a quotation for to-morrow's sermon.'

He shook hands with the Earl, bowed again to Madame Obnoskin, and left the gallery.

'What a deplorable thing,' he murmured to himself, 'is human credulity!'

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Among the more frequent and favoured guests at Wanborough Castle was the Honourable Mr. Mervyn Darrell, a nephew of the Earl, a young gentleman blessed with a couple of thousands a year, perfect nerves and digestion, a more than moderate share of intelligence, and a colossal belief in himself. One of his few earthly troubles was that he had but very recently left his teens, and one of his secret joys sprang from the fact that he was prematurely bald.

There are a good many sorts of ambitions and aspirations in the world, and the Honourable Mervyn's chief aspiration was to be superior to everything and

everybody: an ambition to which a too youthful appearance would have been a serious drawback.

He had acquired a habit of coming down to Wanborough at any odd moment when the idea might seize him, and he turned up there on the morning after Dr. Darley's introduction to Madame Obnoskin, sent his man upstairs with his traps to the room set aside for his accommodation, and strolled, with his usual air of tolerant boredom, into the drawing-room, where a young lady, a few years his junior, was playing softly to herself on the piano.

'Morning, Lottie,' he said, dropping into a seat. 'Uncle about?'

Lady Carlotta Deepdale, the only daughter of the Earl of Wanborough, was as complete a contrast to her father in temperament as could easily be found. His lordship was a naturally thoughtful man, given over wholly to the study of moral and religious problems, and, if fortune and indolence had not combined to make him avoid active labour, he would probably have made a great name as a writer on

ethics and theology. He was dreamy, unambitious, and excessively unpractical. Lottie was a wide-awake young lady, who troubled her pretty head with no problem whatsoever, except that one—so easily solvable by a young and beautiful woman with a great name and plenty of money—of how to get the greatest amount of honest and harmless happiness out of everyday existence.

'Papa's somewhere about the grounds, walking with that awful woman, and talking theosophy, I suppose.'

'Whom do you mean?' asked Mervyn, taking up a book, and settling himself languidly in his seat.

'That Obnoskin creature,' said Lottie viciously. 'Why doesn't she go? She came here for a week, and she has stayed for over a month already.'

'I suppose,' said Mervyn, polishing his nails with a little apparatus in mother-o'-pearl and washleather, and admiring their sheen in the sunlight, 'that she stays because my uncle asks her to stay.'

'Of course; I know *that*,' said Lottie. 'And that's just where the aggravation comes in.'

'May I ask how?'

'Why, can't you see that papa has perfectly lost his head about her, and knows no more than a child what game she is playing with him?'

'And what game is she playing?' asked Mervyn, still admiringly examining his nails.

'Do you mean to say that *you* don't see it? It's as plain as the nose on your face. The woman wants to become Countess of Wanborough.'

Even Mervyn's affectation of indifference to everything on earth, an indifference he had feigned so long that it had well-nigh become real, vanished for the moment at these words. He concealed an unphilosophically violent start by a stretch and a half-yawn.

'My dear Lottie, what nonsense! Your father would never dream of such a thing!'

'Men at papa's time of life are foolish enough for anything, where a woman is concerned.'

'You are shockingly irreverent,' said Mervyn.

'It's true,' the girl continued. 'And you, with your usual absurdity, are encouraging him in his folly.'

'I!' repeated Mervyn. '*I* encouraging him!'

'Of course you are, by pretending to believe in the rubbish she talks.'

'My dear Lottie, as a person philosophically interested in all human developments——'

'Oh, pray don't talk rubbish about philosophy and developments!' Lottie cut him short. 'I sometimes think you *do* believe in their tomfoolery, for if there *is* any moral complaint about, you're sure to catch it. At college you had the æsthetic scarlatina, and babbled about lilies, and sunflowers, and blue china. Then you became affected with Radicalism—went about disguised in corduroys, and lectured at Toynbee Hall. Then, after a few less serious ailments, you caught the last epidemic, from which you are still suffering.'

'And what may that be?' asked Mervyn, returning the nail-polisher to his waistcoat pocket.

'Individualism *you* call it, I believe; *I* call it the dumps.'

'Dumps!' murmured Mervyn, with a slight indrawing of the breath, as if the expression hurt him physically.

'A sort of moral influenza,' continued Lottie, 'which prevents you from enjoying anything bright and sunny. You are simply impossible!'

'I am consistent,' said Mervyn. 'I range through many varying moods. I am chameleonic in my outward symptoms, but I have never wavered from my faith in Nature, and what is to me its most interesting expression.'

'And what's that?' asked Lottie.

'Myself,' responded the youthful sage.

'That's true enough,' she answered, with a laugh. 'Self is your principal study, I think.'

'My only one,' said Mervyn. 'A great, a noble study. How to evolve—how to *be*!'

'Are you evolving at present?' asked Lottie, standing beside the sofa and looking down at him.

'I hope so.'

'It doesn't hurt you much, does it?' she asked, with mock sympathy.

Mervyn merely closed his eyes for a moment, as if her flippancy were too much to bear, and, reopening them, bent them on his book.

'What's that you are reading?' Lottie inquired.

'"The Sublimation of Personality, or the Quintessence of the Ego."'

'Sounds like something funny,' said Lottie. 'Do you think I should like to read it?'

'If I may judge by your general literary studies, I should say not. It is necessary to have attained to a higher intellectual platform than, I fear, the one you stand on.'

'Really!' said Lottie. 'What's it all about?'

'It is an essay on the imperfections of human society. It shows, absolutely and conclusively, that everything is wrong except one's inner self—that Society, Morality, Duty, Respectability, and the other

shibboleths, are only terms to express various phases of exploded bourgeois superstition.'

'Really!' said Lottie. 'So, you don't believe in Morality?'

'No.'

'Or Duty?'

'No.'

'Or Respectability? Whatever *do* you believe in?'

'In myself; in my right to expand, to live, to evolve in my own way.'

And he threw out his chest, as if he were really expanding.

'H'm! Isn't that a little selfish?' said Lottie.

'Certainly,' responded Mervyn, with his own smile of superiority. 'Self is the only reality. *I* am; but, to *me*, everything else in the world is merely a phenomenon, a figment, which has no provable existence.'

'Oh! Am I a phenomenon, and a figment, and the rest of it?'

'Certainly,' replied Mervyn placidly. 'The object

of Self is to realize phenomena, and in so far as Theosophy helps me to realize them, I accept it.'

'What a charming religion!' said Lottie, sitting at the piano.

She let her fingers wander aimlessly along the keys for a few seconds, and then broke into a rattling chorus from the last Savoy opera. Mervyn writhed upon the sofa like an eel impaled upon a trident, his countenance expressing extreme anguish.

'Don't!' he wailed, with his fingers in his ears. 'Please don't!'

'What's the matter now?' asked Lottie, stopping short.

'That music!' said Mervyn, with a reminiscent shudder.

'Why, don't you like it?'

'Like it!' gasped the theosophic æsthete. 'Like it! It reminds me of—of—what shall I say? Plum pudding—or Dickens!'

'Poor Dickens!' said Lottie. 'And don't you like Dickens?'

'Vulgar optimist!'

'I don't believe you really like anything,' cried Lottie, laughing.

'You are wrong,' said Mervyn. 'I like myself.'

'Epicure!'

'And I enjoy the sharp, acute spasm of artistic agony, the aroma of social decay, for out of these comes Literature, which is Life.'

'I wish you would take something to do you good,' said his cousin. 'You're really in a bad way.'

Mervyn smiled with unmoved placidity.

'I'll tell you what it is, Mervyn. You've adopted this last craze simply because you've failed in everything else.'

'Failed!' echoed Mervyn. 'My dear Lottie, the failures of life are its only successes!'

'Then, what a success you must be! But there, it's so easy to talk in paradoxes.'

'All nature is a paradox. The paradox of Life is Death.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' cried Lottie, beating her little

feet on the ground, and clutching at her hair with a comic desperation. 'For goodness' sake, stop! My head's spinning round!'

'That's really not bad,' said Mervyn, pencilling his last utterance on his shirt-cuff, with his head admiringly on one side. '"The paradox of Life is Death." Not bad at all.'

Lottie watched him for some moments with an amused smile, and was about to make another remark, not too complimentary to her companion, when a figure passed along the terrace beyond the open French windows of the drawing-room.

'Isabel, Isabel!' cried Lottie; and, in answer to the call, a beautiful young girl, carrying in her hand a bunch of newly-plucked white roses from the garden, entered the room. She paused on the threshold, glancing quietly from Lottie to Mervyn, and seemed about to retire, when Lottie ran up to her, and putting her arm about her waist, continued, with a merry laugh: 'Oh, do come in, Isabel! Mervyn is boring me to death!'

'Have you been quarrelling, as usual?' asked Isabel. 'Well, never mind, Mervyn. Lottie doesn't mean half she says.'

'But I do!' cried Lottie, still encircling Isabel's waist, and drawing her forward. 'Just look at him. Do you know what he's doing? He's—he's *evolving!*'

Mervyn made a deprecating gesture and shrugged his shoulders, glancing at Isabel with an expression which plainly said, 'You see this little Philistine?—she doesn't understand me in the least. I live in regions far beyond her comprehension. But you, who live in the ideal, doubtless comprehend me, and I freely leave you to judge between us.'

Fortunately, just then Lottie's attention was diverted from the contemplation of Mervyn's eccentricities to the face of the new-comer.

'How pale you look!' she cried.

'I am a little tired, that's all,' replied Isabel gently, seating herself on a couch near the window, and looking at the flowers which she held in her hand.

'We are all tired nowadays,' said Mervyn, glancing

up again. 'We are the inheritors of centuries of decay.'

So saying, the Apostle of the New Culture rose languidly to his feet, and sauntered to the window.

'I think I'll take a stroll,' he murmured. 'The scent of those roses reminds me that relief from all spiritual weariness is still to be found in Nature herself. Yes; I really think I'll take a stroll.'

Lottie tossed her head, and laughed.

'Yes, do,' she said; 'and leave me to talk to Isabel; adding, as Mervyn was about to pass through the window, 'Why don't you take to bicycling, Mervyn, or something really energetic? I'm sure it would do you good!'

The young man glanced at his cousin with a look of profoundly supercilious pity, and murmured, as he disappeared, 'Ride on a bicycle! Good heavens! I would rather *die!*'

Left alone together, the two young girls sat for some time in silence. A casual observer, seeing them seated side by side, could not fail to have been struck by the

extraordinary contrast between them. Lottie, though 'the daughter of a hundred earls,' was as round, plump, and English as fresh air and a happy country life could make her. She was a blonde of the brightest type, fair-haired, fair-complexioned, and blue-eyed, with dimples in her cheeks, and a face all happiness and sunshine. One would have said, looking at her, that she had never known what trouble was; and one would have added, under the contagion of her good temper, a hearty wish that such knowledge might never come.

Isabel Arlington, on the contrary, with her dark, dreamy eyes, her dark hair, and her pale olive complexion, seemed the very incarnation of abiding melancholy. Beautiful as she was, her beauty seemed of the night rather than of the day, and her very voice, with its deep musical tones, increased the impression of settled sadness. She was tall and slightly built; in these respects also a contrast to her sunny companion.

'Well, Isabel,' said Lottie at last, with a little laugh,

'how should you like to have a lover like that?' And when Isabel smiled without replying, she continued, 'I'm really quite serious when I tell him that he bores my head off. He calls me a Philistine, whatever that means, but I'm sure I'd rather be a Philistine than a bore. But there! don't let us talk about him or about anything so absurd. What *shall* we talk of?—Frank?'

A faint blush flickered on Isabel's cheek, and she bent a still closer scrutiny on the flowers she held in her hand.

'He'll be here to-day, papa says, though I suppose you don't know anything about it? What an odd girl you are!' she continued, after a pause spent in roguish examination of Isabel's face. 'Aren't you glad he's coming?'

'Of course I'm glad,' replied her companion; but there was no great happiness in the tone in which she spoke, as Lottie's ear told her. 'I like Frank very much; he's—he's very kind.'

'He's very fond of you, Isabel. I don't know how

you can take things so coolly. It must be lovely to have a sweetheart. If anyone loved me as Frank loves you, I should be jumping out of my shoes.'

'I'm afraid I'm not so enthusiastic as you, Lottie.'

'But just think of it! When you marry Frank, you'll be a queen of society. You'll have your portrait and pictures of your dresses in all the ladies' papers, and columns of description in the *Times* and the *Morning Post*. Lady Dewsbury! Doesn't it sound splendid? And Frank getting more and more famous every day! He's been in the *Punch* cartoons thirteen times in the last twelve months. I've counted, so I know. And then, when the Earl dies, poor old man, you'll be the Countess of Loamshire; but you mustn't let Frank go and bury himself in that stupid old House of Lords. You must make him be an ambassador, or something. Fancy! if he could be ambassador at Paris!' She clasped her hands, her cheeks flushing and her eyes sparkling, as if the glories she dwelt upon were in store for herself rather than for her companion. 'I could go over and live

with you, and you could chaperon me. Isabel, what is the matter with you? I don't believe you're listening to a word I say.'

'Yes, I am, dear. And I was thinking how much better you would fill such a position than I could.'

'I?' cried Lottie, in genuine comic surprise. 'My dear, I should never do for that sort of thing! I haven't a bit of dignity—not an atom! I should be doing something awful, and compromising my husband's official position, before I had been married a week. I know I should! But you're just cut out for a statesman's wife.'

Isabel smiled faintly at her bright little companion's frank and vivacious admiration of her.

'You love Frank, don't you, dear?' Lottie asked, with sudden seriousness.

She was far too honest and loyal a girl, far too unspoiled by the world of which she knew so little, not to put love, where every true-hearted maiden is sure to put it, before all else that life can offer.

'I am very fond of Frank,' said Isabel.

She spoke quite steadfastly and candidly, but Lottie felt a reservation behind her words, and waited with a rather anxious face for her to speak again.

'Frank is very good and kind, and very clever; but—we are so different.'

'So much the better!' said Lottie gaily. 'It's the people who have differences of character who make the best couples. The people whose ways and tastes are alike, and who you'd think were just cut out for each other, are always unhappy together.'

'Then, what a splendid couple you and Mervyn would make!' said Isabel, with a little laugh, glad, perhaps, of a chance, however slight, of carrying the war into the enemy's country.

'Mervyn!' cried Lottie indignantly. '*I* marry Mervyn! What an idea! No; when I marry, I shall marry a *man*—a man who can do something—fight, or write, or paint, or—or anything! Mervyn can do nothing, except loll about and evolve, as he calls it.'

'Yes,' said Isabel, 'and that is just what I mean. There are women like that, women who are fitted to be the wives of the leaders of men, who can sympathize with their aims, and aid them in their struggles. I shall never be a woman of the world, Lottie. I shall never really care for politics, or be interested in Frank's pursuits, or be able to share his pleasures. All the splendid things you talk of, the social triumphs, the great positions, frighten me. I feel like the wife of the Lord of Burleigh, fading away beneath the burden of an honour unto which I was not born. The landscape-painter would suit me better than the great lord.'

She kept her eyes bent upon the flowers as she spoke, and Lottie watched her keenly, her dimpled face dimmed with a shadow of anxious wonder. Isabel, unwitting of the scrutiny, slowly picked the petals of a rose, and watched them as they flickered from her fingers to the carpet.

'Isabel!' she said suddenly, laying her hand on her companion's arm.

'Yes, dear,' Isabel answered, waking from her brown study with a nervous start.

'I have sometimes thought——' said Lottie, and then stopped short, with her eyes still fixed on Isabel's face.

Isabel, once roused from her abstraction, returned the gaze with eyes as clear and untroubled as Lottie's own.

'Yes, dear,' she prompted her. 'You have sometimes thought——'

'I have sometimes thought,' said Lottie, 'that there might be somebody else—somebody you had met, perhaps, when you were in India with your father, who——'

Isabel rose, and walked a step or two back into the drawing-room.

'My darling!' cried the impetuous Lottie, darting after her, and embracing her waist. 'I haven't offended you?'

Isabel looked down on her from her superior height

with the air of affectionate but calm dignity which she could assume when she chose—an air which Lottie, who honestly admired and rather feared her, never dreamed of resenting.

'Don't talk nonsense, Lottie!' she said, softening the reproof with a kiss.

'But it isn't nonsense,' said Lottie, who, with all her practicality, had as keen a relish for a love-story, with a dash of mystery or romance to flavour it, as every pretty girl should have. 'You must have made hundreds of conquests, and among them all——'

'Hush!' said Isabel. 'What is that?'

A distant rumbling of wheels in the avenue, growing rapidly nearer and louder, drew them both to the balustrade of the broad terrace which encircled the entire castle. A carriage rounded the line of elms which had hitherto hid it from sight, and dashed up to the entrance. A face looked from the open window, and Lottie, clapping her hands with delight,

cried, 'Bravo! It's Frank!' and danced down the steps to welcome Lord Dewsbury.

Isabel, after a momentary pause, followed at a slower pace.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERN LOVER.

Lord Dewsbury will play a sufficiently prominent part in the present narrative to merit somewhat of a formal introduction. The heir and hope of one of the oldest and wealthiest families of England, he was a man thoroughly fitted for the position to which he had been born. He was proud, as was natural in a man of such descent, and, as was natural to a true gentleman of any degree, hid his pride for the most part under a genial courtesy to all sorts and conditions of people with whom he came in contact. He was brave, honourable, arbitrary and generous, as his forebears had been before him, while he had a serene conviction, which he had never paused to examine or

even to formulate, that he and men of his class were the appointed rulers and leaders of the great mass of mankind.

