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M A S O L L A M ;

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

A NOVEL

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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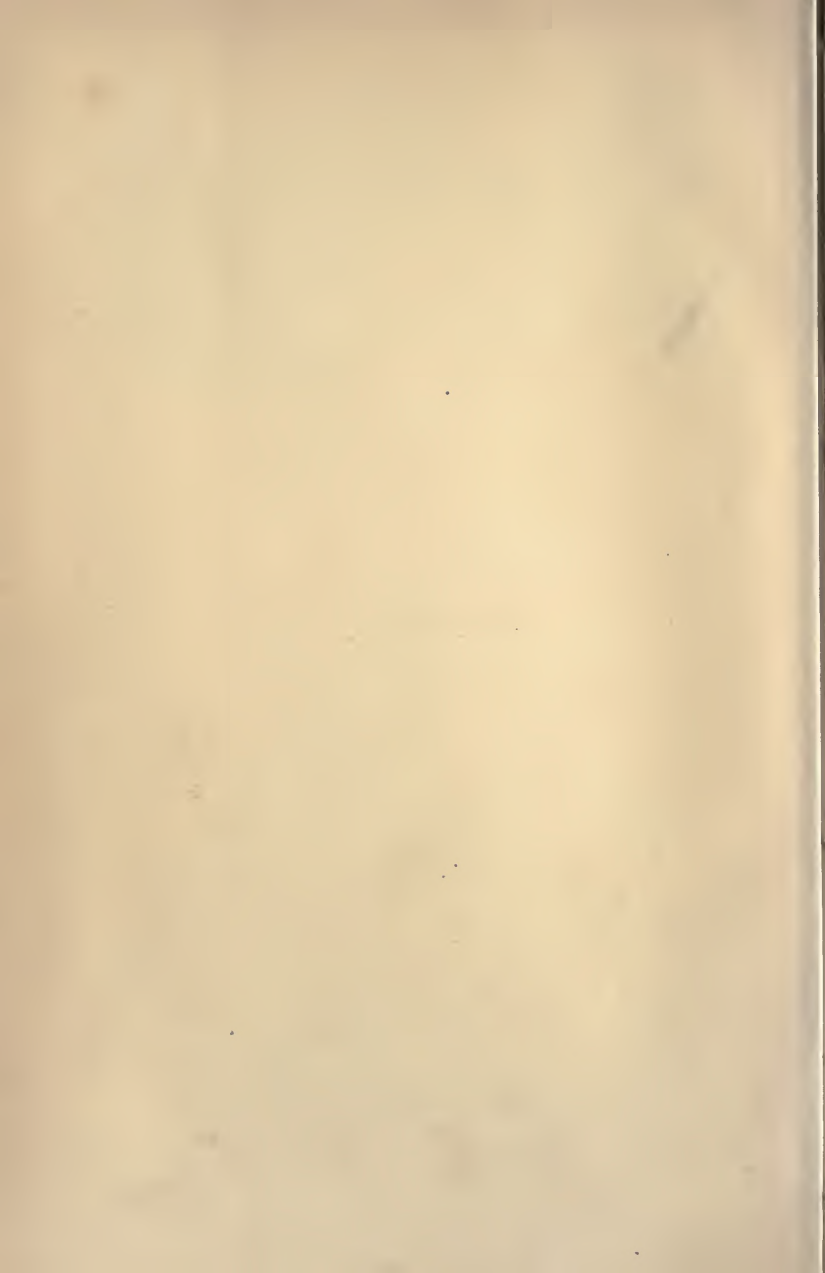
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PART I.



MASOLLAM:

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADIES' GALLERY OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THE ladies' gallery of the House of Commons was more than usually crowded; it was the third night of an adjourned debate, to be followed by a division pregnant with fate to the Government, and honourable members had been balloting and intriguing for the admission of their female belongings, with an assiduity which was some indication of the pressure from without or within, as the case might be, to which they had been subjected. There were wives, and friends of wives, of

various Cabinet Ministers; there were two or three fair creatures so tenderly interested in certain honourable members, that they thought it better to be squeezed into that dingy recess, and look down on the crowns of the hats of those sapient legislators from a distance, than not to see anything of them at all; and there were others, very insufficiently chaperoned, because the members interested in them had "most unfortunately" been quite unable to secure the requisite number of seats. There were old ladies from the country, who had been balloted for in due course, because they were the wives of constituents, and who thus came in accidentally for a good thing in the way of a debate which they altogether failed to appreciate; and there was one, the loveliest of them all—if there had only been light enough to see her—who came from nobody knew where, and who, as time went on, and no gentleman appeared to disturb her absorbed and intense contemplation of what was going on beneath, gradually excited the curiosity of her eager companions in a very marked degree. Attention had been first called to her, partly by her having se-

cured the best seat, to the exclusion of certain ladies, each of whom thought the political position of her husband gave her a right to it; partly by the size and lustre of two diamonds in her ears, and the richness and perfect taste of her costume; and lastly, by the extraordinary depth and brilliancy of her large eyes, as she turned them for an instant on some new-comer, revealing, as she did so, a face so beautiful that it was evident she must be a stranger, or with such advantages she could not have failed to take society by storm, whoever she might be.

