

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A FULL REVELATION.

THE day after reaching Liege, we proceeded by appointment, to the rooms of the Spiritualist Association, and in the evening we had the pleasure of giving to that body a sample of our spiritualistic powers. Thomson considered it unwise for him to go into the cabinet, his chronic suspicion suggesting that the sitters might privately hatch some treasonable design against our peace. It was therefore, resolved, between ourselves, that I should, while here, be the medium for materialisation. My ignorance of the language not being specially required in that direction.

The surroundings of that séance were not inapt, the curtain, which enclosed one corner of the room for a cabinet, was a handsome blue velvet pall used at the funerals of the spiritualists.

John King, however, did not trouble much about that, for, after the test had been duly elaborated under the superintendence of the principal persons present, he gave them a slight view of his person, and gracefully bade them adieu in English, until he would again meet them.

A few days after this, when we were taking our usual stroll in the outskirts of the Ardennes, I determined to relieve my mind of a burden that had long been oppressing it.

"I have been going to ask you something for a long time, and now I think I will," I said to Thomson.

"What is it?"

"I begin to think that the whole of these spiritualistic manifestations is a huge pack of rubbish."

"You *begin* to think! It's almost time you had finished," replied Thomson; "anyhow," continued he, "you are on the right track at last?"

“That is to say, I am right?”

“Never more so in your life!”

“And you mean to say that there is not an iota of truth in your mediumship?”

“That is just what I do mean; neither in mine nor in any other medium.”

“And you have actually carried on this game for all these years, and in conjunction with others too? Why, it is the fun of the age!”

“Or any other age. Now, you have been an awful long time coming to a decision. For the first four or five weeks you were with me I don't think you suspected anything, but after that, you began to look very serious, and I saw that you were too sharp to be wholly bamboozled, and at the end of a couple of months I told you, when we left London, that all mediums had to help out a little, and that seemed to satisfy you.”

“Yes, it did satisfy me in some respects.”

“How do mean?”

“I saw that I had done wrong in blaming the spirits for all that frivolity, and as you know I have a very retentive memory, I found they told lies, but your partial revelation I thought exonerated them altogether.”

“What should you have done if I had told you everything right out at the very beginning?”

“You needn't ask. I shouldn't have had anything to do with it.”

“Of course. I knew that. When I met you first I saw in a minute that you were the very man I wanted. I knew you'd never split if you found out anything. I am not at all afraid if you do now; for nobody would believe but that we had quarrelled, and you were having your revenge.”

“You need have no fear on that head. I don't wish to ‘expose,’ and I don't believe those fellows do the least good by ‘exposing,’ as they call it, except to themselves.”

“That's true: anybody can see there is a wide difference between a conjuror on his own platform, and a medium in

a private room. And the spiritualists only laugh at their feeble attempts, even though the 'exposer' may show exactly the same trick but under other conditions; while outsiders are in numbers of cases led to investigate through the noise they make."

"I believe you are right."

"Yes; and then these Exposers are often people who would expose anything if it would pay. They'd advertise "Christianity Exposed" if they could make money by it; besides which, you very seldom meet with an Exposer who has ever attended many séances, and never with one who really does know anything from experience."

"The most wonderful part of it is, that you have been able to go on for so long a time. How did you first begin your spiritualist career?"

"It was about ten years ago, while living in America. My people took me to a séance with them, and I thought it was all humbug. And just to try these spirits, I got my head under the table and raised it up, and I made it say that I was a wonderful medium; in short I played the very mischief at all their séances. I liked it for a little while, because it made me a person of some importance. I used to go off into trances and kick up awful rows, and get lights and flash them about in the dark, and people in the streets used to say when I passed: 'There's the new medium, that's *him*, that's *him*!' but at last I got tired of it, and told my own people, but they wouldn't believe it; they said I was at that moment under the control of some evil spirit, and it must be exorcised, and a lot of nonsense about cultivating my wonderful gifts. So I thought if they would be deceived it was their own fault, and I kept on with my games, although at that time I had no money for my services, but I didn't then care about that, I was almost worshipped, which pleased me quite as well.

"Soon after that we left for England, and just then we became very poor, and hardly knew what to do for our living. One day I heard that a celebrated American medium with

his wife were giving séances in London, and I visited him at his rooms. Fortunately he had a séance at home for that evening, and he fixed me in the circle next to himself, and, when the lights were put out, I released his hand and helped him in a few little things.