Since the most iron-bound aristocrat cannot escape the influences of the environment of his day and generation, he recognised, and was proud of the clear-sightedness which enabled him to recognise, the right of the great mass to just and kindly government. The people's duty was to him and the class he represented; his duty was to his own instincts as an English gentleman.

For the rest, he was acute, hard-headed, marvellously well-informed on every possible subject, a fluent and convincing speaker, rising sometimes to something like eloquence, keenly alert, obstinately logical, and he had never done five minutes' real thinking in his life. He was a man with no doubts about anything, a man who had inherited his opinions with his birth and his acres as part of the family property.

He was a Churchman just as he was a Tory, because

his father and grandfather had been Churchmen and Tories before him. He believed in the superiority of England and Englishmen over all foreign countries and peoples as he believed in the superiority of his own class over all other classes. A Home Ruler or a Radical was to him a sort of political maniac, a clever and able maniac, it might be, but still a maniac, and he would cheerfully have given his life to save one acre of English territory from dismemberment.

Politically, in a word, he was a young Sir Leicester Dedlock, with more brains, and an up-to-date political education. Socially, he was a charming fellow, even-tempered, genial, and high-spirited. Physically, he was as fine a specimen as one could wish to see of the young English gentleman beginning to verge towards middle age; as hard as nails all over, a superb athlete, splendid shot, boxer, oarsman, rider, and golfer. Somehow, though one of the hardest-worked men of his party, he found time for all these varied pursuits, and for a good deal of innocent social dissipation besides.

A man of such gifts could hardly fail to be popular with women as with men, but a resolute ambition, and the hard work its fulfilment entailed on him, had kept him heart-whole to the verge of six-and-thirty. Since his college days he had never given more than a passing thought to any woman till, at Wanborough Castle, he had met the Earl's niece, the calm, pale, proud girl, who had recently returned from India, committed to her uncle's care by her father, a restless modern Ulysses, who, unable to cease from travel, had started on a desperate journey across the wilds of Thibet.

Isabel Arlington might have seemed the last woman in the world to attract such a man as Dewsbury. Perhaps her very indifference to everything he regarded as best worth having—wealth, social position, political battle and triumph—was the spell which drew her to him.

He had been the despair of mothers and chaperons any time for the last ten years. The prize beauties of successive seasons had surged about him like the

waves of the sea against Ailsa Craig, only to retire defeated. He might have married any woman in England of less than royal rank, and his power of resistance had been tested a score of times with every weapon in the feminine armoury. Women with blood, women with brains, women with money, women with all three, had shot at him, and chased him, and angled for him in vain.

Yet here was a girl, beautiful, certainly, but not more beautiful than a dozen others he had known, not conspicuously clever, the daughter of a retired officer of moderate income, who did none of these things, who did not covet his prospective coronet, or flatter him about his prospective triumphs, but met him with calm friendship, and no more. He was as little of a coxcomb as any man living, but his first impression of Isabel Arlington had been that she was the most finished coquette he had yet encountered.

How else could the heir to seventy thousand per annum and a potential Prime Minister of England

regard the penniless girl whose manner to him was as coldly friendly as it was to any country gentleman she met in her uncle's drawing-room? He had been tried with that bait before, and had not swallowed it, aware, like the shy fish he was, of the hook it covered. But he had soon learned that coquetry of any kind was foreign to this strange girl's nature.

Her calmness had first piqued his sense of humour, then interested, and finally captivated him. Here was the bride worthy of him, the ideal woman he had sought —no vulgar female fortune-hunter, no woman to be dazzled by wealth or the world's regard; but one calm, proud, queenly, and, above all, as he felt, beautifully womanly, full of the capacity of gentle and serene affection for the man who could conquer her reticence and win her love.

Dewsbury soon began to feel as much delight in this quiet girl's lightest word of praise as in the thunders of the crowded House, or the applausive murmurs of London *salons*. Even the strong infusion of mysticism he discovered in her character, which

would have bored and repelled him in another woman, attracted him in her, though, as their friendship thickened, he tried gently and genially to correct it by administering sugared doses of his own hard-headed common-sense.

'Family traits are wonderfully strong,' he had said to her one day. 'You are very like your father.'

'Like my father!' Isabel had answered. 'How can you know that? You have never met him.'

'I don't need to meet him to know that,' said Dewsbury. 'You both have the love of the unknown. He starts out to explore Thibet, the geographical mystery. You try to pierce into the psychical *terra incognita*. Allow for the difference of sex, and the resemblance between you is striking.'

'Yes,' said Isabel thoughtfully; 'there may be something in what you say.'

'And it seems to me,' continued Dewsbury, 'that both expenditures of energy—if you will permit me to say so, Miss Arlington—are equally, or almost equally, mistaken.'

'Yes?' answered Isabel. 'And why so?'

'I can understand exploration when it has a useful and definite end. The exploration which results in the discovery of an America or an Australia, which is useful in finding new outlets for capital and enterprise, justifies itself. But what use can a dreary tract of mountain, covered with snow, and populated by a crowd of ignorant and brutal savages, be to anybody? Such men as Colonel Arlington are rare, and I cannot help thinking it a pity that he should risk his life for such a very inadequate gain. Then, as regards yourself——'

'I can gather your meaning,' said Isabel, 'without your giving yourself the trouble to express it.'

'You are not offended?' asked Dewsbury.

'I am never offended by plain speech which is honestly meant,' Isabel answered. 'If actual and tangible results are all that are worth labouring and suffering for, you are right. My father's life and my life are wasted!'

'Pardon me,' said Dewsbury quickly; 'I did not

say that! I do not think it! But there is so much tangible hard work to do in the world, that it always seems to me a pity to see energy applied to negative rather than positive results.'

He owned to himself later on that this particular lesson on his favourite doctrine of 'common-sense' had been rather a failure, though he knew that a woman of Isabel's nature and intelligence was far more likely to respect, and ultimately to love, a man who discarded the ordinary methods of love-making, and gave her credit for the capacity—none too common among her sex—of dispassionate self-criticism. Isabel was not a woman to be caught by pretty speeches, and, for all her dreaminess and unpracticality, would rather listen to a home-truth than a conventional compliment.

And, indeed, so far as she was attracted by Dewsbury at all, she was attracted by his intellectual and moral honesty. His hard and fast ideas on all created things repelled her. But she liked and respected him for showing himself so

clearly, although what he showed was not particularly lovable.

A great battle was going on in the girl's heart. She knew that Dewsbury loved her. That he was wealthy, famous, and certain of a brilliant career did not affect her in the least. She left those figments aside. The only question in her mind was whether she could make him such a wife as such a man should have.

She liked him thoroughly, and respected him profoundly, but she did not love him, nor could she, after much conscientious effort, take a real interest in the world of which he was so brilliant a figure. As she had confessed to Lottie, his triumphs—or rather the prospect of her share in them—frightened her. And she held the grand old creed, less popular nowadays than it once was with her sex, that nothing but love can justify marriage. If she married Frank, her every thought, her very life, must be his.

Dewsbury sprang from the carriage, and returned Lottie's hearty greeting in kind, though he could not

keep his eyes from wandering to the tall, lithe figure of Isabel, as she slowly descended the steps.

'And you, my dear Isabel?' he asked. 'You are well?'

'Quite, thank you, Frank!' she answered. 'I need not ask how you are. You look radiant. You bring good news?'

'The best. The Liberal Ministry has resigned. We are certain of a big majority.'

'I am glad, Frank—very glad, for your sake.'

'Ah,' said Frank, with a little sigh, 'you don't care much for politics, I'm afraid. Well, we must see what the election and a bit of canvassing will do for you, and you may blossom into a Primrose dame before I see the Clock Tower again. Hullo, Darrell, you here!'

'Yes,' said Mervyn, who had just lounged up to the little group. 'I came over from Oxford to interview the Obnoskin. Wonderful woman! You'll meet her at dinner, Frank.'

'I suppose so,' said Dewsbury resignedly. 'And Lord Wanborough? Still trying to solve the riddle

of the universe, and running after the will-o'-the-wisp of Theosophy?'

'I am afraid so, Frank,' said Isabel, smiling.

'Has the Obnoskin converted *you* yet?' asked Dewsbury.

Isabel shook her head.

'No; I saw enough of Theosophy and Theosophists in India. I don't desire to know more of them.'

'Papa's gone simply crazy,' said Lottie. 'He's ready to swallow any amount of nonsense.'

'Dear, dear! the folly of it!' said Dewsbury 'Seeking to know what never can be known! Opening his doors to every kind of humbug!'

'Ah,' said Mervyn, who had listened to the talk with his usual air of bored tolerance, 'talking of humbug, that reminds me.'

'Reminds you of what?' asked Lottie.

'Of an acquaintance of mine. A wonderful fellow! I was introduced to him the other day at The Travellers, just after his arrival from India. He's fresh from the headquarters of the occult faith, and

an adept in all its mysteries. I told the Earl about him this morning, and he has asked me to invite him down here.'

'You'll do nothing of the kind, if you please, Mervyn,' said Lottie sharply.

'I've done it already, my dear Lottie,' answered Mervyn. 'I wrote to him this afternoon.'

'I'll stop the letter,' said Lottie, starting up the steps leading to the balcony.

'You can't. Simmons went off with the post-bag ten minutes ago.'

'It's shameful!' cried Lottie. 'As if the Obnoskin wasn't enough, without another importation!'

'Perhaps it's for the best, Lottie,' said Dewsbury. 'There's a good deal in what Dickens says—that "the harder an unsound hobby is ridden the better, because it is the sooner ridden to death."'

'This gentleman comes from India, you say, Mervyn?' asked Isabel.

'Yes; he's not a native, though—at least, not altogether—though I should say he had a touch of the

tar-brush. Very gentlemanly person, and particularly well-read.'

'What is his name?'

'Woodville. Perhaps you've heard of him?'

'No,' said Isabel thoughtfully. 'I know nobody of that name.'

'I do, though,' said Frank; 'or, at least, I heard of him. He came over with an introduction to our chief. A Theosophist, you say?'

'The prince of Theosophists. What they call a Mahatma.'

'Oh, how I wish papa would give up all this rubbish and go in for something sensible,' said Lottie; 'billiards, or—or even politics!'

'Thank you,' said Frank, with a laugh. 'But you mustn't chaff *me*, Lottie; Mervyn will be jealous. Will you walk round the grounds, Isabel? You don't know how delicious it is to get away from the jar and clamour of politics to this quiet old place.'

They sauntered away together, leaving Lottie and Mervyn to continue the eternal squabble in which,

during each of the latter's visits to the Castle, their lives were passed. The turf was soft beneath their feet, the encircling trees held the outer world at bay, the solemn voices of the rooks mingled with the chant of the birds singing good-night to the declining sun.

'You are sure you will win in the election?' asked Isabel.

'Certain!' said Dewsbury. 'The country is sick of Radical cheeseparing and muddling. We shall come back with a grand majority and a great programme. But I didn't ask you to walk with me to talk politics, Isabel.'

'I remember the time,' she said, 'when you scarcely cared to talk of anything else.'

'Times change,' said Dewsbury, 'and men with them.'

'Isn't that rather a Radical maxim for such a strong Conservative as you?' she asked, with a smile.

'Politics again! No, I am not to be drawn in that

way. I want to forget them for a day or two, till the fight begins again.'

Isabel certainly had no great interest in the subject which Dewsbury tabooed for the moment, though she would have been glad of any topic which would keep him from speaking on the theme she feared was in his mind. But she could find no other, and so remained silent perforce till her companion spoke again.

They had reached a moss-grown stone bench at the edge of a parterre of smooth turf, beneath which the park sloped precipitately to a line of immemorial beeches marking its confines. Through their thick clustered leaves the roofs and spire of the little town were visible against the fading glory of the sunset.

Isabel sat in obedience to Frank's silent gesture, and he stood beside her for another moment in silence.

'Isabel!' he said suddenly, and for him rather nervously, 'I have something to say to you.'

She shot a quick glance at him, and lowered her eyes.

'You can guess what it is. You know already that I love you. I ask you now if you will be my wife.'

She sat silent, intertwisting her fingers, afraid to answer the question or to meet the eyes she felt were bent on her.

'If the proposal seems sudden, and I dare say it is, take what time you will to answer it. I am a busy man, and I have had little time for love-making, but I think you must know how much I care for you.'

He took her hand, and she made no resistance, but there was no answering warmth to his gentle pressure. He bent closer to her. She did not avoid him, but he felt her whole body shrinking.

'Have you no answer for me, Isabel?'

'I don't know what to say, Frank,' she commenced at last. 'I—I am afraid.'

'Afraid!' he echoed tenderly. 'Afraid of what?'

'Of myself,' she said. 'Of my fitness to be your wife.'

'You are worthy of a far better man than I,' he said, 'worthy of any man alive. I love you, Isabel. I have watched and studied you. I have learned to know you, and every fresh knowledge I have gained has deepened my love. I have worked for you of late far more than for myself. Before I met you my ambition was cold and selfish, but now I feel that all that I could win would be valueless—mere dust and ashes, if you should refuse to share it with me. I feel as if, with you beside me, there was nothing I could not do; without you, there will be nothing I shall *care* to do.'

'Give me time, Frank,' she pleaded. 'Give me time to learn my heart and see my duty clearly. Don't think that I am insensible of the honour you do me. I know there is no woman in England who would not be proud to be your wife. I know you are brave and good and kind, and worthy of any woman's love, but I cannot answer you yet. Frank, I must tell you something. Don't call me childish and silly. I know beforehand what you will think, but we are

not all made alike, and I cannot banish this thing from my mind.'

She then told him brokenly of the vision of her father, which, on the preceding day, she had told to the Earl of Wanborough.

'Frank, I am as certain as that you and I are here together, as certain as I am of my own existence, that my father lives and will return to me. Think if he comes, how could I meet him if I had been false to him?'

'False to him!' repeated Frank in astonishment.

'I should feel so if I formed such a tie as marriage at such a time as this. For two years we have heard no word of him. He may be sick, or a prisoner in that wild country, all alone, and I, his daughter, whom he loved better than his own life—don't you see how selfish, how horrible it would be?'

Dewsbury was in a cruel dilemma. It was hard for a man of his shrewd, worldly common-sense to be held back from the dearest of life's prizes by such

gossamer manacles as these, woven from the fabric of a dream. Yet, what could he say? To ridicule the hope to which she clung so tenaciously would have been an unpardonable brutality. He had long ago made up his mind as to Colonel Arlington's fate, and had tried often, with the greatest tenderness and gentleness, to instil into Isabel's mind his belief that her father was dead, and to induce her to bow herself to the unalterable decree of fate. And now the foolish, impressionable child had received this 'intimation,' and clung to its message with a faith which, during the recital of the dream, had almost infected *him*. Revolted common-sense on the one side, prudence and the desire, natural to a lover, not to shock Isabel by a too open confession of his unbelief in the trustworthiness of her visions, made sad havoc in his mind.

'Well,' he said at last, 'God grant it may be so! But you will name some time, Isabel; some term when you will feel conscience-free to act?'

'Do not press me now,' said Isabel. 'I know how

I am taxing your generosity, but at the earliest possible moment you shall have my answer.'

And with that very doubtful consolation, Dewsbury forced himself as best he could to be content.

The tranquil evening was succeeded by a night of heavy rain and storm.

Lottie and Isabel, whose bedrooms communicated, sat together till, in the early morning, the tempest abated something of its fury. Lottie was ordinarily a sound sleeper; but, as it seemed to her, she had scarcely lost consciousness, when she was recalled to it by an oppressive sense of a presence in her room.

She started up in bed, and there, in the clear, cold light of the early dawn, stood a white-robed figure, looking towards her with wide-open, unseeing eyes.

Her first impulse was to scream aloud, but recognising Isabel, she held back her cry for help.

Isabel walked slowly round the room, looking sightlessly here and there, and turning her head from

side to side, as if listening to voices inaudible to her companion. Presently she spoke, with the dead, level monotony of sleeping speech.

'Philip! Did you not call me, Philip? I am here. I hear your voice, but it is dark. Where are you, Philip?'

She stretched out her hands gropingly, and so stood for a moment, then, with a deep, quivering sigh, passed from Lottie's sight to her own room.

CHAPTER IV.

'THE ASRA.'

It was a rather dull party which met next morning at the breakfast-table.

Frank and Isabel had their own reasons for being rather constrained in each other's presence, and Lottie, remembering the weird appearance of Isabel in her room only a few hours before, was too devoured with natural curiosity as to what her friend's dreaming utterance might have meant to be in full possession of her ordinary conversational fluency. A dozen times already it had been on the tip of her tongue to tell Isabel of her nocturnal adventure, but the ascendancy the latter so easily kept over her held her silent. Madame Obnoskin felt herself unpopular

with all the inmates of the house save his lordship, who was busy with a pile of correspondence, and spoke but little. She held her own counsel, smiling, perfectly at ease, keenly and unobtrusively watchful of the others, and for the most part silent.

Mervyn did not appear till the others had nearly finished their meal. When he at last appeared, he walked up to his uncle, and, having exchanged greetings with him, gave him an open telegram.

'I have just received that, sir,' he said, 'from my friend Woodville. He will arrive here by the 6.15.'

The Earl glanced at the telegram, and returned it with a smile of contentment.

'He will be welcome,' he said; 'most welcome. My dear Mervyn, will you kindly see that a carriage is in waiting at the station to convey him here?'

'Woodville?' said Lord Dewsbury. 'Is that the fellow you were speaking of yesterday—that Mahatma fellow?'