"I am positive they are paste, my dear," whispered old Lady Hornsey to Mrs Vere Middlehurst, with her gaze fixed on the tiny ears of the fair unknown; "it is quite impossible that they can be real. Why, there are not half-a-dozen women in London who have two solitaires of that water."

"No, they are real," returned her friend. "I am never mistaken about diamonds, even in such an uncertain light as this. She is a foreigner, that is evident—probably a Russian princess. If she is, Charles is sure to know about her. He will come up as soon as he has

spoken : he told me he should wait and answer Mr Spintail, who is speaking now. How prosy he is, and yet how eagerly she appears to listen, as if she could possibly understand him, or his feeble jokes ! It is no wonder, I am sure, that the Conservatives have lost the confidence of the country, if that is the kind of oratory they are obliged to listen to, though Charles tells me the Government is certain to be beaten."

"They are sure of a majority of nine, on the contrary : I have it from the very best authority. Meantime Spintail will most likely drawl on for an age, and I shall be half dead with impatience. Can't you lean forward and whisper to Gertrude Clareville to tell her daughter Edith, who is sitting next the woman, to draw her into conversation."

"I am afraid I could not do it without her hearing."

"Oh, nonsense ! what does that matter ? Let us change places, if you don't mind the smell of smoky chimneys : I am sure this fat woman in front of me comes from the Black Country,"—and squeezing past her less enterprising neighbour, Lady Hornsey bent forward, and made her request to a lady sitting on the front

bench in a whisper which she nevertheless intended and believed to be inaudible.

But the ears with the diamonds seemed gifted with an almost supernatural power of hearing; for although at the moment the attention of their owner appeared to be riveted upon Mr Spintail, she drew gently back, and turning her large soft eyes upon her neighbour, said in French, but without lowering her voice—

“It will give me great pleasure to talk to you, if your mamma will allow you, and if you speak French. I understand a little English, but I speak it so badly, I am afraid; and I have so many questions to ask, for I am quite a stranger, and this interests me so much.”

Edith Clareville, who had not overheard Lady Hornsey's stage aside, coloured with surprise and embarrassment at this unexpected address, and turned to her mother to hide her momentary confusion, while poor Lady Clareville felt as guilty as Lady Hornsey should have done, had that veteran campaigner been capable of feeling guilty under any circumstances.

“My daughter will, I am sure, be delighted

to give you every information in her power," said Lady Clareville, speaking across Edith ; but just at this moment she was interrupted by a commotion produced by some arrivals, under the escort of two members, one of whom was her son, and the other his most intimate friend, who, after seating the ladies who had been confided to them, edged themselves as close as possible to Lady Clareville and her daughter. They had scarcely done so when an appalling uproar arose from the body of the House.

"Oh, look! listen!" exclaimed Edith's neighbour, who only seemed too glad to take advantage of the hint which Lady Hornsey's whisper had afforded her to enter into conversation. "What a noise they all make! and why are they all crying Awdrawd—Awdrawd? what does that mean, Awdrawd? and now they all go into fits of laughter, and one gentleman takes the tail of the coat of a gentleman who is standing up and pulls him."

"I can't imagine what is going on," said Edith. "Regy, please explain what is happening. Everybody seems screaming madly at an unfortunate man who is staring wildly

about him in the middle of the floor, apparently unconscious that he is the cause of the uproar, and several people have made clutches at his coat; why, even the Prime Minister is laughing;—there now, he has been pulled down into a seat close to the table.”

“It is only a new member, ignorant of the rules of the House, passing between Spintail and the Speaker,” replied her brother, laughing. “See how wretchedly abashed the poor victim looks, in his temporary refuge on the front Opposition bench, squeezed in between a lot of ex-Ministers, and how the House is enjoying his confusion, which is only exceeded by that of Spintail, who has been interrupted in the middle of his peroration, and can’t pick it up again.”

“And what do they all mean by calling Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya?” asked the unknown, turning to Reginald Clareville, as Mr Spintail, after a final oratorical effort, resumed his seat amid the cheers of his party. Clareville was so dazzled by the brilliancy of the gaze which accompanied this question, and so melted by a tenderness that did not seem altogether appropriate to it, that to his intense mortifica-

tion he felt himself colouring slightly beneath it, as he explained that this was the British parliamentary method of expressing approbation. He soon became more than reconciled to the thirst for information which seemed to possess the fair stranger, as he pointed out the more distinguished characters below, accompanying his remarks by a running commentary, couched in a strain of cynicism which exhibited singular impartiality, coming from one of the most rising among the younger politicians of the day. As he perceived the interest he excited in his listener, he felt himself warming to his subject, the more especially as in the observations with which she occasionally interrupted him, she displayed an unusually quick faculty of apprehension, and an intelligence which seemed as rare as her beauty. He was engaged in a subtle metaphysical analysis of the moral and intellectual characteristics of the Prime Minister, when that statesman arose and held the House for an hour under the spell of his eloquence. The ringing cheers with which his last words were greeted were followed by the division bell, and Clareville and his friend, who had in the

meantime been devoting himself to Miss Clareville, were summoned to perform the most important of their legislative functions.

"I must run away and vote now," he said, hurriedly, "but I shall be back in a quarter of an hour to take my mother and sister to the carriage. There will be nothing more of interest to-night after the division;" and then after a pause, which he dared not prolong, as he thought of the sand running through the minute-glass, and the danger of being shut out in the lobby, he stammered, "I suppose somebody is coming for you?"