“After the sitting he asked me to stay and talk over old times ; and when the people were all gone, he told me that he could see I was alive, and if I liked he would give me two guineas a week if I would help him twice each week ; and he gave me two guineas on the spot as an earnest.

“Naturally, such an offer as this was considered a god-send, and I joyfully accepted it. I used to go to him according to agreement, and many were the pranks we played. At last it happened that he went back to America, and offered to take me with him ; but I considered that I was quite capable of going out as a medium myself, and for two or three years I did exceedingly well. I was not at all dissatisfied with the result of my work in England, but I wanted a holiday, and I took a trip to Paris, thinking I might combine business with pleasure.

“Meeting with a Count de — at a séance one day in Paris, he made me an offer of 1000 francs a month if I would hold myself entirely at his disposal. He was a very rich man and generous, and he soon increased my salary to 1250 francs, besides many bye séances which he induced his friends to have, and for which I was handsomely paid.

“When any of the mediums visited Paris, which was now my home, I often made John King tell the Count to have sittings with them. I was never jealous, but used to help them and coach them up, so that many a clairvoyant test was obtained thus and published ! It was with the Count that I did that shooting at the double, which you remember made such a stir among the spiritualists ; but although the Count is a generous man, he is not a fool, and it required all my wit to satisfy him. You recollect Bugot, that spirit photographer ?”

“Yes,” I answered, highly interested by this story. “How did he manage to do all that he did?”

“We worked it between us; of course no one knew that we were acquainted with each other, and we carried on for a long time, and made a lot of money. But he was a great fool after all. One day the police called (in disguise), and they asked if it were possible for them to obtain spirit portraits. Bugot told them he didn’t know, but they could try, and he soon arranged everything for them; but just as he had got them in position, and was going to remove the cap, one of the detectives stepped forward, and said, ‘Stop, M. Bugot, don’t expose that plate. I am a police officer. Take it out again and come with me into the dark room. Now, please develop it. No tricks, Monsieur; that is the right bottle. Ah, just as I thought,’ said the detective, as a form appeared on the plate. Bugot ought to have been prepared for all this. If I had been in his place I should have had all my bottles labelled wrong; I think that would have puzzled the policemen. But he didn’t, and hence the mischief. He gave my name as an accomplice, and another who was really innocent. He was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment; I got 6 months, and the innocent man 12 months and a fine; but my friends, including the Count, believed in me just the same.”

“There is a photograph of yours exhibited in the Spiritualist Society’s rooms in London. How did you do that?”

“Oh, they have several pieces of my handiwork there, as you know; but as for that photograph, which shows the Count sitting on a chair and my double close beside him, it was done by Bugot and me. I was in Amsterdam at the time, and the Count, knowing nothing of our knowledge of each other, called on Bugot one day to have some portraits taken. Bugot was quite the rage at that time, everybody went to him, and on the occasion when the Count sat, not for a spirit picture, Bugot knew him and exposed a plate with a faint outline of me on it (he had several always prepared); when it was developed Bugot showed it to the

Count, and asked him if he knew what it meant. The Count knew that I was away, and he asked Bugot to say nothing about it to any one ; but I was made aware of what had happened, and when the Count wrote asking me what I was doing at a certain time, I wrote back that I remembered falling asleep, and dreaming that I was with him in Paris. That quite convinced him of the genuine nature of the picture, and he had a number printed and distributed about, and that is how the London Society got one ; but they have a number of casts of spirit hands, &c., which I did. Last year the Count went away for a few months, and I then came to England ; but I shall try and get back to him."

The account which Thomson gave to me would of itself fill a book. Some of his adventures were very curious. I am sorry I have not space at present to relate them. It was plain to me that he had become so inured to this life that he was utterly unfitted for anything else, and he regarded himself as a thoroughly honest individual, and well worthy of the fame and money that he had made. I told him of a séance that I had once had with a noted medium, and that some strange things had then happened which I could not account for. He answered that I talked like a fool, that a person who did nothing but mediumship, in time became clever enough to deceive anybody ; even conjurors themselves had publicly testified that the things they witnessed were beyond their skill. It is true that his story fully explained the mysteries which I had once regarded as incontrovertible proofs of the truth of Spiritualism, and made me resolve, also, to finish my mediumistic career. I told him, therefore, that I was completely satisfied, and did not feel inclined to proceed any further in that direction.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked.