'Yes,' said Mervyn. 'The Mahatma fellow will be here to-night.'

Dewsbury gave a scarcely-perceptible shrug, and, rising from the table, murmured something about having work to do that morning, and betook himself to his own quarters. Lottie and Isabel left the table a moment later, leaving the Earl, Madame Obnoskin, and Mervyn together.

'Isn't it rather a curious thing, Madame Obnoskin,' asked Mervyn, 'that you, who are so highly placed in the theosophical hierarchy, should not know so famous a man in your own line as my friend Woodville?'

'But I do not say that I do not know him,' replied madame. 'It is very possible that I do; it is almost certain that I know *of* him; but if so, it will be by another name—by his spirit name, perhaps. You will remember, dear friend'—she addressed the Earl—'that I warned you of the coming of an Adept, one of the elect.'

'You did, indeed, madame.'

'If this new-comer should be all that Mr. Darrell describes,' said madame, 'he may have been the

person from whom I received the intimation. I felt it strongly last night; it is even stronger to-day. I feel that a great moment is coming; that we are on the verge of great events; that a grand triumph for our common religion may be near at hand.'

'A triumph, madame?' repeated the Earl. 'Of what kind?'

'How should I know?' asked madame, with her pleasant little laugh. 'I do not pretend to prophetic power. But something will happen — something remarkable—before long. Strange influences are about us, working upon us. The air is full of them May they be benignant to this house, and to you, dear friend.'

The Earl inclined his head gravely. Mervyn, who was, in his own fashion, at least as much a philosopher as a Theosophist, made a pretty solid breakfast, undisturbed by the predictions of his fair neighbour, and strolled out with a cigarette on to the terrace. Lord Wanborough sat musing for a time.

'I have not your capacity, madame,' he said presently, 'of reading the subtler signs by which the approach of impending phenomena may be realized; but I, too, feel that strange events are nearing us. Isabel's dream the other night, your prediction of the appearance of one of the Adept, Mervyn's chance meeting with this Mr. Woodville, for whom he claims such wonderful power; all these things combine to point to something—something of grave import.'

'Yes. At last, dear friend, you will be convinced.'

'For myself,' said the Earl, 'I need no convincing. Your inspired teaching, my own slight studies, have led me far towards complete belief. But there are others——'

'Your daughter, for instance,' suggested Madame Obnoskin.

'Carlotta, I fear,' said the Earl, 'is frivolous by nature. She will never take life seriously. I was thinking rather of my niece, Miss Arlington.'

'Yes,' said madame. 'Charming as Miss Arlington is, and profoundly capable by nature of becoming

an adept in divine mysteries, she is an adverse influence.'

'She has strong religious prejudices against Theosophy. She thinks it impious to attempt to pry behind the veil. I have tried to convince her that our attempts to pierce the mystery of living are absolutely compatible with full acceptance of the Christian doctrine, but hitherto I have failed. I do not think it likely that she will ever be converted. She will most probably marry Lord Dewsbury, and he——'

'Ah,' said madame. 'Another adverse influence, and a very strong one.'

'Yes,' said Lord Wanborough; 'I fear so. I like Dewsbury; he is a fine fellow, full of all kinds of good qualities, but a pure Materialist, though nominally, I believe, he belongs to the Church. We shall certainly not convince Dewsbury.'

'Yet I have known,' said madame, 'cases as hard to convince, people as full of prejudice as Lord Dewsbury himself, convinced of the truth. Natures

such as his require actual, tangible, brutal proof. In other words, they must see and handle before they believe. Well, if this Mr. Woodville is worthy of his fame, he should be able to produce some sign, some manifestation of the powers whose secrets he has penetrated, to convince the most prejudiced.'

'May it be so,' said the Earl. 'It is my one prayer—"Lead us to the light."'

'Ah,' said madame, 'my life will not have been spent in vain, your charity to the poor widow will not have been thrown away, if any poor help I have given has been of real service. This atones for much, for the scorn of the incredulous and worldly, the contempt of the deaf and blind, who will not hear and see. Dear friend, you will never let unkind tongues part us. I am alone in a world of unbelief—a weak and solitary woman.'

'An inspired one,' said the Earl.

'I have a favour to ask of you,' continued madame. 'A very little one. Will you grant it?'

'With more than pleasure, if I can.'

'Easily. Will you think of me sometimes by my spirit name—Evangeline?'

'Evangeline!' repeated the Earl. 'It is appropriate to our relation one to another.'

'Think of me by that name,' said madame softly. 'The name I bear is that of my husband, and reminds me daily of early sufferings, and an unhappy marriage. In the East, among believers, the spirit name is all-sufficient.'

'A small favour, indeed,' said the Earl. 'Far too small to recompense the services you have done me.'

'Ah,' broke in madame, with a vivid motion of deprecation, 'do not talk of recompense! I do not work for worldly gain. Your friendship, communion with a soul like yours, the knowledge that I have helped in some small degree to bring you to the light you craved—these things are recompense enough, and more than enough.'

She offered her hand with frank cordiality. The

old gentleman took it, and raised it to his lips with a grace half courtly, half paternal.

'I must leave you now, Evangeline,' he said, smiling. 'We shall meet later in the day.'

He left the room, and madame, as she heard the door close behind him, dropped into a seat, with a quiet smile of triumph.

'I think I have him safe. All that I need now is Woodville's assistance.'

She took a folded letter from her bosom.

'I wonder what he means by this?

'"Keep your eyes open, and learn all you can for my information when we meet. There is a grand *coup* to be done at Wanborough Castle, something vastly more important than you can guess."

And what can that be, I wonder, my good Woodville? You are a clever man, Philip, and a bold one, but did you ever play a bolder game than mine? I think not.'

She sat silent for a moment, and then murmured to

herself, so softly that her own ears barely caught the sound of the words, 'Countess of Wanborough!'

'Yes,' she continued voicelessly, 'I shall succeed. When did Woodville and I ever fail when we pursued one object faithfully together? And whatever his scheme may be, it cannot traverse mine. Countess of Wanborough! Ah!'

A great mirror, which stretched from floor to ceiling of the breakfast-room, reflected her figure as she sat. She rose, and swept a bow to her image in the glass.

'Bon jour, Madame la Comtesse!'

Lottie's ringing laugh came up through the open window from the lawn below. Madame's face changed as she heard it. She took a step or two forward to a place of vantage where, hidden by the lace curtains, she could see the two girls sitting together.

'I shall find an answer to your insolence, young ladies,' she murmured. 'You shall look on at my triumph and acknowledge my authority.'

Her eyes travelled over the rich verdure of the park,

and rested slowly and caressingly on the priceless objects with which the room was crowded.

'What a triumph it would be! What a triumph it *shall* be—mad, delirious dream as it would have seemed but a month ago!'

'I wonder where Mervyn can have got to?' said Lottie that afternoon, as she presided over the tea-table. 'I never knew him miss tea-time before.'

'He has driven over to the station,' said Dewsbury, 'to meet Mr. Woodville. He ought to be back pretty soon now. How fast the evenings are drawing in! Mightn't we have the lamps lit, Lottie?'

'Not yet, Frank,' said Isabel from the window. 'I love the twilight. This is the best hour of the day.'

'I like it, too,' said Lottie. 'It's nice and creepy. Doesn't anybody know a ghost-story?'

'Perhaps Madame Obnoskin could oblige us?' suggested Frank.

'No; I am a very bad story-teller,' said madame.

('I wonder what you *can* do then, if you can't do that?' was Lottie's silent and uncharitable comment.) 'But would not Miss Arlington sing to us?'

'Yes, do, Isabel,' said Lottie. 'Something nice and twilighty, and I'll play for you.'

As she moved to the piano, Mervyn entered the room.

'You don't deserve any tea, Mervyn, for being late,' she continued; 'but I'll forgive you this once.'

'Thanks, very much,' said Mervyn; 'but I don't want it. I had a cup of tea at the station.'

'Oh, indeed! Then I suppose your wonderful friend has arrived?'

'Yes. He's *here!* I've just introduced him to my uncle, who has received him with open arms.'

Lottie struck a petulant chord on the piano.

'Come along, Isabel,' she said. 'What will you sing? Oh, I know. Sing "The Sultan's Daughter." That's romantic and twilighty.'

She played the brief and tender prelude of Rubinstein's beautiful ballad, and Isabel's clear voice, plaintive as the theme, rose on the darkened air—

'Day by day the Sultan's daughter,
Wandered idly by the fountain;
By the fountain in the garden,
Near the splash of the white waters.

'Day by day the young slave watched her,
Standing lonely near the fountain;
Day by day his face grew paler
As he watched the Sultan's daughter.

'Then at last the Sultan's daughter
To the young slave ran, exclaiming,
"Tell me now thy name and kindred,
What thou art, and whence thou comest?"

'And the slave replied, "Mohammed
Is my name—I come from Yemen—
And my kindred are the Asra,
Who, whene'er they love, must *die!*"'

The listeners sat enthralled, too wholly given up to the sweet influences of the hour and the delicate charm of the voice to mark that their numbers had been increased by two—the Earl and a second person—who stood leaning against a console on the further side of the room, his face in deep shadow.

Isabel's tones died slowly into a silence left unbroken for a second or two.

'Poor slave!' she said, with a sigh and a smile together.

'Rather too sentimental for my taste,' said Dewsbury. 'What says Shakspere? "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love."'

'I don't suppose he died of love,' said Lottie. 'He most likely had his head chopped off for daring to love the Sultan's daughter.'

'No,' said Isabel. 'The Sultan gave him a kingdom, and he married the Princess.'

'And lived happy ever after,' added Lottie. 'Yes, that's the best ending to the story.'

'Yes,' said Isabel. 'I think the slave lived.'

A strange voice broke in from the darkness behind them: 'Yet Heine tells us that he died!'

Isabel started with a stifled cry, and all turned in the direction of the mysterious voice.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIP WOODVILLE.

The butler and a footman entering at that moment with lamps filled the apartment with a sudden blaze of light.

The stranger, to whom all eyes were turned, had advanced to the middle of the room, and stood there, smiling deprecation of the alarm his unexpected utterance had given.

He was tall, and strongly though rather slightly built, swarthily pallid, with clear-cut, high-bred features, and rippling hair, worn rather longer than the fashion dictated, jetty black, save where it was touched above the temple with a few thin streaks of premature gray. Save for a slight black moustache,

beneath which his teeth shone with ivory whiteness, he was clean-shaven.

'I fear I have startled your friends,' he said to the Earl. 'I hope they will pardon me.'

There was the faintest possible hint of a musical foreign accent in his voice, which was strikingly rich and full.

'Let me introduce my daughter, Lady Carlotta. Lord Dewsbury—Mr. Woodville.'

Dewsbury acknowledged the presentation with a curt nod. The eyes of the two men met, at first with no definite expression, but at the second glance they crossed like sword-blades. At Isabel's cry, Dewsbury had made an instinctive protective movement towards her, and his arm still lingered unconsciously round her waist as the Earl spoke.

A curious spasm, brief as a lightning flash, crossed Mr. Woodville's face as he noted their position; a second later his features had resumed the rather bored and languid calm which seemed to be their habitual expression. Dewsbury caught the flash of emotion,

and his eyes answered it with a questioning challenge. The old Earl, noting nothing, went on with his introductions.

'My niece, Miss Arlington. Isabel, my dear, Mr. Woodville.'

Isabel had conquered the emotion which had for a moment overpowered her, and received the stranger with a quiet bow. Her face was deadly pale, and she was glad of the support of the piano, on which her hand was resting.

'Madame Obnoskin,' continued the Earl.

'I am profoundly happy,' said Mr. Woodville, with a more marked deference than he had shown at any previous introduction, 'to meet a lady so distinguished.'

Madame bowed low in answer to his words.

'It is strange, Mr. Woodville,' she said, 'that I should never have heard your name. Your friend, Mr. Darrell, speaks of you as one of our most remarkable teachers.'

'The circumstance is easily explained,' said Mr.

Woodville lightly. 'I have borne my present name only a little while. A relative of my father's, and a devotee of the faith, died six months ago, and left me his heir, attaching the condition that I should adopt his name. Till then I bore the name of Carton.'

'Is it possible?' exclaimed Madame Obnoskin, in a low voice, and with a look of almost awe-struck reverence. 'My dear Lord Wanborough, you are indeed fortunate. Mr. Carton—Mr. Woodville—is perhaps the most remarkable man now professing our religion. No wonder the intimation was so strong—so overwhelming.'

'It is a very strange circumstance, Mr. Woodville,' said the Earl—'a most remarkable circumstance, that your appearance here was distinctly foretold by Madame Obnoskin.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Woodville a little languidly. 'I am glad to have been announced by so charming a herald.'

'Such intimations,' said the Earl, a little puzzled by the cool fashion in which his guest received his

information, 'are, I suppose, matters of course among the adept?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Woodville; 'they are fairly common. I am afraid, Lady Carlotta,' he continued, 'that I was a little inconsiderate in startling you so. May I hope I am forgiven?'

'Certainly. Though it *was* a little weird. Won't you have a cup of tea? Ring the bell, Frank, please. The water is cold. I hope you had a pleasant journey from London, Mr. Woodville?'

'More than pleasant,' he answered. 'This is one of the most memorable days of my life. I have had my first glimpse of real rural English scenery.'

'This is your first visit to England, then?' asked the Earl.

'Yes, my first visit. I had read of its beauties, and tried to imagine them, but the reality goes far beyond any dream or description. To one who, like myself, has passed all his life in the East the effect is altogether indescribable.'

'Is it your intention to stay for long?' asked the Earl.

'I really don't know. I have no definite intention in the matter. I shall stay as long as I am permitted, and go when I am sent.'

'When you are sent?' repeated the Earl, puzzled anew by the phrase.

'Yes,' Mr. Woodville replied wearily; 'when the presences I serve require my services elsewhere. Pardon me, Miss Arlington. Your name is not a common one. Might I ask if you are in any way related to Colonel Arlington, the famous traveller?'

Isabel raised her eyes to his, and made as if she would speak, but no word issued from her lips.

'His only daughter,' said the Earl, speaking for her. 'Pray say no more on that topic, Mr. Woodville.'

Woodville gave him a quick sign of intelligence, and sipped his tea in silence.

'You know the East well, Mr. Woodville?' suddenly asked Lord Dewsbury.

'I was born there.'

'Then—pardon me—you are not an Englishman?'

'My father was English.'

'Your visit to England is not, if I may so express it, professional?'

'Professional?' repeated Mr. Woodville, bending forward in polite inquiry. 'I fear I hardly understand you.'

'I thought, perhaps,' continued Dewsbury, 'in view of your connection with Theosophy——'

'Do you call Theosophy a profession? In India we regard it as a religion.'

'And a noble one!' interrupted the Earl.

'I might,' continued Woodville, sinking back into his seat—'I might describe any worldly pursuit—medicine, mechanics, or politics, for example—as a profession. I should hardly have thought of applying the term to Theosophy. If a disinterested inquiry into things spiritual is a profession, then Theosophy is my profession.' He added, with a seemingly casual

glance in the direction of Isabel, 'In that case, I am here on a professional errand.'

'Candidly,' said Lord Dewsbury, 'I never associated disinterestedness with Theosophy.'

'Indeed! May I ask, my lord, if you have studied the subject?'

'I have never taken the trouble,' answered Dewsbury. 'But I am sceptical.'

'Scepticism,' said Mr. Woodville, 'is often the offspring of uninstruction.'

'We are all sceptical,' said Lottie, who had been dividing a keen regard between Dewsbury and Mr. Woodville during their conversation, 'except papa.'

'And me,' put in Mervyn.

'Oh,' said Lottie to him, over her shoulder, '*you* don't count!'

'And Miss Arlington?' asked Mr. Woodville. 'Is she also among the sceptics?'

'Yes,' Dewsbury answered curtly. 'My dear Isabel, are you going?'

'Yes,' said Isabel.

She had risen from her seat as if to go; then, as if relenting in her purpose, remained standing.

'It is so close here; I cannot breathe.'

'Shall I come with you?' asked Lottie.

'No, no; I shall be better alone.'

She passed through the open French window on to the balcony.

'Poor child!' said the Earl. 'You touched upon a tender chord when you spoke of her father. Poor Arlington! There is his picture, taken shortly before he left England for the last time. For more than two years we have had no news of him.'

'Well,' said Mr. Woodville, 'no news is often good news.'

'Do you think it possible——' began the Earl.

'That Colonel Arlington will return? I think it more than possible. He and his daughter were much attached?'

'Passionately! Nothing will convince her that he is dead. Why should you think that he is living?'

'In the first place, I know, as all the world knows,

Colonel Arlington's record — his fearlessness, his wealth of resource, his indomitable courage and determination. They have saved him often before this, why should they fail him now? That is a purely human reason for hope, and a good one. Then—do not think me presumptuous for venturing on an opinion on so short an acquaintance—I should say that Miss Arlington is a young lady endowed with a large measure of psychic sympathy, what the spiritualists would call an undeveloped medium. The intuitions of such natures are often of enormous value, of far greater value than the common-sense, logical deductions of ordinary people. Since she is so convinced that her father survives, I think the chances are strongly in favour of her being right.'

The talk was abruptly ended at this point by the clang of the dressing-bell.

'Lottie, my dear,' said the Earl, reminded of his duties as host by the sound. 'I should have asked you before—where have you put Mr. Woodville?'

'I told Brown to prepare the turret-chamber, papa. Mr. Woodville will find his things there.'

'The turret chamber?' repeated the Earl a little dubiously.