"You are in a hurry now,—I will tell you when you come back," she said, softly; and Clareville rushed after his friend, whom he only overtook as he was entering the House.

Meantime Lady Hornsey had taken advantage of the momentary stir in the ladies' gallery to get immediately behind the diamonds which had so keenly excited her interest.

"Have you ever been in the House of Commons before?" she inquired, in by no means the purest French, leaning forward till her lips were in close proximity to those glit-

tering jewels. They seemed to flash if possible more brightly, but their wearer had lapsed into sudden taciturnity.

“It is a curious scene, is it not?” proceeded her ladyship, nothing abashed, and in a louder tone, as the members came trooping in; and the murmur which greeted them as the tellers of the Opposition were observed to be on the right, as they advanced to the table, swelled to a sudden roar when the numbers were announced. Then followed the wildest demonstrations of delight: honourable members shrieked, and went so far as to stand on their seats and to fling their hats in the air; for it was such a crushing defeat on a cardinal point of policy, that the Government, which had already sustained more than one of minor importance, was now left no alternative. It was no wonder that the stranger was too much interested to attend to Lady Hornsey, but peered intently through the glass which rendered her invisible to the eyes of Reginald Clareville, at that moment gazing up at the latticed barrier.

“Good heavens! My dear, the Government is beaten, and will have to go out,” ejaculated

Lady Hornsey, applying this familiar epithet in her agitation to whoever might chance to think herself included.

"I think Lady Hornsey is speaking to you," said Edith, not without a touch of malice, turning to her impassible neighbour.

"*Oh, pardon, mille fois pardon!*" exclaimed the latter, looking round straight into Lady Hornsey's face, and scanning it with great deliberation. "I was just thinking how much these gentlemen resemble a set of howling dervishes; and how like we are, cooped up here behind this lattice screen, to a lot of Turkish ladies in a harem." She uttered the words "derveesh" and "hareem" with the marked pronunciation which belongs to them in Eastern tongues, and again became absorbed in the scene below, while Lady Hornsey, leaning back to Mrs Vere Middlehurst, whispered—

"I feel certain, my dear, that she has some black paint round her eyes,"—and her ladyship rose to leave, lingering, however, at the doorway, that she might intercept Clareville on his return.

"Oh, Mr Clareville," she said, when that

gentleman appeared, "this defeat of the Government is really quite too terrible. You will do me such a favour if you will find out who the beautiful stranger is you have been talking to. Mrs Vere Middlehurst has asked her husband, and he does not know. If she is the least respectable, I want her to come to me on Thursday night: I am sure she would create a sensation. I don't think I ever saw anything so lovely. I suppose, if she has a husband, I shall be obliged to have him too: but foreigners are always presentable. Do find out all about her, and come and lunch with me to-morrow and tell me who she is, and what the Government mean to do about it all,"—and Lady Hornsey waddled off on the arm of Mr Vere Middlehurst, with a mind agitated in equal proportions by her feminine curiosity and her political proclivities.

"Sebastian," said Clareville to his friend, who had returned with him to the gallery, "please look after my mother and sister while I take care of the unprotected female next to Edith, if, as I suspect, she stands in need of protection;" and as he spoke he looked up and encountered a wistful confiding gaze, which

left no doubt on his mind that his suspicions would turn out correct.

"I will follow you," he added to his mother and sister, who had now joined him, and were putting on their wraps. "Hartwright will see you to the carriage."

Meantime the gallery was emptying, but the stranger, who was rapidly becoming invested with a mysterious interest in Clareville's eyes, remained seated.

"Do you expect somebody, or are you still too much interested in the processes of British legislation to tear yourself away?" he asked, as he seated himself comfortably by her side.

"I am not expecting anybody, and I am more interested, perhaps, in some of the legislators than in the legislation," she replied, with a smile. "Though I confess that my object in coming here to-night was chiefly to be present at a crisis in the political fortunes of this country, which cannot fail to exercise a momentous influence not merely upon its own future destiny, but which must seriously affect that of other nations. Those boisterous politicians with the *cœur léger* whom I saw throwing their hats into the air just now,

little suspect the weighty consequences which hang upon their vote. They are like school-boys who have been playing a game, and who cheer because their side has won. Have they ever thought what their side winning means for the countless millions whose fate has been decided by that victory? *Des marionnettes!* How should they know, those twenty-seven that formed the majority, what effect their vote is destined to have on the fortunes of the race? But I tell you,"—and she turned with sparkling eye and quivering nostril on Clareville,—“that among the wanderers of the deserts, and dwellers in distant palm-groves, its action will be felt, no less than among those who claim the peat-bogs of Ireland, or the lion’s share of their industry in your own country. Ah, I see more,” she said, lowering her voice, and speaking very slowly. “It means war, and I see those who have taken part in that vote to whom this night will be fatal.”

Clareville meanwhile had listened to this strange exordium, with its assumption of prophetic inspiration, with a mingled feeling of admiration, wonder, and amusement. Nor

could he altogether deny that, however much she might be mistaken as to the far-reaching consequences of the division in which he had taken part, the levity which reduced it to a mere party triumph was calculated to astonish a stranger, who would naturally consider a change in the Government, and therefore in the foreign policy of so great a country as England, to be a matter of extreme gravity : but being of a somewhat sceptical and cynical temperament, he failed altogether to be impressed by what he irreverently termed "the fortune-telling business" at the end.