"Anything rather than this. If you can do those things of which you have just spoken, we can make plenty of money on the stage, and what is more important, we can do it honestly. Now we may gloss this over as we will, it is nothing more nor less than a downright swindle."



“Look at other mediums.”

“That is no excuse. Here is M. de Chênée, for instance, a sensible and clever man. He will do anything for us, and although he is a prominent spiritualist, he will, I am sure, give us an introduction to some of the managers of the public halls here, and we can at once begin ; that we can do in perfect safety. I recognise the difficulty of getting anything to do, but at present that seems to be the only chance we have of getting out of this fearful kind of life.”

“Well, it certainly is almost impossible to get any position, after once being a medium, and I think if it were not for that fact, many mediums would at once give it up. However, I am willing to give these tricks on the stage. I did once have an offer in Paris, but at that time I daren't because of the Count. However we must change our names and not say anything of Spiritualism. You see there are great numbers of good people who have always believed in me, and have stood by me through thick and thin ; they'd feel bad if I came out in public, and said it was all trickery.”

“I have no objection to change our names ; but I wonder you never saved any money when you made so much.”

“Easy come, easy go,” answered he shortly.

The same afternoon we met M. de Chênée, and this gentleman at once consented to give us the desired introduction. We told him nothing of delusion or fraud, but simply said we wished for an opportunity to work in public, saying nothing for or against the cause. The manager of the Hall of Varieties agreed to have a trial with us, and if satisfactory, which he had no doubt it would be, he would offer us a lengthy and lucrative engagement.

This was so far good, and we began to prepare for our public display, and finding several things were necessary, Thomson said he would go off to Brussels to procure what was required. There was still another reason for his journey. The apparatus would cost more money than we possessed, and he thought he could procure the balance requisite from friends in that city.

I made no objection to be left alone, but I pointed out the necessity of a speedy return, otherwise I should be in an uncomfortable position, in a place, the language of which was unknown to me, not to speak of being left almost penniless, but a day or even two would not seriously incommode me.

When the time came for him to go, we drove to the station, and he asked me to meet the last train that night, by which he intended to return, and he soon after took his seat in the carriage, and with a "Be sure and meet me by the last train to-night, good-morning," and the train moving off bore away my partner; as it afterwards turned out, never to return, for I have never seen him since.

I did not feel particularly lonely that day; I roamed off to the delightful haunts of the Ardennes forest, and spent the greater part of the day there in perfect contentment. Late at night I bent my steps to the station for the last train, which duly appeared, but without the precious cargo of Thomson. I was not very much troubled by his non-arrival; we had both thought it very probable that he would be expected to give a *séance* in Brussels, and consoling myself with the reflection that such was the case, I went home.

Several days now passed, and no sign either by post or rail of Thomson, I began to feel very uncomfortable. I expected, too, the hotel bill every morning, which would have been an unwelcome apparition, considering my present impecuniosity, and I actually began to console myself that if the worst really did come, "mine host" would not suffer, for my wardrobe would more than liquidate every claim.

At this time I walked to the village where lived our excellent friend M. de Chênée, and fortunately he could speak German. He received me with his customary hospitality and politeness, and kindly inquired after Thomson. I informed him that he had gone to Brussels on business, but I expected that he would return shortly, a piece of faith in which my friend did not join, but he was careful to let me down as gently as possible. He told me that he had received a letter from Paris regarding us, and for my better grasping the true character of Thomson he translated it into German.



It appeared from the letter that my partner was possessed of rather an evil repute; it spoke of his extravagances and loose morals, but did not hint at anything derogatory of his mediumistic powers, on the contrary, it eulogised him in that direction, and the letter concluded by expressing sorrow that I had ever been induced to join him.

I was rather surprised at the latter part, for I imagined myself a totally unknown quantity in the gay city. Regarding the first, it confirmed a side-wind report which formerly had told me that Thomson had been in many escapades, but which I thought was not borne out by my own experience of that gentleman, for respecting any charge of reckless immorality he was as steady as most men.