'The turret chamber sounds interesting,' said Woodville; 'nice, and antique, and ghostly.'

'Well,' said the Earl, with a smile, 'you have just hit upon the doubt in my mind. It is said—it is a legend connected with the place—that the room *is* haunted. It is occasionally used, but we make it a point to warn anybody who sleeps in it of its reputation.'

'Oh,' said Woodville, 'the turret chamber for me, by all means! I am profoundly obliged to Lady Carlotta. A well-accredited, authentic family ghost is rare. I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance.'

'*Her* acquaintance,' said the Earl. 'The ghost is —or shall I say was?—a lady. If you will follow me, Mr. Woodville, I will conduct you to your quarters. By the terrace will be the shorter way.'

He led the way out on to the terrace, and along it to the foot of a steep flight of stone steps, flanked by a lofty wall pierced at regular intervals with cross-shaped *meurtrières*.

'This is the oldest part of the castle,' said the Earl, 'and dates from a century before the Conquest.'

He opened a ponderous door of oaken beams, clamped by huge stanchions of hammered iron, and pierced, like the wall, with slits, through which the besieged defenders of the castle had harassed their enemies with arrows and cross-bow bolts, and entered a gloomy corridor, paved and walled with huge slabs of granite.

'It is a little dark. Here are the steps.'

They mounted anew, and the Earl threw open a door, revealing a large, cosily-furnished apartment, lit by a large brass lamp depending from the ceiling and the flickering flames of a generous fire of coal and wood. The walls were hung with faded tapestry.

'This is the room,' said the Earl. 'I used, years

ago, to make a study of it; but my legs and lungs are not what they were, and now I prefer a more accessible part of the house. Ghosts apart, I think you will be fairly comfortable here. You can be absolutely alone if you have need of quiet to write and study, and the view from the window is as fine as anything in the country.'

'A charming room, my dear Lord Wanborough!' said Mr. Woodville. 'And you—did the apparition ever trouble you?'

'No,' said the Earl; 'she never favoured me with a visit, or, if she did, she remained invisible.'

'May I ask the particulars of the legend? Ghost stories are always interesting.'

'Well, we are not fond of referring to the story in the family; but everybody knows it, and you would be certain to hear the details from somebody during your stay in the castle. A certain unhappy lady, the sister of an ancestress of mine, stabbed herself in this room two hundred years ago.'

'Two hundred years ago!' echoed Woodville. 'A

very venerable ghost by this time! Of course, she killed herself for love?'

'Yes, a young fellow, a page in the service of the family, managed to entrap her affections, and used, it is said, to meet her at night on the battlements. The intrigue was discovered, and the lady's brothers lay in ambush in the room below, and killed him. There is a stain upon the stone floor, which is said to be caused by his blood.'

'Well,' said Woodville smilingly, 'if the White Ladye does me the honour of a visit, she shall be courteously received. Pray don't let me detain you longer, my lord. You have to dress as well as I.'

The old gentleman left him to himself, and Woodville, aided by a soft-footed, deft-handed man, who appeared from the curtained recess which formed his bedroom, performed his toilet, and descended to the dining-room.

The evening passed away uneventfully. The newcomer talked freely over the dinner-table with the easy and somewhat languid manner of a man of the

world, but scarcely any allusion was made to what Dewsbury had called his profession or to the religion he was said to teach. Both Dewsbury and Isabel were very silent, and the talk was monopolized by Woodville, Madame Obnoskin, Mervyn, and the Earl.

At an early hour the party broke up, and Woodville returned to his new quarters.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE TURRET-ROOM.

The moment Woodville found himself alone, his manner underwent a sudden and extraordinary change. He was like a man who throws off an irksome dress and mask, used to cloak his true identity, and who appears altogether without disguise. The droop of the shoulders, the general lassitude of look and mien, the dreamy languor of the half-closed eyes, were altogether gone. He stood erect, expanding his chest, as if for air; his dark eyes flashed, his nostrils dilated, and he seemed to be drawing in a great breath of life.

Over the old-fashioned chimneypiece there was an antique mirror in a panel of carved oak; the quick-

silver had run, and the glass was misty and blurred; but thither his eyes turned, as if involuntarily, and he saw his own face, reflected as in a dim magician's glass.

He drew nearer, looked at the reflection, and then, with a quick gesture and a low laugh, ran his fingers through his hair, and looked again. The inspection seemed to satisfy him, for his eyes flashed brightly as he turned away.

The walls of the chamber were hung with old and faded tapestry, wrought with hunting groups, and other pictures of the chase. From the ceiling swung the large oil-lamp, burning very dimly, but the chimneypiece was lit with wax candles in quaint wooden candelabra.

Opposite the door by which Woodville had entered was a curtained recess containing a modern brass bedstead, and in front of the fireplace was a cosy modern settee; but the rest of the furniture was of old black oak—black oak chairs, an oaken writing-table, and an oaken wardrobe, dressing-table, and

chest of drawers. The window, which faced the fireplace, was mullioned, and formed a recess, where there was an old seat, also of black oak.

Woodville had only had time to divest himself of his dress-coat, and throw on a dressing-jacket, when there was a knock at the door, and the old butler once more appeared, followed by two footmen carrying a tantalus-stand of spirits, glasses, a syphon of soda-water, and a box of cigars, all of which were set down on a small table near the fireplace. These preparations were scarcely complete, when the Earl himself appeared.

'Quite comfortable, I hope, Mr. Woodville?' he said, with his usual benignant smile. 'I think it advisable, on the principle of *similia similibus curantur*, to provide you with spirits of human manufacture, to neutralize the effect of those which are of superhuman origin, and are said to haunt the turret chamber.'

'Thank you,' replied Woodville, relapsing at once into his former subdued manner, and answering the Earl's smile with a look of gentle languor. 'I shall

certainly try their efficacy; and since your lordship is here, perhaps you will join me.'

At a look from their master, the butler and servants withdrew, while the Earl sat down on the settee before the fire.

'The room has not been occupied lately,' he said, 'though my housekeeper sees that it is always kept habitable. I thought you would like a fire. Even in summer these old rooms are cheerless and comfortless without firelight.'

While the Earl was speaking, his guest had mixed two tumblers of whisky and soda-water, one of which he handed to the Earl, as he seated himself at his side.

'I am charmed with your haunted chamber,' he said; 'and I prophesy that I shall sleep soundly. I do not think your White Ladye, or any other apparition, will disturb me to-night.'

'I hope not,' returned the Earl. 'It is my experience, indeed, that those who are most akin to spiritual influences fear them least. The wise man is

too anxious to assure himself of the certainty of another world to feel daunted when assurance comes to him that that other world is a certainty.'

'I suppose so,' said Woodville, lighting a cigar. 'For my own part, however, I am not vain enough to include myself in the catalogue of wise men. With regard to spiritual influences, I am acclimatized, so to speak. They surrounded me from my cradle, and now they never surprise me in the least—on the contrary, if I may admit so much, I am often infinitely bored by them, and long to escape to the fresh air, the sunshine, and the daylight.'

The Earl looked at him in wonder, and not a little admiration. Woodville, conscious of the look, though he did not meet it, fixed his dark eyes on the curling rings of smoke, and round the edges of his finely-cut mouth there was just the ghost of a smile.

'You are very young, Mr. Woodville, to have seen and known so much,' said the old man gently, almost wistfully.

Woodville shrugged his shoulders.

'In the East, my lord, we do not measure time by years, but by episodes. I am thirty years old, and often I feel as if I were a hundred. Let me compliment you on your cigars; they are excellent. But frankly, you spoil me. I should become a sybarite if I remained long under your hospitable roof. I am not accustomed, as I dare say you know, to such consideration. In most houses which I visit, I am looked upon either as something "uncannie" (as the Scotch express it) or as a sort of vulgar conjurer, who is expected to perform tricks for the public amusement. Even here, I fear—though not, of course, by yourself—I may be a little misunderstood.'

'The whims and prejudices of children.'

'Lord Dewsbury is scarcely a child,' returned the Theosophist, with a quiet smile.

'I must beg you to overlook Lord Dewsbury's remarks; they were certainly in bad taste. He is strongly prejudiced against Theosophy.'

'Just so. He has never investigated the subject.'

The Earl shook his head, with a sigh.

'I do not think any form of religion attracts Dewsbury very much, though, of course, as a politician on the Tory side, he is a Churchman. His interests are of this world only.'

Woodville did not reply, but, leaning back in the settee, continued to watch the curling rings of smoke that issued from his lips. He had the manner of one watching and waiting to be cross-questioned.

'You have lived long in India?' asked the Earl, somewhat nervously, after a long pause.

'Nearly all my life,' answered Woodville. 'As I told you, this is my first visit to England.'

'May I ask what brought you so far from your birthplace?'

'Curiosity, I suppose. I myself am half English, for my father was an Englishman. I do not recollect him. He died when I was quite a child.'

'Your mother, Mr. Woodville?'

'She was a Persian, and, I believe, a sort of princess among her own people. She, too, died when I was very young. I was brought up by some of my

father's kinsfolk, who were kind enough to give me a good education.'

'And where did you first study Theosophy?' asked the Earl eagerly.

'At its fountain-head—in Thibet itself. My uncle was a devout believer; in close communication with the Mahatmas.'

'The Mahatmas!' echoed the Earl. 'They exist, then? And their miracles?'

'Are performed daily, and extend over all animated creation,' answered Woodville, in a tone of extreme languor, as if the subject were too familiar to awaken in him the slightest thrill of excitement.

'Wonderful, wonderful!' murmured the Earl, his eyes fixed on the pale, impassive countenance of the young man.

'To you, no doubt, it seems so; to *me*, my lord, it seems the most ordinary thing in the world. I passed some time with one of these men, if men they can be called, and, frankly, I found him tiresome and not particularly clean. He was said to be several hundred

years old, and, like many very old people, he seemed rather stupid. He spent his days and nights in a kind of trance, closely resembling catalepsy; but of one thing I am quite certain—that he had power to heal diseases, and that, so far as the ordinary necessities of the flesh are concerned, he was practically unconditioned.'

As Woodville talked on, with the *blasé* indifference of one talking on the most ordinary matters, the Earl seemed more and more surprised and puzzled. Possibly, indeed, this was just the impression which his visitor intended to produce, and, if so, he succeeded to admiration. In speaking of the phenomena of his strange religion, he seemed to take the position of a somewhat sceptical outsider rather than that of one with any living belief. This made his testimony towards the truth of Theosophy carry unusual weight, since it was impossible to believe him swept away beyond reason by any fanaticism or enthusiasm.

'You are not in the least like what I should have expected,' remarked the Earl thoughtfully.

'Indeed! May I ask in what respect?'

'Certainly. If you have not deceived yourself, you have been favoured far beyond ordinary men, in so far as you have been permitted to see into the secrets of the superhuman. You have had proof, absolute proof, you tell me, that what we call death is merely phenomenal, and that the spirit is—as our own religion teaches us—endowed with immortal life. You have witnessed miracles, yet, if you will pardon me for saying so, you seem little impressed by the solemnity, the awful import, of what you have seen.'

'Does it strike you in that way?' asked the young man, smiling. 'Well, I am honest; at any rate, honest enough to admit that the certainty of another world does not help me to explain the inconsistencies of this one, and that infinite life may only, after all, mean infinite *ennui*.'

'Surely,' cried the Earl, 'you cannot think *that!* Surely the assurance that personality is permanent explains everything, justifies everything! What is evil here will be set right. What is unexplainable in

this life will be explained fully in another. The Divine Fatherhood will be justified to its children!'

As he spoke the old man rose to his feet in great agitation and stood looking down at Woodville, whose impassive demeanour underwent no change whatever.

'You are aware, no doubt,' said Woodville, 'that some of our Theosophists deny the existence of God altogether—that is to say, deny that God possesses any attributes of personality? I myself hold that opinion, since the Infinite is absolutely inconceivable and unthinkable.'

'Call it what you please—Infinite God or Infinite Goodness, Infinite Law or Infinite Love—it amounts to the same thing.'

'Just so,' returned the Theosophist, with a shrug of the shoulders. 'To the Mystery which will never be solved, here or yonder.'

'You yourself, in accepting miracles, admit the solution?'

'Far from it. All that I admit, all that I know, is

that life is not merely corporeal, and that the universe is full of intelligence which controls matter in a way no known science can explain. How does that answer my question? It does not answer it at all. If all the said intelligences were beneficent, if all their influence was for good, it would be another matter. But the merest tyro in spirit-rapping is aware that our ghostly friends are subject to the same infirmities of character as ourselves; and no man who contemplates the universe can fail to see that it has no consideration for human sentiment. Evil things, evil acts, evil influences, are at work on every side—disease, earthquake, pestilence attest their existence; and really, there is no argument whatever in support of the thesis that the operations of nature point to a beneficent First Cause!'

Curious language, indeed, for the apostle of a new religion! The Earl wondered more and more as he listened, but at the same time he was impressed more and more—as, doubtless, Woodville intended him to be—by the absolute honesty of the speaker.

'After all,' continued Woodville, 'the whole question is one of evidence. While speculation as to the Absolute is mere waste of time, verification of actual phenomena is at once interesting and scientific. If I can prove to you, as I hope to do, that the soul survives the body, and is independent of it——'

'If you can do that,' cried the Earl warmly, 'I shall ask no more. I have faith in the Infinite Goodness! All I seek is some assurance to strengthen that faith; and the proof of personal immortality would be, to *me*, at least, the crowning proof of the beneficence of God.'

So saying, he held out his hand to Woodville, and prepared to leave him for the night. The young man rose to see him to the door.

'Good-night, my lord,' he said. 'Forgive my plain speaking. I did not wish to impose upon your good nature with any profession of an optimism I do not feel. Although I am thoroughly convinced of the mysterious influences surrounding us, although I am

personally conscious of them every moment that I live, I have seen too much misery to be very sanguine about the future, and my own experience, moreover, has not been a very happy one.'

'I am sorry for that, Mr. Woodville,' returned the Earl, pressing his hand. 'One so gifted, so favoured as yourself, should certainly be happy.'

He was leaving the room, when a thought seemed to occur to him, and he turned back, pointing to the door underneath the tapestry.

'I forgot to tell you, Mr. Woodville, that the room you are occupying has another exit, long disused. Under the tapestry here'—as he spoke he lifted the heavy hangings on the wall facing the fireplace—'is an old door. It opens right out on the battlement, but it is many a long year since anyone has turned the rusty old key.'

Holding up the tapestry with one hand, he touched the door with the other, and, reaching forward, attempted feebly to turn the key, which remained immovable in the lock.

'The tradition is,' he continued, 'that the unfortunate lady, of whom you have heard, used to meet her lover out yonder, passing out to the rendezvous by this door, and the tradition goes that her spirit still does so nightly. So strong is the belief in this tradition, that no member of my household cares to visit the battlement after nightfall.' He dropped the tapestry again, adding: 'You may sleep securely, knowing that no one can open that door from without. As for the mysterious lady——'

'I don't think she will trouble me,' said Woodville, smiling. 'If she does, I will receive her with all the respect due to a ghost of her years and experience.'

The Earl smiled also a little sadly, and then, with another gentle 'Good-night,' left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Left once more alone, Woodville sat down before the fire, and remained for some time in deep thought, still smoking his cigar. Presently he rose again, threw the remains of the cigar into the

fire, and began slowly walking up and down the chamber.

His manner was restless now, his look troubled. From time to time he paused as if listening, and then, with a deep-drawn breath, resumed his walk.

It was now past midnight, and not a sound disturbed the silence of the night.

Once more he approached the mirror and looked at himself; but there was no touch of pride or vanity in the gaze which he fixed upon the face in the glass—a pale, thoughtful face, with bright, wistful eyes, and sinister lines about the delicately-cut and mobile mouth. The black hair clustering round the high forehead was just threaded with gray, and it was the threads of gray hair, so unusual in a man of his years, that seemed to fascinate his regard.

'What does she think of me, I wonder?' he muttered to himself. 'Does she find me changed? Why should time spare *her* and play such tricks with *me!* I look ten years older, at the least.'

Again he resumed his monotonous march up and down the room, angrily now, with a dark frown upon his handsome face. Late as was the hour, he seemed to have no intention of retiring to rest.

Presently he approached the window and stood still, as if listening. Then he drew the curtain back and looked out.

Just beyond the window was the battlemented roof, communicating by the flight of old stone steps with the terrace below, and far away over this roof was a distant prospect of park, greensward, and woodland glimmering faintly in the moonlight. Low down in the west hung the crescent moon, glimmering like a silver sickle in a field of misty blue.

Save the long-disused door underneath the tapestry, the only entrance to the room was by the door by which he had entered. It opened on the granite corridor, at the end of which was another door, leading on to the battlement.

For reasons of his own, Woodville was curious enough to leave the chamber, cross the corridor, and

open the further door, emerging from which he stood on the battlement itself.

There he paused for some moments, looking down upon the shadowy vistas far below him; then, quietly and stealthily, he descended the stone steps, and did not pause again until he reached the terrace.

All was very still, and the air was full of the heavy scent of flowers growing in the great stone urns and clustering on the walls. In two of the great modern windows opening on the terrace a light was burning, but scarcely had Woodville appeared when one of them was extinguished, as if some occupant of a chamber had retired to rest.

Very quietly, making little or no sound with his stealthy footfalls, he stole along the terrace until he reached the spot where it widened out from the drawing-rooms and led to the broad flight of marble steps descending to the open lawn in front of the modern mansion.

Following these steps, he gained the lawn, and, pausing in the shadow of a large lilac tree, he sur-

veyed the façade, gleaming white in the moonlight.