"I quite admit the justice of your criticism," he said, "as to a certain incongruity between the solemnity of the issue at stake and the somewhat boyish demonstrations we make over it. We pick up the habit at our public schools, and are unable to shake it off. You have just seen here a cricket-match at Lord's, or a university boat-race, or a Derby day, carried into politics. We have no imagination, and our methods are always more or less the same. Thus you saw the episode of the new member. We always look out for that. It is like the dog that runs down the

race-course. Then after the division is taken, we cheer the winner,—that is the end of the race; but this time I am afraid it has been witnessed by a Cassandra: your terrible predictions have caused me the greatest consternation.” .

“I predicted no misfortunes to your country. I simply say it is a crisis in her fate from which, for all I know, she may come out unscathed; and in the fate of others, both of nations and of individuals, from which they will not: but I did not ask you to attach any importance to it. The day will come when you will remember what I have said.”

“You have said enough, at all events, to excite my curiosity, and to give me food for reflection. I so far agree with you, that I think the position of foreign affairs abroad, and the relation of England towards them, in the highest degree critical; and a reversal of policy by a new Government must produce important changes, and possibly bring about new and serious complications. I should like to know something more definite: for instance, can you tell me to whom this night will prove fatal, and how or when?—and might I

further venture to ask in which of the legislators you are especially interested?"

"It would be useless to answer your first question, for you do not know those of whom I am thinking; but the legislators in whom I am especially interested"—and she paused as the words seemed forced from her lips by an effort, either real or affected—"are Mr Sebastian Hartwright and Mr Reginald Clareville. I would rather you had not asked me the question, but I dare not refuse to answer."

"She need not have led up to it in that case," thought Clareville; and he became aware of a curious sensation of puzzled fascination creeping over him. This was the more remarkable as he prided himself on his imperviousness to attack from the whole feminine armoury. As the only son of Lord Clareville, he was an eligible *parti*, putting aside his good looks and political prospects; but without being a misogynist, he had obtained a reputation for impenetrability, which was the exasperation and despair of maidens and their mothers, to say nothing of the young married women. Now he was

already becoming conscious that this unknown stranger was throwing a spell over him which he was at a loss to describe. This was the more annoying because she seemed aware of her power, and to be doing it deliberately. She was certainly not a flirt in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Snakes who fascinate birds can scarcely be said to be flirting with them. Naturalists have not yet pushed scientific analysis to the point of being able to describe for us the sensation of the birds, nor can any one venture to assert that their emotions may not be of a mixed character—a sort of pleasurable alarm, in fact. Much less are they able to define the nature of the force which is projected from the visual organ of the reptile, and which possesses the singular faculty of dominating the volition of the victim : it is a region of speculation which, while it is impossible for them to deny that it exists, they shrink from entering upon—an aggravating region, because it eludes the power of a microscope or the action of a blow-pipe, and is nevertheless an active and persistent force in nature, which is pronounced to be unknowable to anybody. because it has

proved unknowable to them. It was so distinctly "feelable" by Clareville, that he made a vigorous effort of will to resist the attraction of which he was becoming conscious, the more so as the languor which seemed stealing over his faculties was calculated to predispose them to a certain credulity. "An adventuress^{*} with sham diamonds, who supposes that I am as easy to mystify as to flatter," he thought, as he said with an almost imperceptible sneer, and with not quite so much respect thrown into his tone as he had hitherto used—

"I suppose my sister Edith pointed us out to you, and told you our names. I am sure my friend Hartwright would feel as highly flattered as I do by the interest you are kind enough to express in us both, even though it must be of somewhat sudden growth."

"Pardon me," she replied, not in the least disconcerted by his change of manner; "it has existed for many years. Nor is there any reason why either you or he should be flattered by it. There are often reasons why we should feel an interest in persons which need not always be complimentary to them—quite the reverse." And Clareville thought, as she said

this in a soft voice, that he detected a shade of sadness beneath the flash of those lovely eyes. "You asked me who were the members of Parliament that I felt especially interested in, and I told you—*voilà tout* ! At the same time, I added that I would much rather not have done so. Your sister did not tell me your names," she added after a pause, as she rose from her seat and drew a light *bourouns* of a very rich oriental material over her shoulders.

"I must admit," said Clareville, a little taken aback by this sudden change of front, and with a somewhat embarrassed laugh, "that I was unduly conceited in attaching any complimentary sense to the interest you expressed in us—in me, at all events. You must let me make reparation for my vanity by putting you into your carriage. And I think that you, in your turn, owe me something for having piqued my curiosity. If you cannot stay and gratify it now, may I venture to hope that you will allow me to call upon you ?"

"I shall be very happy to see you at my hotel whenever you like to call," she replied, as she accepted the proffered arm.

"As I do not possess, like you, the sense of

divining people's names, permit me to inquire whose carriage I am to ask for," said Clareville, as they reached the yard, relapsing again into resentment at the mystification of which he felt he was being made the victim.

"Ask for Mr Cottrell's carriage, please;" and a policeman brought up at Clareville's request a neat private brougham.