I was very much impressed with the graceful courtesy of M. de Chênée, who proved himself, in the widest sense of the word, a Christian and a gentleman, and a fine representation of the generous and sturdy Belgians.

Time slowly passed away, and the suspicions of M. de Chênée regarding Thomson's intention to keep away received another confirmation, besides his non-appearance.

A lady, speaking German, informed me that she had sufficient knowledge to justify her in declaring that my partner never intended to return. It was a mystery to me how she had got her news, though I was not quite so ready to credit the spirits with clairvoyance as formerly. But it appeared to me that everybody knew more of Thomson's present intentions than I did.

This lady vehemently declared that he would not come back, and excitedly advised me to break the peace of any sovereign lord or lady wherever I happened to find him, saying—

“If I were you, when I saw him again I would make him smart. I would thrash him, ah, nearly to death; that I would, the villain.”

And the intense disgust she exhibited was almost comical, blended as it was with a strong desire to display her own powers of forcible persuasion upon the unlucky wight; and unlucky he would be, too, I am afraid, if ever he ventured to call at that portion of Europe again.

I certainly had not abandoned hope in the honour of Thomson, and still looked out for him by every "last train" to come and extricate me from my unpleasant dilemma. But the wearisome days dragged by and still no sail in sight. It would not have troubled me had I been able to speak the language. Often I met spiritualists in the town who knew me, but when we had shaken hands, and uttered a mutual, "Bon jour, Monsieur!" we could only look at each other, and for lack of more dictionary silently pass on our ways.

At last came the crisis which I had been long expecting. One morning I descended, and as usual inquired if there were any letters; and as if not willing I should be disappointed any longer, the landlady handed me a letter written in world-wide-known characters—The bill.

Whatever powers of speech I lacked to make her understand were fully supplied and atoned for by the irate lady before me. She flung forth into such a—well I really don't know, neither had I any particular wish for an interpreter.

But I resolved not to risk a discourteous reception by any further visits to that abode, nor subject myself to the encore of a refrain, which seemed to me as likely to offer greater charms if heard at a distance of half-a-dozen liberally measured miles, and I shook the dust off my feet and heard no more of her extraordinary eloquence.

I was now convinced beyond a doubt that Thomson had left me to get away as best I could, and after a visit to the station for that "last train," I strayed off into the solitary depths of the Ardennes forest.

Deeper and deeper I penetrated its lonesome glades, with no thought of anything in particular. I felt no anger against Thomson, or anybody else; indeed I was rather pleased than otherwise, for I was now free—and satisfied. I spent the day in ——— searching for early spring flowers. At times I did try to review the past, present, and future, but my mind refused to dwell upon any single point for any length of time, and I turned again to the flowers.

When the cold and dreary day had merged into a colder

and drearier night, I bethought myself to return home, but I suddenly remembered I had nowhere to go, and found too that I had lost my bearings.

At any other time this would probably have alarmed me, but in my present predicament one place was as good as another. Fortunately I was neither assailed by fatigue nor hunger; but perhaps that is due to the fact that the means of satisfying either were beyond my power.

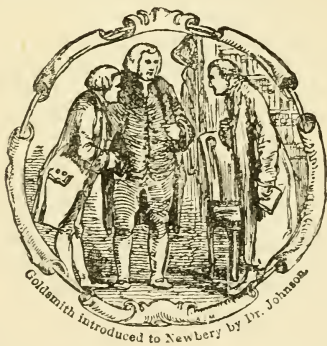
I wandered along through the drizzling rain which now commenced, at times stumbling over rocks and tree trunks; and the hours slowly dragged past, until I judged it must be about midnight, and then my thoughts began to take a definite shape, and I could view my position with comparative clearness.

No fretful complaints arose, for indeed I had nothing to complain about. How to extricate myself I did not for one moment consider. It appeared as though nothing short of a miracle would help me. I had neither friends to whom I could apply, nor the power possessed by those of the wealthy order of mankind. And yet the prospect did not alarm me; I was confident, if I thought of it at all, of a happy issue, even though I had empty pockets and a broken faith.

At last the night wore away and day broke, and eventually I found my way back to the town where I met M. de Chênée, who insisted upon taking me home with him.

This gentleman removed my embarrassments, and in a few days I returned to England, happier if not richer, because I was enfranchised from the horrible deception of phenomenal Spiritualism.

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