His eyes glanced from window to window, resting at last on the one blind where the light was still burning.

An owl flitted past him, winging silently towards the dark turret tower, which rose like a black shadow to the left of the modern mansion, and the only sound in the air was the thin z-like cry of the bats, which flew high in the air between the lawn and the turret.

Minutes passed, and he still gazed, as if fascinated, on the lighted blind.

At last a shadow appeared behind the blind, the shadow of a woman, and he knew, by some subtle instinct, that the woman was Isabel Arlington.

He drew back under the darkness of the tree, and as he did so, the blind was drawn, the window opened, and Isabel leaned out, looking towards him.

The moon's rays fell upon her face, and upon a wrapper of some white material which she had thrown loosely around her.

Woodville did not stir, but stood, well concealed in the shadow, with his eyes fixed upon her. He was too far away to distinguish her features, or to see exactly what she was doing, but she seemed to be gazing forth intently, spellbound, and listening, and, as she did so, Woodville also seemed under the influence of a similar attraction. His heart throbbed tumultuously through all his pulses, and a great wave of yearning filled his heart and flooded his dilated eyes. He seemed to be drawing her towards him, and also to be drawn towards her, by some mysterious and irresistible force.

The spell was broken by another figure, which appeared behind Isabel in the lighted chamber, and, stealing forward, embraced her, and seemed persuading her to leave the window.

Woodville heard the faint sound of voices, but was too far away to distinguish what was said, or rather whispered. Almost immediately, however, the window was closed, the blinds drawn, and directly afterwards the light also disappeared.

For nearly a quarter of an hour Woodville remained in the same spot without stirring; then, quietly and stealthily as before, he reascended the steps, reached the terrace, and made his way back in the direction of the turret chamber.

As he passed the window where he had seen Isabel, he paused for a moment to listen, but all was quite still.

A few minutes later he climbed to the old battlement, and regained his solitary quarters.

CHAPTER VII.

ISABEL.

Early the next morning Woodville was astir, and long before the early breakfast hour he was out wandering in the park.

The sun was shining brightly, the morning air was alive with light and sound, and even amid the shadows of the great trees, where the dews were still sparkling like drops of gold, the warmth of the summer day was already felt. Here and there, where the groups of deer gathered,

> 'Twinkled the innumerable ear and tail.'

A drowsy murmur of life was heard everywhere, and, loud over all, from the interwoven branches

came the clear, brooding cry of the stockdove, like a call from the glades of Sleep or Fairyland.

Accustomed to scenes so different, born and bred in a land where Nature is profuse even to luxuriance, Woodville could not fail to be charmed and attracted by the placid and gentle beauty of the scene around him. Again and again he paused to look and listen.

Far as eye could see stretched the park, with its clusters of woodland, its shady colonnades, its open glades, and from almost every point of vantage a view could be had of the white mansion, with its long façade and stately terrace, and, beyond these, the dark outlines of the old castle and the turret tower.

About a quarter of a mile from the house was a large sheet of ornamental water, in the centre of which was an old group of stone statuary representing Tritons and Nereids, and surmounted by a semi-naked figure of Amphitrite. Around the margin were flowering shrubs of all kinds, and here and there was a garden-seat.

Tired of wandering to and fro, Woodville at last sat down, and amused himself by watching the swans and waterfowl which swam hither and thither on the lake.

He was seated thus, enjoying the beauty of the morning, when he suddenly became conscious that he was not alone. Unseen and unheard, like some creature of another world, Miss Arlington crossed the greensward, and stood before him, clad in a light morning dress, and carrying a bunch of white roses which she had just gathered. Although the sun was burning brightly, her head was uncovered, and the full rays of light fell upon her dark, luxuriant hair and beautiful face, which was pale with mingled pride and anger.

The moment he saw her, Woodville rose politely, raising his hat. She took no notice of his greeting, but, fixing her eyes on his, demanded, in a voice which trembled with agitation:

'Why did you come here?'

For a moment he seemed surprised, and was at a

loss how to reply. Still more emphatically and angrily, though without raising her voice, she repeated the question:

'Why did you come here?'

This time he was master of himself, and smiled quietly.

'I do not quite understand you,' he said gently.

At a glance he saw that she was greatly agitated, and could with difficulty calm herself sufficiently to meet his gaze.

'You understand me perfectly,' she answered, drooping her eyes and looking on the ground, only stealing quick, nervous glances at him from time to time. 'I insist upon an answer to my question.'

'Since you insist, Miss Arlington, I must obey,' said Woodville, still smiling. 'I came here to meet *you*.'

The answer seemed to surprise her. She had expected, no doubt, that he would prevaricate.

She drew a quick, startled breath, and seemed trying to speak again, but no words came.

'You see, I am quite frank with you,' he continued. 'If you will sit down and listen, I will explain my motives fully, such as they are. You will not? Then I will explain them all the same. Being in England, and hearing that you were here, I could not resist the temptation to see you again. Let me take the opportunity of expressing my gratification at finding you well and happy, and, if I may say so, as beautiful as ever.'

There was no concealment now in the look of admiration he cast upon her. But the look was not merely one of admiration; it partook to some extent of triumph and command. Conscious of this, her face flushed angrily, and she was about to turn away, when her strength seemed to fail her, and for a moment she seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

But when he made a movement as if to support her, she drew herself up proudly, and waved him back.

'You will go as you came, and at once,' she said,

adding, as he bent his head in apparent assent: 'No one here knows that we have met before, and there is no reason that they should know it. You can readily, no doubt, invent an excuse for departing so suddenly. If you decline to go, I shall have to tell my uncle that I cannot remain.'

Woodville watched her intently, but it would have been very difficult to divine his thoughts. His expression was one of surprise, mingled with a certain pain, but he seemed, at the same time, to be quite confident of his power over her, and of the strength of his own position in regard to hers.

'Pray sit down in the shade,' he said softly, motioning her to the garden-seat. 'Your head is uncovered, I see, and the sun is very hot. Afterwards I will do exactly as you wish. You have only to command, and I promise to obey.'

Almost involuntarily she obeyed him, and sank into the seat, trembling nervously, and averting her face.

The bunch of roses fell from her hand. He stooped

and offered them to her, but she did not take any notice.

He retained the flowers, and held them to his face, inhaling their scent as he continued:

'I see that I have blundered, and I am sorry. Candidly, I did not expect to find you so bitter against me. I am not conscious of having ever done you any wrong; I have preserved since we parted in India the memory of the one deep friendship of my life; and I thought that perhaps—forgive me for saying so much—that you, too, might remember.'

He paused as if waiting for her to speak, but she remained silent.

He placed the flowers by her side, and sat down; then, after a pause, he proceeded in his deep, musical voice, with just an inflection, a half-tone, of foreign accent.

'Had I guessed for a moment that my presence would give you pain, I would have returned to India without seeing you at all. All I can do now is to express my regret, and ask your forgiveness. Be

assured also that I fully sympathize with your feelings on this subject. I have no claim whatever upon your friendship — none even upon your sympathy. I possibly deserve neither, and since you deny me the one, I shall never ask for the other.'

The tone in which he spoke, even more than the words he used, was so gentle and respectful, that it obviously made an impression on the hearer. She glanced at him nervously, and then said, 'I understand now why you came. Why did you come under an assumed name?'

'Did you not hear me explain?' asked Woodville quickly. 'Since I last saw you, I have inherited a small fortune from one of my father's relations, and a condition attached to my taking it was that I should take the donor's name as well. I did so willingly enough, as you may believe, for you possibly remember that I was very poor. Henceforward, Miss Arlington, I can live my own life, without any danger of being mistaken for either a pauper or a fortune-hunter.'

As he spoke, he watched her keenly, waiting for the effect of his words, but she made no sign.

A long pause ensued; it was broken by Isabel, who rose quietly, and walked slowly away.

Woodville remained seated, and watched her go. She went about twenty yards along the water's edge, and then paused nervously, and looked back and met his eyes.

He sprang up with a cry, and approached with outstretched hand.

'Why can we not be friends?' he cried. 'Why are you so cruel to me? Why do you drive me away from you as if my very presence was an insult—a contamination?'

'I do not wish to drive you away,' she answered, looking down at the water. 'All I know is that it is better we should not meet.'

'Why?'

'For the reasons that I gave you long ago; I do not trust you, and I have no faith in the things you profess to do.'

Woodville shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

'You share the opinion of your friends in Bombay —that I am a trickster, a charlatan?'

'I did not say that.'

'That is what you mean. Once, I believe, you judged me differently.'

'That is all over,' she replied, trembling nervously.

He was close to her now, his dark, wistful eyes fixed upon her face, which flushed beneath his gaze, as he said, in a low voice, which seemed to vibrate through her whole living frame: 'For me it will never be over, Isabel!'

'I forbid you to call me by that name!' she cried.

'As you will; but by whatever name I call you, I cannot forbear telling you that I am still unchanged. You resemble the Sultan's daughter, of whom you sang so sweetly yesterday. I am only the poor slave in the garden, whose sole happiness was to watch her come and go. He was silent, and *I* can be silent—but never forget that I love you; never forget that mine is a love which can never pass away.'

'For Heaven's sake, leave me!' she cried, shrinking from him. 'You don't know what you are saying—you—— Go away, I implore you! If they should see us here together——'

'I understand,' answered Woodville, 'and I will go; but perhaps, before I leave this place, we shall meet again?'

'Perhaps; but go now!' she said, in a low voice.

He gazed at her for a moment, and then walked rapidly away. Quitting the shrubberies surrounding the lake, he crossed the lawn leading to the terrace of the mansion.

Only once glancing back, he saw the girl standing where he had left her, looking after him. His face brightened to a curious smile of triumph and exultation as he wandered on.

As he ascended the terrace steps, he came face to face with Lord Dewsbury, who greeted him with a stony British nod.

'Have you seen Miss Arlington?' asked the young lord.

'I think I caught a glimpse of her over yonder by the lake,' replied Woodville carelessly, and passed on, unconscious of, or indifferent to, the frown which his answer called up on Dewsbury's face.

Reaching the terrace, he was passing by one of the open French windows, when a voice called him by name; and, looking into the room, he saw the Apostle of the New Culture seated alone at breakfast. It was a large but cosy chamber, containing a number of small tables, and a large, well-provided centre table, at which the butler was presiding.

'Have you breakfasted?' asked Mervyn, holding out his hand. 'They've been wondering where you were. They've all had breakfast, I believe, except us two.'

Woodville sat down, and was soon discussing a substantial meal of coffee, dry toast, and new-laid eggs.

Mervyn, whose breakfast consisted of some very thin dry toast, and some weak claret and water, watched him with critical interest.

'I envy you your appetite, Mr. Woodville, and yet

I *don't*. Eating is a disagreeable reminder that we are still mere animals. Why can't we exist on air and dew like the roses, if we must exist, which I take leave to question.'

The contrast between the speaker's airy affectation of manner, and the chubby, solid, clean-shaven face, amused Woodville, and he laughed gaily.

'I've an excellent appetite,' he said. 'Besides, I've been up and about for several hours.'

'And you can drink English coffee?' exclaimed Mervyn.

Woodville nodded, and called to the footman for another cup.

'My uncle is curious to know if you slept well last night. I think he would be rather pleased than sorry if he heard that you had been visited by the White Ladye.'

'She left me severely alone,' replied Woodville, 'and I slept quite soundly. I generally do.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

LATE that night, Lord Dewsbury received a wire summoning him to Downing Street, for a private interview with the chief of his party; so he rose early and breakfasted, preparatory to driving to the station and catching the morning train. The only member of the family down to meet him was Lady Carlotta. To his great annoyance, Isabel did not appear.

'Tell her that I shall return this evening,' he said. 'I am sorry that I cannot see her before I go,' he added irritably. 'How long does that fellow remain?'

'Mr. Woodville?' inquired Lottie. 'I am sure I can't say, Frank; but I wish with all my heart that

he would go. But don't worry yourself about Isabel, Frank. *She's* all right!'

'But why is she so changed? Since this man came here, she has not been like the same girl. I am perfectly certain that they have met before.'

'I dare say,' said Lottie; 'but, in any case, I am sure she dislikes him quite as much as you do.'

The young man looked rather dubious; but at that moment the carriage was announced, and there was only just time to catch the train. As he left the house, and was about to enter the carriage, he saw the man of whom he had spoken quietly regarding him from the terrace.

Their eyes met, and Woodville waved his hand in careless salutation.

'Curse the fellow!' muttered Dewsbury, as he drove away. 'I'm sure he is a scoundrel, and I don't like to leave him here with Isabel. Never mind; I'll demand a full explanation from her when I return.'

Meantime Woodville had turned into the breakfast-

room, where he found Lady Carlotta in a brown study. She looked up as he entered, and greeted him quite sweetly.

'You'll have papa to yourself to-day, Mr. Woodville,' she said. 'Lord Dewsbury has gone to town, Miss Arlington has a nervous headache, and Mervyn and I are going to lunch at the Deanery, and go a round of parochial calls.'

'I shall be sorry to lose your society, Lady Carlotta,' returned Woodville; 'but even if I were quite solitary in this house, I could find plenty of occupation. The place is so peaceful, so beautiful, and among the books in the library alone one could pass many days without weariness.'

'Have you many friends in England?' asked Lottie, after a pause.

'Very few. Why do you ask?'

'Nothing; only I was wondering.'

'Shall I tell you what you were wondering about?' said Woodville, with a smile, sitting down and signalling to the butler to bring him some coffee. 'You

were wondering, Lady Carlotta, how soon you would be rid of a tiresome visitor.'

Lottie looked astonished, and Woodville quietly proceeded:

'You may make your mind easy. I am going almost immediately. If I remain at all, it is in deference to your father's wishes.'

'Papa is so absurd!' cried the young lady impatiently.

'Thank you, Lady Carlotta,' said Woodville, laughing outright. 'You are frankness itself, and I am not in the least annoyed. You may be still more frank if you like without fear of giving me offence. Why are you so anxious that I should go?'

'Because——' Lottie hesitated, and bit her lip.

'Because,' said Woodville, 'you regard me as a dangerous person? Or because you are quite sceptical as to the religion in which I am supposed to be an adept? In the last case, be reassured; I am almost as sceptical as yourself. I have said as much to the Earl. I have assured him that such supernatural

manifestations as I have myself seen interest me very little, and leave me very doubtful as to their value.'

'What is it you are supposed to do?' asked Lottie sharply. 'Turn tables, or something? It always seems to me that spirits, if they are spirits, behave very absurdly, and, at any rate, ever since papa has gone in for Theosophy, his conduct has been ridiculous. Then there is Isabel. She used to be as sceptical as I am, but, for some reason or other, she has got it into her head that there may be something in Theosophy after all, and that you could tell her something about her father.'

The butler had left the room, and Woodville was quietly sipping his coffee. He made no reply, but looked very mysterious.

'Suppose I could?' he said, with the same quiet smile. 'I am perfectly convinced that Colonel Arlington, whether he is alive or dead, desires to communicate with his daughter, and that I shall be the fortunate medium of communication.'

'What!' cried Lottie. 'And yet you can talk about it so coolly! That is what frightens me in you, Mr. Woodville—you are so awfully cold-blooded!'

'I exist in two worlds, you see,' returned the Theosophist; 'while you, fortunately for yourself, exist only in one. Spiritual existences are so real to me, so ever present, as to have lost their power of surprising me. Even your White Ladye, if she condescended to visit me up yonder, would find me severely cool, and possibly critical about her looks and her wardrobe.'

They talked for a little longer in the same strain, and then Lottie left the room, with her dread and suspicion of Woodville increased tenfold.

For secret reasons of his own, or possibly out of sheer bravado, he seemed perfectly indifferent to the impression he created. Possibly this was one of the secrets of his influence. Had he taken himself more seriously, and assumed the airs of omniscience common to professional charlatans, he might have awakened a very different impression.

During the forenoon, Woodville had a long talk with Lord Wanborough in his study, after which the old man ordered his hack, and prepared to take his daily ride.

'I would ask you to accompany me,' he said, 'but I have to see my steward this afternoon on some matters of business, and you will find better entertainment at home. No doubt, Madame Obnoskin will join you at lunch, and you will find her society far more interesting than mine.'

Thus it happened that the two Theosophists found themselves alone together, almost for the first time. The Earl had ridden away, Mervyn and Lady Carlotta had gone to the village, and Isabel kept her room. This was exactly what Woodville wanted. During luncheon, of course, in the presence of the servants, there was no opportunity for private conversation, and the two addressed each other with the formality of comparative strangers; but, luncheon over, they walked out together, and found a quiet seat by the lake, where they could converse undisturbed.

'At last!' said Madame Obnoskin, with a little laugh, holding out her ringed hand with the manner of an old comrade; then, drawing from her pocket a cigarette-case and a match-box, both wrought in gold, and adorned with the letter 'E' in rubies and diamonds, she selected a cigarette for herself, and invited him to select another.

'I see,' observed Woodville, 'that you still preserve the little *cadeau* of the Maharajah?'

The Obnoskin nodded, and showed her white teeth, while Woodville struck a match, lighted her cigarette, and then his own.

'Well?' said the Obnoskin, blowing a wreath of smoke, and looking through it with sparkling eyes.

'Well?' repeated Woodville, doing the same.

Both smiled, and then there was a long pause.

'How droll that we should meet here!' said the Pole, at last. 'How still more droll that they should think we have met for the first time! Ah, *mon ami*, you have used me very cruelly! There was a time,

not so long ago, when you would not have cared for so long a separation; but since then——'

'Since then, my dear Eva, you have found company more attractive. Well, I do not blame you, nor shall I blame you when the day comes that I have to say to you, "Accept my homage and my congratulations, Madame la Comtesse."'