"May I call to-morrow, and if so, at what hour, and where?" asked Clareville, half inclined to beg for a seat by her side, as he handed her into the carriage.

"At three o'clock to-morrow, at the Grand Hotel, if that will suit you. You can bring your friend Mr Hartwright with you, if you like. Sec, here is my card, so that you cannot make a mistake." And she added in a decided tone, as if to check the request upon his lips, "Good night,—I am much obliged for your kindness; please tell the coachman to drive home." And Clareville pressed the tips of the fingers that were extended to him, and shouted "Home," as with uncovered head and profound salutation he watched the carriage dash off, and saw the diamonds gleam for a moment in the gaslight.

“Amina Masollam,” he muttered to himself, glancing at the card he still held in his hand ; “what an uncouth name ! There is nothing on her card about the Grand Hotel to prove whether she is married or single, nor was there on her finger either, now that I come to think of it. Who is Cottrell ? Is there a Mr Masollam, I wonder ; and if there is, what country has the honour of claiming him as a native ? Perhaps he is ‘a wanderer of the desert, or a dweller in some distant palm-grove.’ It will be only fair to Hartwright to tell him what an interest he has excited in the breast of a lovely and inspired prophetess, and take him with me—I shall be sure to find him at the club.” And thither Clareville wended his way ; and the two young men sat up till a late hour discussing the mysterious *incognita* whom they were to visit on the following day, and, what was far more important, the effect of the division upon their own political prospects and that of their party.

At three o’clock next day the two friends repaired to the Grand Hotel, and asked for Madame Masollam. The porter informed them that no such person had been staying at the

hotel, but that a lady had left a note that morning, saying that it was to be handed to a gentleman who would call to inquire for her at three o'clock that afternoon. It contained only these lines :—

“I am sorry not to be able to keep my appointment. Tell your friend we shall meet before long.
A. M.”

“Not flattering, so far as I am concerned,” said Clareville, with a laugh. “It is clear which of us inspires the most interest.”

“If she had been an impostor with designs upon us, in the first place she would have chosen you as more valuable prey than myself; and in the second, she would not have disappeared when her efforts so far had been crowned with success,” returned his friend.

“I don't know about our respective values as objects of prey,” replied Clareville; “but of the two I suspect that, with your mystical tendency, impulsive temperament, and love of adventure, you would be far more easily captured than I should, my dear Sebastian. Perhaps that is why she has decided that you are

to have the first chance. However, we have more serious matters to attend to than this lovely and mysterious witch, whatever her designs may be ;” and the two young members crossed the street into Palace Yard, on their way to the House, under the escort of a policeman especially told off to protect the valuable lives of timid legislators on foot from their more impetuous colleagues in hansom cabs.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASOLLAMS.

At the very moment that the two friends were entering the House of Commons, a lady and two gentlemen were standing on the platform at the door of a first-class carriage of a train which was on the point of taking its departure from the terminus of the Great Midland Railway.

“I trust, Mr Masollam,” said the younger of the two men, “that you are satisfied with the manner in which I have discharged my trust towards your daughter? I assure you it required all the influence I possess to obtain the seat for her in the ladies’ gallery which she seemed so much to desire. I only regret that my capacities for service are not always equal to my inclinations; but I beg of you

not on that account to hesitate to command them. I am aware that in saying even thus much, I am in a manner guilty of presumption. You, who see so far into the motives of men, require no verbal assurances from me to enable you to appreciate mine."

"You speak wisely, my friend," replied the person thus addressed. "I judge no man by his professions of service, nor by any analysis he may furnish to me of his motives. I will go farther, and say that a man's acts are but an uncertain guide. I am, however, well satisfied with yours so far, and it is possible that ere long occasion may arise when your professions will be tested to the full extent of your desires. You are but a beginner, you know, and beginners are apt to be a little over-confident. But here is the guard coming to shut us out if we linger longer. *Au revoir*, my son. You know my address—to the care of Carabet at Tongsley. Write to me if you have any information on the points in regard to which you have my instructions."

Helping the lady into the carriage, the speaker followed her with an activity beyond his years ; while she, leaning out of the window,

waved an adieu to the gentleman left standing on the platform, who kissed his hand in reply.

"It was a pity that Cottrell did not employ some of that small capacity to which he has just made allusion, to the extent of securing us a carriage to ourselves," remarked Mr Masollam, in a tongue not certainly understood by a gentleman and two ladies who were its previous occupants, while he busied himself stowing away sundry rugs and packages in the rack overhead.

"It was not his fault. Nothing could have been kinder, or more zealous or efficient, than he has been. Besides, that need not prevent us from talking secrets," returned the lady, as she turned the flashing eyes and diamonds, which had already captivated Reginald Clareville and Lady Hornsey by their rival brilliancy, upon her travelling companions. "You don't suppose any of them understand Armenian?" She slightly raised her voice, and uttered the last sentence very slowly and distinctly, as she watched its effect upon the other passengers. Apparently satisfied that she might continue her conversation in that language without danger of being understood,

she continued, "What a pity it was that you prevented me from keeping my appointment!"

"It was unavoidable," answered her companion. "Read that,"—and he handed her a telegram to the following effect: "The H.'s will probably leave England day after tomorrow. Don't delay.—C." "Of course, then, I had nothing for it but to leave Paris as quickly as I could, and telegraph to you to meet me here. I only just caught the train as it was—thanks to the tidal boat."