Madame Obnoskin smiled, and shrugged her pretty shoulders.

'Perhaps that day will never arrive. But, at any rate, he is very good to me, is he not? My dear Woodville, there is nothing in the world to compare with a perfect English gentleman! He treats me like a princess, and he is shocked at nothing I say or do—not even at my constant cigarettes!'

'It is unfortunate, however, is it not, that the Earl's enthusiasm does not extend to the other members of his household?' said Woodville, with a sarcastic smile.

The Obnoskin changed in a moment, and her calm,

almost 'purring' satisfaction gave place to malicious anger.

'I hate them all!' she exclaimed; 'the pert English miss, his daughter, the proud, cold Miss Arlington, the dull, imaginative fool who is her *fiancé*. Yes; I hate them all as cordially as they hate me! But I will prove to them who is the strongest. I will prove to them who is mistress! It is not I, but they, who will be shown the door.'

'You think that Miss Arlington is cold?' asked Woodville quietly, without seeming to notice her anger. 'My own impression of her is somewhat different. She is certainly proud, as you say, but cold, no!—except, of course, superficially.'

Something in his tone and manner arrested the attention of his companion, and checked her indignation.

'You are interested in Miss Arlington?' she asked.

'Exceedingly, since it was on *her* account that I came here.'

'Then it is as I suspected—you have met before?'

'Oh yes; in India, some time ago.'

The Obnoskin regarded him for some moments attentively, then, laughing lightly, touched him on the arm.

'What a fool I was not to understand! You met in India, and there, where the climate is more favourable, the lady was more complaisant, and now—well, it is inconvenient when one has a *fiancé* to encounter an old lover.'

'Your guess is not very clever,' said Woodville, without any sign of annoyance; 'for so experienced a woman as yourself, it is commonplace. You are entirely wrong. Miss Arlington is a young lady beyond reproach, and I have never been her lover.'

'*Vraiment!*' cried madame, smiling sceptically. 'Possibly, however, you hope to be?'

'Say I mean to be, and you will have hit the mark.'

'I think you will waste your time. Miss Arlington is wise enough to appreciate her own good fortune. She is engaged to marry one of the richest men in

England, and in due time she will be Lady Dewsbury.' She was about to say more in the same strain, when, struck by a sudden change of manner in her companion, she cried: '*Mon Dieu*, Woodville, what is the matter?'

The man's face looked as black as night, his eyes flashed, his mouth was set fiercely, and with a savage gesture he had thrown his cigarette away. The storm lasted for a moment, but during that moment it was terrible.

Commanding himself with a violent effort, and forcing back his former supercilious smile, Woodville said:

'Once again, my dear Eva, your talk is not clever. Miss Arlington will never marry Lord Dewsbury!'

'And why not?'

'Because it is my intention to prevent it.'

'And why, again?'

'I will tell you—I will, in fact, be quite frank with you, since I stand in need of your assistance. We are rowing in one boat, my dear Eva. If Miss

Arlington married Lord Dewsbury, *you* would never marry Lord Wanborough.'

'I am to infer, then, that you wish to marry her yourself?'

'You may infer what you please; but still, again, you are not clever. I may have other designs, which are less conventional.'

'I don't understand you in the least,' cried Madame Obnoskin, 'unless—unless'—here she looked at him nervously and anxiously—'you mean something really diabolical.'

'I see, you are qualifying in English morality,' said Woodville. 'Once upon a time you were not so particular. Forgive me for reminding you of the fact, which you seem to have forgotten.'

The Obnoskin shrugged her shoulders.

'The reminder is not very chivalric,' she returned; 'but let it pass. In what way do you wish me to assist you?'

'Oh, in the simplest way possible! You are anxious to convince the Earl of the truth of our religion. I

am equally anxious to convince Miss Arlington. In carrying out what I may call our professional arrangements, we shall both be forwarding our private wishes.'

'You are simply impossible!' exclaimed madame. 'You constantly infer, in very bad taste, that our religion is one of imposture—the marvels which I myself have seen, the spiritual influence which has guided my whole life——'

'May I remind you,' said Woodville dryly, 'that you are not talking to the Earl of Wanborough? Between you and me, my dear Eva, there need be no concealments. Well, cards on the table, if you please. Miss Arlington already almost believes that her father, the missing traveller, still lives. I intend to convince her, with your assistance, that the belief is a certainty.'

'As before?' asked Madame Obnoskin nervously.

'As before. In the only way possible.'

'Suppose we fail?'

'We shall not fail.'

'Let me implore you not to risk anything of the

kind,' cried the lady, now greatly agitated. 'You know what took place at Petersburg; it may occur again, and ruin and disgrace would follow. Besides, it is so horrible, so wicked! You may despise me for my weakness, but I swear to you that I never think of these things without a shudder. It seems tampering with holy mysteries, inviting the punishment of Heaven. Besides, the very articles of our religion forbid us to resort to means so abominable, save in cases of extreme necessity.'

'This is one of them,' said Woodville firmly. 'Now, listen. I myself know already, by a supernatural communication, that Colonel Arlington is alive.'

'A supernatural communication, my dear Woodville?'

'Such scepticism is shocking in one of our faith! Well, say a communication which is not supernatural. I *know* that Colonel Arlington is alive.'

'You know it! How?'

'From a correspondent in Thibet; one of our

people. Some months ago, before I left for England, I wrote to him, bidding him to keep watch, and should he ever receive news of the missing traveller, to give him what aid he could, and to inform me at once that he survived. Well, three days ago I received this.'

He drew from his breast-pocket a square sheet of flimsy paper. Unfolding it, he read aloud to his companion :

'The sahib you wrote about is lying in this house, struck down by fever. We have watched over him so far, as you commanded, and when he recovers we will help him to the frontier.'

'No,' he continued, as madame stretched out her hand for the despatch ; 'not that I doubt you, my dear Eva, but I run no risks.'

He drew out his matchbox, struck a match, and set fire to the paper, which fell in a little rain of gray ashes to the turf.

'If this is true——' began madame.

'It is certain !' said Woodville.

'Then you will tell Miss Arlington that her father lives?'

'In my own time and way. You see, my dear Eva, how the celestial ones are working on our behalf. With this knowledge at our command even a miracle is possible. But time is precious, and we must not fritter it away. We must hasten, or Colonel Arlington may anticipate us by writing to his daughter!'

'I understand,' said the lady.

'I am sure you do,' said Woodville, with his own inscrutable smile.

'But,' she continued, 'I still fail to comprehend your object with regard to this girl.'

'It is not necessary that you should comprehend it,' returned Woodville, in a tone of quiet mastery. 'But you will work for me and aid me, for all that.'

'If money is your object, I may tell you at once that she is almost penniless.'

'My dear Obnoskin,' returned Woodville, with the same inscrutable smile, which lent no more cheering warmth to his dusky features than the play of sun-

shine lends to an icicle, 'I know it. I do not work for sordid gain.'

'I understand.'

Madame went pale, and, after a half-frightened glance around her, to assure herself that they were quite alone, continued in a lower tone:

'You love her?'

Woodville slightly shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows.

'Well, if love is too fine a name, you have a passion for her, which you would gratify at any cost.'

'Well?' asked Woodville, placidly turning his eyes upon her.

'It is madness—sheer raving madness! I beg you to abandon the idea!'

'Mad or sane,' said Woodville, still speaking tranquilly, 'it is the errand which has brought me here. Yes, I love her! Once I thought I had won her heart. Had I, indeed, done so, I would have been her servant, her slave, till life was done. Then, through the calumny of evil tongues, she learned to

despise me. She drove me from her with insult. I pursued her; I accepted humiliation upon humiliation. Her door was closed in my face. My letters were returned unopened. At last, to avoid me, she came to England. I followed her; and I am here!'

'And now you are here?' asked his companion.

Woodville placidly puffed a circle of smoke into the air, and watched it melt.

'Now I am here,' he said, 'you will help me to bring Miss Arlington to her senses.'

'Is that really and truly the object with which you came all the way from India? The girl must have fascinated you indeed. Did you ever take so much trouble for a woman before?'

'Never,' he answered quietly. 'But I might have done so had I ever met one who was worth it!'

'You are not very polite to present company,' said madame.

'You asked a question,' responded Woodville, 'and I answered it. When I want a thing, I take enough

trouble to get it. No more, because more is not needed; no less, because I never accept or recognise defeat in any project I have really made up my mind to carry through. Let me give you an illustration. Last year I went antelope-hunting in the Himalayas. I heard from the hill-tribes of a certain White Gazelle, so scarce, that it had hardly been seen within the memory of living man. Snow-white, observe. It was to be found only among the most inaccessible peaks. My curiosity was excited. I resolved to kill or capture this mysterious creature, even if I lost my life in the attempt. I lived for months high up among the snows, watching day and night. Nothing to eat but the roots of plants, nothing to drink but melted snow. I was worn to skin and bone, but I did not despair.'

'All this for a wretched antelope?' exclaimed madame.

'My dear Eva, the White Gazelle! On one occasion, at dead of night, I saw something white flash by me. I fired, but it was gone. At last, when I had

almost abandoned hope, fortune favoured me. One morning, at sunrise, I saw among the whiteness of the snow something almost as white, nearly indistinguishable against the shining background. There, not a hundred yards away, was the creature I had sought so long. As if spellbound, it came slowly towards me, regarding me quite fearlessly, with soft, still, almost human eyes, so beautiful that I felt almost afraid. I hesitated. I watched it approach till it was within a score of yards, then, quietly, steadfastly, I raised my rifle to my shoulder, took aim, and——'

'You killed it?' cried the Obnoskin, with a little scream.

'No; I let it go!'

'What a strange mixture you are!' she said, after a pause.

'Am I? Well, you see, I never resign pursuit. In the same spirit, I came here. Miss Arlington is my White Gazelle. Chance has favoured me again in the accidental meeting with that booby Darrell, in

the interest Lord Wanborough takes in our religion. Your help is all I need now.'

'I have more than half a mind to refuse it,' said Madame Obnoskin. 'Philip, I *will* refuse it, unless you assure me——'

'Assure you of what?' asked Woodville, rising and looking down on her.

'That you mean no absolute harm to Miss Arlington.'

'You have developed a wonderful interest in Miss Arlington very suddenly,' he said, with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

'I do not like her,' said madame; 'I do not pretend to like her; but we are both women, and——'

'And you will help me, my dear Eva,' said Woodville. 'Do I mean her harm? I really don't know myself. I mean to make her love me. I mean to hold her pride, her heart, her life, in the hollow of my hand. What I shall do with them when I have won them is another question. Hark! what is that?'

A sound of carriage-wheels crunching the stones

and gravel of the drive a quarter of a mile away reached their ears.

'Lady Carlotta is returning,' said Woodville. 'We had better go back to the house.'

CHAPTER IX.

INTUITIONS.

The Earl of Wanborough saw very little company, and passed the greater part of every day in his library, which was rich in the literature of Theosophy and the occult sciences, only issuing thence to wander musingly in the gardens, or to ride on his hack about the park. After lunch that day, however, he invited Woodville to join him in a carriage drive, in company with Madame Obnoskin; and they had a pleasant excursion of several hours, during which the old man talked volubly on his favourite subject.

It was soon very clear which way the wind was blowing, so far as Madame Obnoskin was concerned. The handsome Pole, with her voluptuous and almost

feline beauty, her gentle manners, her air of perfect sympathy allied to tender omniscience, had completely fascinated the old Earl, and the intellectual *rapprochement* between them was closely allied, on one side, at least, to a tenderer feeling. Her manner was that of a frank companion, as well as that of a thoughtful attendant. She watched every look, studied every word, without for a moment seeming obtrusive or over-zealous. And yet, with all this, she seemed to do exactly as she pleased, and preserved the ease and freedom of a thorough woman of the world.

When they had returned home, and Madame Obnoskin had retired to her room, the Earl walked with Woodville on the terrace.

'A truly remarkable woman!' he said. 'I have seldom met a person of greater natural gifts or more perfect discernment. I cannot forget, Mr. Woodville, that she actually predicted your visit.'

'Yes; it was singular,' returned Woodville, smiling to himself.

'It was revealed to her in a dream; that is to say,

she had a warning, an intuition, that one of the Adept would shortly come to Wanborough, and at that time neither she nor I had ever heard your name, or had any suspicion that a stranger was coming here.'

'I understand such intuitions. I have often felt them myself, and they have generally been realized.'

'Just so—just so! Evangeline—humph! that is to say, Madame Obnoskin. Her spirit name is Evangeline,' explained the Earl rather anxiously.

'Quite so,' said Woodville, smiling. 'In the East, among people of our religion, such names are frequently employed in preference to the baptismal names. I was not in the least surprised when I heard you so address Madame Obnoskin.'

The Earl looked somewhat relieved, and Woodville continued:

'Madame has resided with your family for some time?'

'Yes; for several weeks, as a visitor—merely as a visitor. At my request, she has from time to time

prolonged her stay. But she is sensitive, very sensitive, and though she is strongly attached to my daughter, I regret to say that the feeling is not reciprocated. Lady Carlotta, in fact, has conceived a strong dislike to Madame Obnoskin.'

'You surprise me! For what possible reason?'

'Chiefly, I believe, because Evangeline—hem!—Madame Obnoskin is a Theosophist. These young people are so sceptical, they believe in nothing, care for nothing, save what is purely conventional.'

'Miss Arlington—is she of the same way of thinking?'

'On this one subject, yes,' replied the Earl. 'She also is strongly prejudiced against Theosophists and Theosophy. Then again, there is Lord Dewsbury. On more than one occasion he has almost told me to my face that I am *non compos mentis*.'

'The way of the world,' said Woodville, shrugging his shoulders. 'Politics, my lord, is no school for either religion or philosophy. Every great and living faith has been thus despised, every discovery, of even

science itself, has had to survive the contempt of the great majority. I am not at all surprised that Lord Dewsbury should deny what he does not understand; but with Miss Arlington the case is very different. She has a strangely spiritual face, and she must, I am sure, be subject to the subtlest spiritual influences.'

'She is a noble girl,' cried the Earl warmly; 'and spiritual, as you say, in the extreme. But one thing alone absorbs her whole nature—the dream, the hopeless dream, that her father will return.'

'Is there no possibility that he survives?'

'It is possible, of course, but most improbable. Two years have now passed since he disappeared, and though every inquiry has been made, both privately and at the instance of the Royal Geographical Society, it has been quite useless. I have no doubt myself that he has perished.'

Woodville remained silent for a time, as if plunged in deep thought; then he said, in a tone more serious than was common to him:

'Surely the religion which Miss Arlington despises

might help to set her mind at rest? It is in cases like these that Theosophy has worked its great wonders.'

'Do you really mean that?' cried the Earl, looking at Woodville in agitated surprise. 'Do you really think it possible that——'

'I think that the affair is simple enough,' replied Woodville. 'Whether Colonel Arlington is alive or dead, whether his Upadana is still allied to mortality, or free of its functions, he still exists as a spiritual being, and it is in the power of Theosophy to ascertain the truth concerning him by actual communication.'

The old man looked startled, almost stupefied, and could find no words to express his surprise. Sinking upon one of the terrace seats, he passed his thin hand nervously over his forehead, and then gazed wistfully at the calm, impassive countenance of his companion.

At that very moment, Woodville himself started, and made a gesture as if enjoining silence.

Standing just within the open window of the

drawing-room, aware of every word that Woodville had said concerning her father, was Isabel herself.

Her face was pale as death, her eyes dilated, and she was gazing at Woodville in mingled wonder and terror.

'Isabel, my child,' cried the Earl, rising and moving towards her, 'you were listening? You heard what Mr. Woodville said?'

Without answering, Isabel continued to look at Woodville, and her expression was now almost imploring; then, with a low cry, she turned away, and sinking into a large settee within the embrasure of the window, seemed about to lose consciousness.

Trembling like a leaf, the Earl bent over her, and took her hand, while Woodville, now greatly agitated himself, watched her with keen solicitude.

'She is fainting!' cried the Earl. 'Isabel, my child!'

At this moment another person appeared upon the scene—Lord Dewsbury, who ran from the further end of the long drawing-room, where he had been reading

a newspaper, and, kneeling by Isabel, supported her in his arms.

'What is the matter?' he asked anxiously. 'She was all right only a few minutes ago. She strolled over to the window, and then——'

As he spoke, Isabel revived, and, releasing herself from Dewsbury's embrace, rose nervously to her feet.

'It is nothing, Frank,' she said. 'I felt a little faint, that is all. I'm quite well now,' she added, forcing a faint smile.

'Shall I get you a glass of wine?' asked Dewsbury,

'No, thank you. A glass of water.'

And as the young man turned away to procure it, she clung to the Earl's arm, and whispered, 'Please say nothing of this to Frank.

CHAPTER X.

PREMONITIONS.

The next morning, Woodville did not appear at the breakfast-table, but sent a polite message to the Earl that he had slept very badly, and was indisposed.

Not until the afternoon did he descend from his room. He found his host alone in the drawing-room, seated near the window, and wistfully gazing out on a dreary prospect of flying vapour and falling rain.

'I was about to send up to you, Mr. Woodville,' said the Earl, 'to inquire if you were better. I should have come myself, but I feared to disturb you.'

As he spoke, he was arrested by the expression of the young man's face, which was very pale, worn and troubled.

'There is not much the matter,' replied Woodville. 'I am absurdly sensitive to atmospheric changes, and your climate, when it is at its worst, depresses me. I am usually a sound sleeper, but last night——'

He paused, with a slight shiver; then, sinking into a chair, inquired in a low voice, 'You observed nothing unusual during the night?'

'Nothing,' answered the Earl. 'The rain fell heavily, that was all; but I was not disturbed in any way.'

'That is singular,' said Woodville, and seemed plunged in thought.

The Earl watched him anxiously for some moments, and then inquired, 'What do you think is singular, Mr. Woodville?'

Woodville did not immediately reply, but remained in deep abstraction.

'I think I had better return to London,' he said, at last, passing his hand nervously across his forehead.

'Return to London? So soon; and before'——

'Before my visit leads to any more mischief,' cried

Woodville, rising and pacing up and down the room. 'I know now, I am certain, that something strange is about to happen—what, I cannot tell. I am a perfect child in these matters, though I am, unfortunately, a powerful medium for spiritual influences. It is better, far better, that the thing should go no further; and so, with your permission, I will leave your house this evening.'

'Pray do not think of it!' said the Earl. 'Remember your promise! If, as you imply, some extraordinary communication has come to you, that is all the more reason that you should remain, and permit us, possibly, to share your knowledge.'

'Long experience has taught me,' answered Woodville bitterly, 'to have little or no faith in these premonitions. They may mean nothing, or they may mean everything. I will tell you frankly what has occurred. I had just fallen asleep, when I was awakened by something like a cold human hand being passed over my face. I opened my eyes, and saw nothing. The rain was beating on the

windows, and the wind was moaning loudly. As I lay listening, I became conscious of feet moving up and down the corridor, then of a low sobbing, as of some human creature. I sprang up, opened the door, and entered the corridor. I may tell you that I was not in the least nervous, though I thought of your ancestral ghost, the White Lady. I closed the door, and returned into the room. The air seemed full of voices. Then I heard, as clearly as I hear my own voice now, a voice cry, "Isabel! Isabel!" I should know that voice if I heard it anywhere; it was the deep, low voice of a man.'

Trembling like a leaf, and lost in deepest amaze, the Earl listened.

'Good Heaven!' he murmured. 'And then—and then——'

'Then the usual saturnalia, which so often renders these manifestations contemptible, began, and disturbed me for hours. The voices continued, crying sometimes, sometimes laughing, as if the turret were peopled with demons; but from time to time I heard

the voice of which I have spoken repeating the same word, "Isabel." I was naturally excited, of course, but I exerted all my will-power to discover the source of the voice. For a moment I succeeded. Suddenly, for a moment only, I saw, or thought I saw, a face in the darkness—the face of a man, gray-haired, gray-bearded, and clad in some filmy raiment.'

'Arlington!' cried the Earl, panting, as if for breath.

'Heaven knows! I should warn you that these apparitions are often utterly delusive. It is in the power of disembodied spirits, good or evil, to assume corporeal likenesses, in order to influence and amaze the human mind. The whole business is ugly, and as unsatisfactory as it is ugly, and that is why I suggest that it should go no further.'

'What you tell me is amazing,' said the Earl. 'You are sure, quite sure, that you were under no delusion?'

Woodville gave a curious laugh.

'In such matters as these I am not likely to be

deluded,' he replied. 'I saw and heard exactly what I have described.'

'And how do you explain it? What, I mean, do you think that it portends?'

'I would rather not answer that question,' returned Woodville.

'Let me beg you to do so!'

'My explanation, I have no doubt, would only provoke the ridicule of most people,' said Woodville, hesitating. 'You, I know, are different; but ever since I came here, I have been conscious, as you know, of very strong prejudice and antipathy. That is another reason why I would rather take my departure.'

'Mr. Woodville,' said the Earl solemnly, 'you may be perfectly sure of my faith in you personally, and of my deep interest in the subtle and mysterious truths in which you are an adept. I must beg of you as a gentleman, as a man of honour, as a friend, not to withhold from me any knowledge which may affect my happiness, or the happiness of anyone

dear to me. Tell me, I beg you, what is in your mind.'

'Since you put it in that way, my lord,' answered Woodville, 'I will answer you. I think that this house is surrounded by disembodied spirits, and that, through their agency, it may be possible to ascertain, once and for ever, the fate of Colonel Arlington.'

'If the vision you saw was that of my kinsman himself, would it not portend the worst?'

'By no means,' replied the Theosophist. 'These apparitions are not necessarily those of the dead. The astral body can separate itself from the corporeal body—in sleep, for example—and yet project the image of the latter while it is still living. But it is because I am uncertain of the truth in this instance that I dread proceeding further. I should never forgive myself if I were the means of communicating news of more sorrow and disaster.'

'Whatever the truth may be,' said the Earl resolutely, 'it is well that we should know it, and, in any case, why should we flinch if the very messenger

of Death brought proof of the soul's immortality? Think what a victory it would be to convince the most blind, the most sceptical, of this Divine truth; and do not, I entreat you, leave us in uncertainty or despair!'

After much apparent hesitation, Woodville at last consented to postpone his departure until he had endeavoured to procure, in the presence of the Earl and his immediate friends, some kind of manifestation. It was agreed that the experiment should be made that very evening; but before anything was finally decided, Woodville insisted on an interview with Miss Arlington.

'I wish to ascertain,' he said, 'if she has received any intimation, however slight, from the mysterious presences now surrounding her, and I may tell you frankly that I rely far more upon her power than on my own to bring our inquiry to a satisfactory conclusion.'

'I will send her to you at once,' returned the Earl eagerly. 'Fortunately, Dewsbury has ridden over

to the village with my nephew; and as for Isabel, I have no doubt that she will grant you the interview you seek.'

Left alone, Woodville walked up and down the drawing-room in no little agitation.

His look was that of a man undergoing some terrible mental struggle. From time to time he paused, listening eagerly, and when at last the door opened, he turned with an exclamation.

To his disappointment, however, the new-comer was only Madame Obnoskin.

She entered the room quickly and stealthily, closing the door behind her.

'What has happened?' she asked, sinking her voice to a whisper. 'I have just met the Earl, and he seemed terribly agitated. All I could gather from him was that you had made some remarkable communication.'

'Do not question me now,' answered Woodville, frowning. 'Go away. I am waiting here for Miss Arlington.'

'But what is it?' she persisted. 'You yourself look pale and agitated. My dear Woodville——'

At that moment the door opened again, and Isabel herself appeared.

She paused a moment on seeing that Woodville was not alone; then, with the proud and haughty bearing peculiar to her in his presence, she advanced into the room, and said quietly, 'You sent for me? What is it you wish to say to me?'

Never had she appeared so cold, so antipathetic. There was something almost contemptuous in her very tone, and her face was pale with anger.

'Will you leave us, madame?' said Woodville. And, without a word, Madame Obnoskin left the room.

There was a pause, during which the young girl kept her eyes fixed on Woodville, holding her head erect, and compressing her lips with cold determination. He offered her a chair; she declined it with an impatient gesture, and waited haughtily for him to break the silence.

'Possibly,' he said, 'the Earl has explained to you why I wished to see you?'

'He has explained nothing,' was her reply. 'He has merely hinted that you desired a private meeting, because you had some important communication to make to me.'

'In that case, I am at a disadvantage. I fear also from your manner that I am still labouring under your displeasure.'

'Kindly leave me out of the question,' answered Isabel.

'Pardon me,' said Woodville; 'that is impossible. What I have to say concerns you only. Am I right or wrong in assuming that you were anxious, until a few hours ago, to be assured as to the fate of one who is very dear to you, and that you fancied, rightly or wrongly, that I could give you that assurance?'

Isabel trembled, her face grew very pale; but she answered with the same coldness and hauteur: 'Whatever I may have thought, I have changed my mind. I have no faith whatever in your power to help me.

I feel for such pretensions as yours only contempt, and I decline to countenance your deceptions in any way.'

Their eyes met, and Woodville, now quite master of himself, smiled quietly.

'In that case I had better say no more. I have made a mistake. I did not think that you were quite so bitter against me.'

'I am neither bitter nor angry,' returned the girl proudly.

'You despise me too completely!'

'At any rate, I despise the impostures by which you live. I desired you to leave this place; you have remained. I have avoided you; you have presumed, again and again, to remind me of your presence. It is cowardly of you to presume upon your influence in this house in order to put me to humiliation.'

'I quite understand,' said Woodville, still with his dark eyes fixed upon her. 'It is the voice of Miss Arlington which speaks, but the spirit is that of Lord Dewsbury.'

Isabel's eyes flashed angrily, and she made a movement as if to leave the room, but, turning quickly, she replied: 'You should have understood that my whole nature revolted against everything you say and do. You would not have remained if you had been—a gentleman. You would have known that either you or I must go.'

'Pray do not distress yourself,' said Woodville, as if deeply wounded. 'After what you have said, I shall certainly not remain. I had already arranged to go, when I yielded to Lord Wanborough's entreaties, and delayed.'

'Lord Wanborough does not know you; he believes in your impostures, which I think blasphemous. Is that all you wish to say to me?' she added.

'I think so,' said Woodville. 'Only, before we part, I should like to ask you one question.'

Isabel waited, and he continued: 'Last night, between midnight and one o'clock, were you awake or sleeping? And if awake, did you observe anything unusual?'

Woodville himself was surprised at the effect of the question. Isabel uttered a low cry, and pressed her hand upon her bosom, while her eyes filled with tears.

'Let me go!' she cried faintly, turning to the door.

Before she could resist, Woodville had stepped forward, taken both her hands in his, and was gazing intently into her face.

'For God's sake,' he whispered, 'answer me!'

She scarcely seemed to hear; all her thought seemed concentrated on something terrible. Her lips quivered; she shivered from head to foot.

'Look at me, and answer.'

As if involuntarily, her eyes looked into his, while she struggled to release herself from his hold. All her strength and pride seemed to have fled. She had changed from a proud, determined woman into a weak, hysterical girl.

'Father—father!' she moaned, sinking on a settee, and covering her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XI.

WEAVING THE WEB.

Woodville watched her for some moments with an expression of mingled triumph and pity; then he bent over her, and stretched out his arms as if to embrace her, and so calm her sorrow.

She sprang up as if stung, and, with the tears streaming down her beautiful face, confronted him angrily.

'Do not presume upon my weakness!' she cried. 'If you knew how all my nature revolts against you, you would understand why I wish never to see your face again.'

'How have I offended you?' asked Woodville gently.

'I believe you to be utterly false and cruel. I am certain that what took place last night was your doing —a falsehood, a trick, like all the rest.'

Woodville shrugged his shoulders.

'You have not yet told me what *did* take place. Whatever it was, I am sorry, since it has caused you so much distress. But since my very solicitude on your account seems an offence to you, since my very anxiety to serve you is so misconstrued, I have really no more to say, except this—if we must part, let it be in friendship, not in anger.'

And he held out his hand, as if inviting her to say farewell. She did not take the hand, but, turning her head away, said in a low voice:

'Can you swear to me, on your honour, that you know nothing of what took place last night—that you had no part in it—that it was not a device to terrify and deceive me?'

'Certainly,' he replied. 'I can go further than that, and swear that I am entirely ignorant of what occurred.'

'Then why did you ask me whether, between midnight and one o'clock, I observed anything unusual?'

'Because I had a strange experience of my own, and was curious to ascertain how far the same phenomena had presented themselves to *you*. That is why I asked for this interview; not, believe me, because I wished to run the risk of your displeasure.'

He then rapidly described to her, in much the same language as he had used to the Earl, what he had heard and seen in the turret chamber.

She listened breathlessly, and when he described the voice which had called her name, and the apparition which had followed, she uttered a low cry, and wrung her hands.

'It was my father!' she cried. 'He came to *me* also. I did not see his face, but I heard his voice crying, "Isabel, Isabel!" You have told my guardian of this?' she added.

'I have told the Earl everything,' replied Woodville. 'I have told him also that I have no faith in

these manifestations, that they are, and have ever been, hateful to me. See,' he continued more passionately, 'what they have done for me already! They have made you shrink from and despise me; they have made you think me infamous! Even now there is a doubt rankling in your mind—a doubt whether or not I am the meanest of mankind, capable of playing upon your holiest feelings, and of inventing these manifestations in order to terrify you.'

He paused, watching her eagerly.

She was now comparatively calm, but she avoided his gaze, and made no answer.

'Let it end here!' he cried. 'Good-bye!'

And he made a movement as if to quit the room.

Simultaneously she rose, and walked slowly to the window, making no attempt to detain him.

He paused irresolutely, looked at her, and then, mastered by a sudden impulse, approached her again.

'Forgive me, Miss Arlington!' he cried. 'I have been like an evil shadow on your young life. I should never have come here. I should never have tried to

revive in your heart a feeling which was long dead. I was a fool for my pains, but I have been punished—cruelly punished!'

Still not looking at him, but gazing sadly out on the dreary landscape of mist and rain, she said, quietly, as if speaking to herself, 'When you leave this place, what will you do?'

'God knows!' he answered. 'But set your mind at rest; you will never be troubled with me again!'

She turned, and looked him in the face with an expression so sad, and yet so penetrating, that his eyes fell.

'I wish I could believe in you, but I cannot,' she said. 'Even if things which have happened to me are real, I am sure that they are evil. I have prayed God to deliver me from them, and from *you*.'

'Since you hate me so much——'

'I do not hate you, Mr. Woodville. I pity you too much for that. If you have deceived me, as I instinctively believe——'

He interrupted her with an angry exclamation.

'Judge me as you please! Why should I defend myself, since I am already condemned? It is the old story, Miss Arlington! Why should you trouble to wear a mask? I stand in the way of your good fortune, and you wish to get rid of me, in deference to the scruples of Lord Dewsbury.'

Her face flushed angrily, and she motioned him to silence; but he paid no attention. His passion seemed now thoroughly aroused, and he was now no longer master of himself.

'You have been cruelly frank with me; let me be equally frank with you. When we first met, out yonder in India, you were less fortunate, and I was less despised. You showed no anger *then*, when I told you of my devotion. You taught me to care for you. Afterwards, through the calumnies of your friends, you turned away from me. You came to England, you forgot that I existed, you found another lover, rich and powerful. The old story, as I have said! But there is a new side to the story, after all. We met once again, and I tell you now that we have

met never to part again, save by my wish and will.'

'What do you mean?' cried Isabel. 'You and I are nothing to each other.'

'We are nothing or everything to each other, just as I choose,' answered Woodville sternly. 'It will be well for you, perhaps, if my *choice* is to leave you. I am as proud as you are, but my pride, unlike yours, is the pride of power. You say you know me. You never were more grievously mistaken. If you *did* know me, you would think twice before treating me like a dog!'

Surprised and indignant at this unexpected tirade, Isabel once or twice attempted to speak; but before she could find words, Woodville had turned away. Crossing the room to the fireplace, he threw himself into a chair, and covered his face with his right hand.

Several minutes passed, and neither of the two stirred or spoke. At last the silence was broken by Isabel.

'Mr. Woodville!'

He did not seem to hear.

'Mr. Woodville!' she repeated, approaching him quietly.

He drew his hand from his face, and looked at her.

'We are both to blame,' she continued. 'I should not have spoken as I did; and you—you should not have reproached me unjustly. I hope you will not go away—at least, not yet.'

So saying, she left the room.

No sooner had the door closed upon her, than Woodville rose to his feet, his features breaking into a sardonic smile.

A short time afterwards, when the Earl returned to question him as to the result of the interview, Woodville said quietly:

'I shall not leave you to-night. Miss Arlington has asked me to remain.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE APPARITION.

'Dr. Darley, Mrs. Darley, and Miss Olive Darley,' chanted the footman.

Lottie rose from her seat in the white gallery, and welcomed the new-comers.

'Good-evening, Dean.'

'Good-evening, Lady Carlotta. Permit me to introduce my daughter, Olive, whom I have taken the liberty to bring with me to-night, as she is profoundly interested in Theosophy. The Earl told me in his letter that he was in hopes that your visitor, Mr. Woodville, would perhaps produce some sort of a manifestation to-night.'

'I believe there is going to be some sort of rubbish

of that kind,' said Lottie, 'if the spirits, or the shining presences, or whatever they call them, are propitious.'

'You are not a believer, Lady Carlotta?' asked Miss Darley.

She was a distinctly pretty girl, with a rather priggish manner, and was newly emancipated from Girton. As she spoke, she fixed a pair of *pince-nez* on her supercilious little nose.

'In Theosophy? No, I certainly am not.'

'I have not yet arrived at a satisfactory solution of the mystery,' said Miss Darley, rather with the air of addressing a numerous audience from a platform. 'It is a wide subject, and one requiring considerable time and thought.'

Lottie shrugged her shoulders. Problems requiring time and thought were not in her line.

'I will let papa and Miss Arlington know you are here, Dean, if you will excuse me for a moment.'

She left the room, and the Dean turned to his wife,

a large and severe-looking lady, who had taken a seat near the window.

'My dear,' he remarked, 'you look nervous!'

'I have misgivings,' said Mrs. Darley, in a deep bass voice, which accorded with her physical proportions. 'I doubt the propriety of our being present on such an occasion.'

'It is out of the merest curiosity, my dear!'

'We are warned,' proceeded the lady, 'to have nothing to do with profane and pagan mysteries!'

'Really, my dear,' said the Dean mildly, 'you exaggerate the importance of the matter. We are here to witness a sort of conjuring entertainment, that is all. My child,' he continued to Olive, who had gone to a table and taken up a book, 'what are you reading?'

'The life of Paracelsus, papa.'

'Para—who?' inquired Mrs. Darley.