"May I see our letter of introduction to them?" she asked.

He took a letter from a somewhat bulky pocket-book, and gave it to her. This was what she read:—

"MY DEAR HARTWRIGHT,—This will be handed to you by a very old friend of mine, Mr Masollam, who is now on a visit to England with his daughter. I first made his acquaintance in the East some thirty years ago; since then I have had occasion more than once to test his extraordinary powers. Do not allow any narrow prejudice to prevent you from availing yourself of his services, should he offer them: I consider him the most

remarkably gifted man that I have ever met, and he is as good as he is gifted. Let me add that his daughter is as beautiful as she is good.—Yours ever, SANTALBA.”

“He does not know as much about your gifts as I do, my dear, or he would not have ended with such an equivocal compliment. However, you will probably soon have an opportunity of exercising them,” remarked the old gentleman, as he slowly folded up the letter and put it back in his pocket-book. There was a remarkable alternation of vivacity and deliberation about the movements of Mr Masollam. His voice seemed pitched in two different keys, the effect of which was, when he changed them, to make one seem a distant echo of the other—a species of ventriloquistic phenomenon which was calculated to impart a sudden and not altogether pleasant shock to the nerves of the listeners. When he talked with what I may term his “near” voice, he was generally rapid and vivacious; when he exchanged it for his “far-off” one, he was solemn and impressive. His hair, which had once been raven black, was now streaked with grey, but it was still thick, and fell in a

massive wave over his ears, and nearly to his shoulders, giving him something of a leonine aspect. His brow was overhanging and bushy, and his eyes were like revolving lights in two dark caverns, so fitfully did they seem to emit flashes, and then lose all expression. Like his voice, they too had a near and a far-off expression, which could be adjusted to the required focus like a telescope, growing smaller and smaller as though in an effort to project the sight beyond the limits of natural vision. At such times they would be so entirely devoid of all appreciation of outward objects, as to produce almost the impression of blindness, when suddenly the focus would change, the pupil expand, and rays flash from them like lightning from a thunder-cloud, giving an unexpected and extraordinary brilliancy to a face which seemed promptly to respond to the summons. The general cast of countenance, the upper part of which, were it not for the depth of the eye-sockets, would have been strikingly handsome, was decidedly Semitic; and in repose the general effect was almost statuesque in its calm fixedness. The mouth was partially concealed by a heavy moustache

and long iron-grey beard ; but the transition from repose to animation revealed an extraordinary flexibility in those muscles which had a moment before appeared so rigid, and the whole character of the countenance was altered as suddenly as the expression of the eye. It would perhaps be prying too much into the secrets of nature, or, at all events, into the secrets of Mr Masollam's nature, to inquire whether this lightening and darkening of the countenance was voluntary or not. In a lesser degree, it is a common phenomenon with us all : the effect of one class of emotions is, vulgarly speaking, to make a man look black, and of another to make him look bright. The peculiarity of Mr Masollam was that he could look so much blacker and brighter than most people, and make the change of expression with such extraordinary rapidity and intensity, that it seemed a sort of facial legerdemain, and suggested the suspicion that it might be an acquired faculty. There was, moreover, another change which he apparently had the power of working on his countenance, which affects other people involuntarily, and which generally, especially

in the case of the fair sex, does so very much against their will. For instance, we say of a lady that she is *journalière*, by which we mean that on some days she looks much older than on others. Now Mr Masollam had the faculty of looking very much older one hour than he did the next. There were moments when a careful study of his wrinkles, and of his dull, faded-looking eyes, would lead you to put him down at eighty if he was a day; and there were others when his flashing glance, expanding nostril, broad smooth brow, and mobile mouth, would make a rejuvenating combination, that would for a moment convince you that you had been at least five-and-twenty years out in your first estimate. When he was erect, he stood about six feet in his stockings, but his attitudes varied with his moods, and he often drooped suddenly and tottered along with bowed shoulders and unsteady gait. These rapid contrasts were calculated to arrest the attention of the most casual observer, and to produce a sensation which was not altogether pleasant when first one made his acquaintance. It was not exactly mis-

trust,—for both manners were perfectly frank and natural,—so much as perplexity. He seemed to be two opposite characters rolled into one, and to be presenting undesigningly a curious moral and physiological problem for solution, which had a disagreeable sort of attractiveness about it, for you almost immediately felt it to be insoluble, and yet it would not let you rest. He might be the best or the worst of men. Perhaps his moral nature presented the same violent contrasts that were observable in his physical aspect, and that he was alternately first one and then the other. Either he was a freak of nature, a sort of *lusus naturæ* so far as the psychical and emotional part of him was concerned, or he had acquired a wonderful artificial mastery over those forces which transmit the expression of feeling to feature, and could produce transformations which so far transcend the trick of the comedian, that they involved no forced or unnatural muscular distortion, but appeared simply to depend upon the spontaneous but subtle play of some internal light and shade, which seemed to transmute his whole being, and force their influence

upon the outer surfaces of his organism. He was like a landscape over which dark thunderclouds are constantly rolling, and obscuring the bright sunlight, which, when it did burst forth, made the very features that a moment before were gloomy and almost repellent, bright and attractive. The effect of this peculiarity upon sensitive natures with whom he was brought into contact, was to produce in them corresponding alternations of sympathy and antipathy. It was as though he was alternately presenting to them the positive and negative poles of his being. They were like tin geese with iron bills in a basin of water, now sailing gracefully towards their magnetic acquaintance, now turning their backs upon him, and as gracefully sailing away.