'Paracelsus, mamma.'

'And who was *he*?'

'Paracelsus? A mediæval physician, mamma,

who professed to have discovered the philosopher's stone.'

'He was not, I presume, a Churchman?'

'Well, no,' said Olive, with a smile of gently pitying superiority; 'hardly. The Church, as we understand it, hardly existed then. Here he is, seated on a stool, surrounded by a lot of little devils with tails.'

'Olive,' exclaimed the elder lady, in tones about an octave lower than usual, 'close that book!'

'Professor Marrables!' said the footman, appearing again at the door.

Mrs. Darley started and glared.

'Dean, do you hear? Professor Marrables?'

'Yes, yes, my dear,' said the Dean hastily and soothingly.

'The writer of those dreadful books! Are you aware of what he is?—a materialist, an Atheist!'

'Nothing of the kind, mamma,' said Olive, in a sharp undertone. 'Professor Marrables is an agnostic!'

'And what is the difference, pray?'

'A materialist is one who says that he knows everything; an agnostic is one who says he knows nothing. Do speak to him, papa. We heard so much about him at Girton.'

The subject of debate, a very tall, lank, angular old gentleman, with a shining bald head and a quizzically benevolent aspect, dressed in an evening suit, which might have been fashionable somewhere about the forties, had ambled into the drawing-room, and collided with a group of statuary, to which he had addressed a polite apology, delivered in a high-pitched, piping whisper, before he had readjusted his spectacles and determined the real nature of the obstacle.

'Good-evening, my dear sir,' said the Dean, approaching him. 'I presume you have come on the same errand as myself.'

'What is your errand?' piped the scientist, blinking vacantly.

'To meet the eminent Theosophist, Mr. Woodville. A very remarkable man, I am told.'

'Just so,' said Mr. Marrables. 'Living in the near

neighbourhood, and being an old college friend of his lordship's, I have come for that purpose, on his invitation.'

'May I ask if Theosophy interests you?'

'It professes,' said the Professor, 'to have a scientific basis, and, as a humble student of nature, I am always ready to learn.'

'Quite so,' said the Dean—'quite so, though I suppose your own conclusions——'

'I am too old to have arrived at any conclusions,' said the scientist, with a faint little chirp of laughter. 'That is a privilege reserved for very young people.'

'Very true, sir,' said the Dean, with an approving smile. 'We have,' he added, with sudden gravity, 'but one light to help us.'

'Precisely,' said the Professor. 'The light of truth.'

'Exactly,' said the Dean. 'The light of truth.'

'In other words,' piped the Professor, crossing his long, ungainly legs—'the light of Science.' The Dean started and stared. 'For many centuries the

Spirit of Humanity has wasted its energies upon the search of the Unknown, the Unknowable. Beguiled by various forms of anthropomorphism, misled by a blind and ignorant clergy——'

'A blind and ignorant clergy!' echoed Mrs. Darley.

'Sir!' cried the Dean, with as near an approach to fierceness of tone and manner as the good old gentleman could accomplish.

The Professor rose, peered at him from head to foot, and back again, and then piped apologetically:

'If I am addressing a member of the Church, let me apologize.'

'My name is Darley, sir,' said the Dean, rather with the air of delivering a challenge to mortal combat; 'Dr. Darley, Dean of Wanborough.'

'The Dean of Wanborough! Dear me!' said the Professor in evident distress. 'Bless my soul! I beg your pardon, sir. I am very short-sighted, and I did not at first perceive——'

The Dean waved him away.

'Say no more, sir—say no more, I beg.'

And he strode across the room, and joined his wife and daughter.

'After this, I presume you will return home at once?' said Mrs. Darley.

'What nonsense, mamma!' said Olive. 'It was merely a mistake.'

'A blind and ignorant clergy!' intoned Mrs. Darley.

'A mere figure of speech, my dear,' said the Dean. 'In these days we must be tolerant. One meets these people everywhere, even at the table of the Bishop. . . . My dear Miss Arlington, you are well, I trust? Professor Marrables, I believe,' he added severely, noticing the direction of Isabel's glance.

'The *great* Professor Marrables!' said Madame Obnoskin, who had entered the room with Isabel and Lottie, speaking in an awe-struck whisper, carefully calculated to reach the old gentleman's ears, and sailing forward with extended hand.

'My dear madam,' he said, with his peculiar little chuckle, 'the epithet is misapplied.'

'Indeed, no,' said the lady. 'May I introduce myself?

Madame Obnoskin. Perhaps you have heard of me?'

'I think so,' said Marrables, tapping his forehead! 'in connection with—— Dear me!'

'Theosophy,' said madame. 'It has much in connection with natural science, in which you are so distinguished.'

'True. But our humble labours are merely experimentary, while yours embrace enormous generalizations.'

At this moment Woodville entered the drawing-room. His face betrayed nothing, but it was with almost as much surprise as pleasure that he beheld Isabel.

Dressed in a robe of white silk, with no ornament but a few white and red roses, she had never seemed more beautiful, and, strangely enough, all traces of pain and agitation had disappeared from her face, and she was talking quite cheerfully with Olive Darley.

The Dean was sitting apart with Mrs. Darley, casting severe glances from time to time at Professor

Marrables, who was in animated conversation with Madame Obnoskin and the master of the house.

'But, of course, my dear Professor,' Madame Obnoskin was saying, 'you believe that the Soul exists?'

The Professor smiled—the secret, self-satisfied, sceptical smile of science; then, hesitating for a moment, and blinking at the fair Pole like a benignant owl, he said, in his thin piping voice, with his little deprecating cough, 'Hem! I have been told so. I have never,' he added, with a quiet chuckle, 'verified the fact. You see, my dear lady, my investigations are chiefly confined to such phenomena as are revealed by the microscope.'

Not at all shocked, the Obnoskin tapped him playfully with her fan, and then beckoned Woodville to join them.

'These dreadful men of science!' she cried, as Woodville approached the group, 'they believe actually nothing!'

'Pardon me again,' chirped the Professor. 'To believe anything may be difficult, but to believe *nothing*

is impossible. But, after all, what do our beliefs matter? How should mere ants on an ant-heap presume to criticise the great mystery of the universe?'

'Is it not equally presumptuous,' said Woodville, with a smile, 'to insist too strenuously, as some of us do, on our own insignificance? We may resemble ants on an ant-heap, but surely we are not complimentary to the Power which created us when we assume that we are nothing more.'

'Is it necessary that we should be complimentary?' laughed Marrables.

'Alter the word, my dear sir, and say respectful. It is better, with the theologians, to assume that we are undeveloped angels than to argue with the materialists that we are mere automata. There is nothing so demoralizing or so paralyzing to all human effort as to assume that we are of little or no importance in the scheme of Nature.'

'That is true enough, Mr. Woodville,' returned the Professor; 'but no one doubts the importance of humanity as a link in the chain.'

'As the highest and most wonderful of phenomena!' broke in the Earl, who had joined the group. 'You are quite right, Mr. Woodville. The higher we estimate our own humanity, the nearer we come to God.'

During this conversation, Woodville had been quietly observing Isabel. She had not looked up at his entrance, but a slight flush had come upon her face, and he knew that she was conscious of his presence. Without a shadow of annoyance, or even constraint, she continued her conversation with Miss Darley.

The dinner passed off very quietly; but never, since his arrival at the Castle, had Woodville talked so much, or seemed in such excellent spirits. He was the more voluble because he noticed that his gaiety seemed greatly to annoy Lord Dewsbury, who scarcely spoke a word, but regarded him with a stony stare.

The talk turned on many themes, and on all the Theosophist was more or less eloquent. He seemed to have been everywhere, to have known all sorts and

conditions of men, and to have had all sorts of adventures, afloat and ashore. He told of his own wanderings in far-off Thibet, and as he did so, he was aware that Isabel listened intently. Once or twice, when he addressed his remarks to her, her colour came and went, and once, when their eyes met, hers seemed full of a sweet understanding.

When the ladies had left the table, Woodville relapsed into silence, leaving the chief conversation to Mervyn and the Professor, who got along together admirably, the Earl and Dr. Darley talking in whispers, now and then glancing towards Woodville, while Dewsbury leant back in his chair, moodily smoking his cigar.

Presently Woodville rose, and asked the Earl's permission to join the ladies.

'Won't you have a cigar?' asked the Earl.

'Not to-night; at any rate, not now.'

'A glass of wine? During dinner, I observed, you drank only water.'

Woodville shook his head with a smile, and, bowing

politely to the company, left the room. The moment he had gone, Dewsbury rose, threw his cigar away, and prepared to follow.

'Going too, Frank?' said the Earl. 'Isabel has told you, I suppose, about to-night's experiment? I have persuaded Mr. Woodville to endeavour, if he can, to procure some kind of a manifestation.'

'I have no doubt he will oblige you,' returned Dewsbury, with a sneer. 'From what I have seen of him, I should say that he is an expert in deception.'

'That remark is unworthy of you,' said the Earl warmly. 'Kindly remember that Mr. Woodville is my guest.'

'If I had *not* remembered it,' replied the young man, 'I should have adopted a very different tone towards him, I assure you.' And so saying, he left the room.

'I think we had better follow him,' said the Earl nervously. 'He and Mr. Woodville are best kept apart.'

'You surely don't think Lord Dewsbury would be guilty of the bad taste——'

'Upon my life, I don't know,' said the Earl. 'The mere sight or mention of Mr. Woodville acts on him as a red rag acts on a bull. I live in constant dread of an explosion.'

He rose, and, followed by the Dean, Mervyn, and the Professor, led the way into the drawing-room, glad to find no signs of coming conflict there as yet. Woodville was chatting with Lottie, Madame Obnoskin with Mrs. Darley, and Olive and Dewsbury were in earnest conversation with Isabel.

'Ah, here you are, Mr. Woodville!' said the Dean. 'Well, is the oracle prepared to speak to-night?'

'Who knows?' answered Woodville, with a smile. 'In deference to Lord Wanborough's wishes, I shall endeavour to present some sort of a manifestation; but, to be candid, I am not over-sanguine.'

'We are all in Mr. Woodville's hands,' said the Earl.

'Really,' said Woodville, with a little laugh, 'you

put me rather at a disadvantage. We Theosophists make no pretence to supernatural power. All we contend is, that everywhere around us there are forces which are unexplained, and possibly unexplainable.'

'My dear sir,' piped the Professor from an armchair, 'if you go no further than that——'

'Just one step further. We believe that the forces I have named are obedient to the will of inspired individuals.'

'Inspired!' repeated the Professor. 'Yes; but how inspired?'

'Yes,' echoed Dewsbury dryly; 'that is what I want to know. How inspired?'

'By temperament,' answered Woodville easily. 'Just as the magnetized needle is sensitive to the polarity of the magnet, so certain natures are sensitive to the spiritual world about them. Of course,' he continued, with a smiling glance at Lord Dewsbury, 'this only applies to persons of imagination.'

'No doubt,' said the Professor, 'science admits that extraordinary manifestations are obtained, but how and wherefore?'

'Precisely,' said Mervyn, 'the influence of the Kama over the Upadana——'

'Do be quiet, Mervyn,' said Lottie. 'Let us begin and get it over, Mr. Woodville.'

'By all means,' said Woodville. 'Kindly close those curtains,' he continued to a footman, who was moving about the room. 'It is necessary that we should be entirely secluded and undisturbed.'

The heavy curtains which divided the long room were lowered.

'I must explain to you that each individual present has the result in his or her hands. The only condition necessary is complete mental concentration—obedience to impressions from within.'

'Understand, Davidson,' said his lordship to the footman, 'that we are on no account to be disturbed!'

The footman bowed silently, and left the room.

'And now,' continued Woodville, 'for our arrangement. Will you take this seat, Lady Carlotta? Madame Obnoskin, you might remain where you are.'

'I should suggest,' said Dewsbury, 'that Madame Obnoskin, since she shares your wonderful sensitiveness, should sit elsewhere.'

'Certainly. Madame Obnoskin, will you sit by his lordship? Does that satisfy you? But I must ask your lordship, whatever you see or hear, not to interfere, otherwise our efforts will be useless.'

Dewsbury nodded curtly.

'Isabel,' he said, 'will you sit here?'

'Excuse me,' said Woodville; 'it is now my turn to object. I desire that you and Miss Arlington will sit apart.'

'Why?' asked Frank.

'Because you are an adverse influence, while Miss Arlington is distinctly a sympathetic one.'

'Absurd!' muttered Dewsbury.

'Pray be fair to Mr. Woodville,' said the Earl

mildly. 'Let him conduct his experiment in his own way.'

'As you please,' replied Dewsbury, leaning back in his chair.

'The next step,' continued Woodville, 'is to darken the room.'

'The usual preliminary!' said Frank, with a short laugh.

'The usual preliminary, as you say,' said Woodville, with calm good-temper. 'I do not make the conditions; I only apply them.'

'Quite so!' said the Professor.

'Professor Marrables will tell you,' continued Woodville, turning towards the scientist, 'if you are unaware of the fact, that brain sensitiveness is largely disturbed by light.'

'Quite so, quite so!' chirped the Professor.

'I place you in darkness,' Woodville went on, 'just as the artist treats the sensitive plate which is to receive a photographic impression.'

'That is not unreasonable,' said the Professor. 'It

is well known, moreover, that certain psychic impressions are closely dependent on obscuration of the optic nerve. In the case of a monkey, for example, on which I once experimented——'

'I beg your lordship's pardon,' said the footman, re-entering. 'Telegram, my lord.'

Madame Obnoskin half rose from her seat with a sudden gasp. Woodville, as if he had not heard the servant's voice, pressed the electric button, and plunged the room into almost complete darkness.

'Did I not tell you,' said the Earl testily, 'that we are not to be interrupted?'

'It has come by special messenger, my lord,' said the man.

'Very well; go away! Pray proceed, Mr. Woodville; the telegram shall wait.'

Woodville crossed over to the window, through which a broad band of faint moonlight was streaming, and drew the heavy plush curtain, thus totally darkening the room.

'I must ask you,' he said, 'for perfect silence. In

the event, however, of a manifestation to any person, that person may speak.'

His voice, which sounded strange and cavernous in the deep darkness, ceased, and perfect silence reigned for what, to the tense nerves of every person present, seemed a long time.

'It is useless,' said Lord Dewsbury, moving in his chair with an impatient gesture.

'Patience, if you please,' Woodville's calm and level voice answered. 'Someone in the room,' he continued, 'may desire to communicate with one who is far away, dead or living. If so, let that person will with all his or her might, to be assured of the beloved presence. Fix your minds on those with whom you desire to communicate. Will that they shall appear. Help them! Summon them! Perhaps they will obey!'

'May they do so!' said the Earl fervently. 'It is the will of all here!'

'I do not pretend to know how or wherefore,' continued Woodville; 'but I know that every person

present must have felt at one time or other, in supreme moments of joy, of sorrow, or of insight, that there are forces in life which are beyond us, above us, yet ever surrounding us, as they surround us possibly to-night!'

He was interrupted by a sudden exclamation from Madame Obnoskin.

'Ah!'

'What is it?' asked Woodville.

'A form appears before me!'

'Speak to it!'

'I cannot!' madame panted. 'I am terrified!'

'I see nothing,' said the Earl.

'Hush!' said Woodville. 'The presences are here! They are growing!'

'I see a form in a white dress!' said madame. 'It is moving to and fro!'

'Near whom does it stand?'

'Near Miss Arlington.'

'It is false!' cried Dewsbury. 'We see nothing!'

'Silence, Lord Dewsbury!' said Woodville com-

mandingly. 'Describe what you see,' he continued to Madame Obnoskin.

'It is too vague! It changes shape! Ah, it grows! I see the face—sad-eyed and stern, with hair and moustache white as snow! His lips move! He is trying to speak!'

'To whom?'

'To Miss Arlington.'

'And does Miss Arlington see nothing?' asked Woodville.

'Nothing!' panted Isabel. 'Ah,' she cried, 'something touched me! Something bent over me!'

'If your thought is of anyone near and dear to you, will with all your might that he may appear.'

'I do! I do! If he lives, let him appear to me!'

A strange sound, a universal sob of superstitious awe, broke from the throat of every person in the room. Something white, mystically luminous, began to grow in the darkness. It grew slowly almost to completed human form, then wavered half-way back to nothingness, grew and strengthened again, and

finally amid the awe-struck silence of all present, seemed to solidify into the shape and face of Colonel Arlington. Isabel rose with a hysteric scream.

'Father, father, you live!'

Her groping arms encountered nothing but the empty air.

'A vile imposture!' cried Dewsbury. 'It shall go no further!'

He sprang to the electric button, and the figure vanished in a blaze of light.

'Father, father!' cried Isabel again, and sank back quivering into her seat.

'Look up, dear,' said Dewsbury. 'It is nothing! Draw back those curtains! Give her air!'

Woodville, pale and calm amid the universal excitement, spoke in measured tones of certainty:

'Of one thing Miss Arlington can rest assured—her father lives.'

'It is false!' cried Dewsbury. 'Colonel Arlington is dead!'

Woodville smiled quietly, as at the petulance of a

spoiled child, and crossed to where the Earl was standing like a man dazed.

'Will you not open your telegram, my lord?'

The Earl started, and passed his hand across his forehead.

'The telegram? Yes; certainly!'

He opened it with tremulous fingers.

'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'What is this? Read it!'

He thrust the missive into Woodville's hands.

'Read it aloud!'

Woodville glanced at the telegram, and then at the ring of white faces about him. He read calmly:

'I am safe and well, and on my way to England. Break the news to Isabel!'

END OF VOL. I.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.