"So you saw both the young men," said Mr Masollam to his daughter, after a cloudy pause. "Tell me about them." And the sun came out.

"I scarcely saw anything of young Hartwright," she replied ; "that is why I was so disappointed at missing him to-day. He seemed quite absorbed by Miss Clareville, Reginald Clareville's sister. So, *faute de mieux*, I de-

voted myself to Reginald, and I must say I rather like him. He is decidedly clever and original."

Two bright rays flashed from the caverns under the bushy brows of the old man as he listened to this, and then went suddenly out, and he sank back into his corner in silence.

"What did you leave mother to do in Paris?" asked his daughter, after another long pause, during which they had both seemed buried in their own thoughts.

"She is taking care of Santalba—he is not well. It was better so: three of us would have been too much of an intrusion on the hospitality of this cold-blooded Englishman."

"Why, do you expect to stay with him? I thought we were going to Carabet's."

"Under no circumstances should we do that. I have telegraphed to Carabet to take rooms for us at the best hotel, and to meet us at the station. In the first place, I doubt whether he has room for us; and in the second, it would not be expedient under the circumstances for us to be the guests of a man who keeps an old curiosity shop. Besides, there are other reasons." A very dark cloud flitted

across the landscape as he uttered this last sentence, but it had passed away before he added, "I do not think it probable, after Mr Hartwright receives our letter of introduction, that he will allow us to remain in the hotel—at least, if he decides to postpone his departure; but it does not much matter whether he does or not."

The large town for which our travellers were bound lay in the centre of an important mining district in one of the northern counties of England, and it was nearly midnight before they reached it. On the platform they were met by a dapper little man, who received Mr Masollam with a deference and respect almost amounting to servility, and who manifested in his intercourse with that personage a nervousness and timidity that seemed foreign to his real nature, to judge from the somewhat peremptory vivacity with which he ordered about porters and cabmen in a language which was meant to be English, but which a strong foreign accent rendered almost unintelligible to them.

"How is Sada?" asked Mr Masollam in the same language in which he had been convers-

ing with his daughter, and in his deepest and darkest tones, after they were all three seated in the cab. There was too little light from the flickering gas-lamps for Carabet to see the change on the face which corresponded to the voice, but his own trembled as he replied—

“She is as she always is—no better, no worse. I watch her carefully, O sage.”

I can give no better translation of the final epithet used than this, though it implied more, and signified authority combined with wisdom.

“When do the Hartwrights leave?” was Mr Masollam’s next question.

“His butler, who, ever since I have been established in this town, has been my most intimate friend,”—and Carabet ventured on a little laugh, which did not reach the dimensions of an audible chuckle before it was repressed from an instinctive feeling that it would not be approved,—“his butler, Mr Sharp, told me yesterday that instead of going to-morrow evening, as they intended when I sent you my telegram, they would not leave till the following morning.”

Mr Masollam drew a card from his pocket, and after inquiring the name of the hotel at

which they were to stay, ordered the cab to stop, while he carefully wrote it in the corner.

"Does Mr Hartwright live in the town?" he inquired.

"No, O master," answered Carabet; "in a mansion on its outskirts, about two miles out. It is a very handsome house; indeed they say he lives much above his means."

"To-morrow morning," said Masollam, in his measured, reproving voice, "I shall have a great many questions to ask you: you need not trouble me with your information now,—keep it till then, and I hope it will prove to be sufficient. You have been spending a good deal of money, my son; and as some months have elapsed since you have sent any to me, I presume you have not made any."

"Believe me, I never forget, O my master, that my knowledge or information, whatever it may be worth, and my time, and my money, nay, my very life itself, is at your disposal, to do with as you will."

He was continuing in his profession of faith when he was interrupted by the cab drawing up to the door of the hotel.

"Here," said Masollam before he got out,

handing the letter of introduction and card to his follower, "is a letter of introduction and my card, which I wish you personally to convey to your friend Mr Sharp, as early as may be in the morning, and tell him, when he gives it to Mr Hartwright, that the messenger is waiting for an answer: and stay," he added, as, after a profound salute, Carabet was about to take his departure,—“does Sada know that you expected me?”

“She knows nothing. I had no instructions to tell her anything, and kept silence.”

“You did right—keep it still. Good night,”—and Masollam turned a face furrowed with age to the obsequious waiter, and, leaning on his daughter’s arm, followed that functionary with bent frame and tottering steps to the apartments which had been provided for them.

“I am suffering to-night,” he said, when he reached them, and threw himself wearily into an arm-chair. “Carabet has been under my influence now for more than twenty years, and should have more sense of what is going on under his nose. Sada is worse, much worse. I felt it the moment I touched his hand; and he, though he lives in the house, was too dense

to perceive it. There is something wrong with him too, or he must have felt it," he muttered, after passing his hand three or four times slowly over his eyes, from which all light seemed to have absolutely faded away. "We have a heavy day before us to-morrow, my child," he added, looking up at his daughter, who was standing by his chair with her hand on his shoulder. "Go to bed; you are tired now, and will need all the rest you can get for what is in store for us both. I know not what I should do, if it were not for the life I gain from your strong young frame."

"Surely, father, you will go to bed too," she said; "you who have come all the way from Paris without stopping, must be far more tired than I am."

"Physically," he replied, with a smile, "I feel no fatigue except in so far as the moral may affect the physical: my nerves are tired, child, or rather they are only the outer casing of what is tired within them—and that has not been made tired by travelling, but by the elements with which they are loaded. Go you and sleep for us both,—your repose will rest me,—while I watch."

CHAPTER III.

AN ARMENIAN CURIOSITY-DEALER.

HOWEVER dense, from Mr Masollam's point of view, Carabet may have been in regard to a certain item of information which he had imparted to his sage and master, he was correct enough as to the two pieces of intelligence he had given him with reference to Mr Hartwright. The villa inhabited by that gentleman, which stood in several acres of shrubbery and ornamental grounds, and was called "The Turrets," was not without architectural merit, if, as may be gathered from the name, it had not been too ornate and pretentious; while the establishment which he kept up in it was far beyond his means—so far beyond them, that he had decided to let it and go abroad, partly to economise, and

partly in the hope of finding some scheme with which he might identify himself as a promoter or concessioner, which would furnish him with the capital necessary to meet his most pressing creditors.

He was not altogether inexperienced in such matters, for as the younger brother of Richard Hartwright—the celebrated contractor, and father of the young member to whom I have already introduced the reader—he had been interested in many most important financial enterprises, and indeed in his earlier days had been a partner in some of them ; but his habits of reckless extravagance, combined with a certain moral laxity in financial matters, had decided his elder brother, who was a man of scrupulous probity and sound business capacity, to dissolve all connection with him, and to content himself with throwing a good thing from time to time in his younger brother's way. It was on the top of a *coup*, made through his brother Richard's instrumentality, that Charles Hartwright succeeded in winning the affections of a young lady possessed of considerable fortune, whom he shortly after married ; and had they been

contented to live quietly, their combined resources sufficed to maintain them comfortably in a style which corresponded with their position. Mrs Charles Hartwright, unfortunately, had aspirations of a social character incompatible with economy. She wanted her husband to be in Parliament, and succeeded in making him spend far more in a contested election, in which he was defeated, than he could afford; and she made three desperate assaults on London society in three successive seasons, only to be routed shamefully on each occasion,—a circumstance the more galling, because she saw success achieved by rivals who seemed in her prejudiced eyes inferior to herself in the four great requisites for it—wealth, beauty, talent, and impudence. When to these political and social excesses were added the cares of a family of three sons and two daughters, some of whom inherited the extravagant habits of both father and mother, and had come to an age when expensive dresses for the girls, and hunting for the youths, were the indispensable adjuncts of life, it became evident to Charles Hartwright and his wife that a crash could only be averted, either by a

reduction of their establishment, which would compromise them in the eyes of such aristocratic friends as they had succeeded at a great sacrifice of self-respect in making, or by a temporary exile, during which it might be hoped that something would turn up by means of which their shattered fortunes might be repaired.

Hartwright was brooding over his prospects in his dressing-room, in an especially unamiable frame of mind, for a hitch had occurred at the last moment with the solicitor with whom he was in negotiation for the lease of his house, when his valet entered with a letter and a card, saying, as he handed them to his master—

“Mr Sharp told me to say that the messenger was waiting, in case you wanted to send an answer, sir.”

Hartwright took them with the air of a man whose communications were generally of an unpleasant nature, and after glancing at the card slowly, perused the letter. Then he took up the card again, looked at it more carefully, and pondered.

“Bring me my writing-materials,” he said

at length, "and tell Jane to ask her mistress to step here for a moment."

The servant disappeared, and shortly after Mrs Hartwright, in an elaborately embroidered *peignoir*, entered the room.

"Look at those,"—and her husband gave her the letter and the card.

"Well, what do you propose to do about them?" said the lady, after complying with his request.

"That is just what I sent for you to consult about: it might be worth our while to put off our departure for a few days, and see what these people are like—more particularly as I have just heard from Travers that he will not take the house for his client, who is a hunting man, unless I pay for the repairs of the stables. Santalba is a man who generally knows what he is about, and he would not write so strongly unless he had good reason for doing so. I was thinking of writing to invite this Mr Masollam and his daughter to come and dine and sleep."

"It will be very inconvenient," answered Mrs Hartwright; "half the things are packed—we are all in confusion. I have already

settled with some of the servants ; besides," she added, somewhat inconsequently, after a pause, "Masollam is such a very odd name, don't you think we had better see them first? Suppose we begin by asking them to lunch,—we can always extend our invitation if we find it best to make the effort ; and it will be an effort, I assure you, Charles. Men never can realise what an amount of bother rootings-up of this sort entail."

Her husband looked at her with a grim smile.

"If your amount of bother, as you call it, were put in the balance against mine, I have very little doubt which would kick the beam. However, we will not discuss that now ; let it be as you say. I will invite them to luncheon, and we will be guided as to what civility we show them beyond that, by our judgment as to the use they may be turned to." From which it will appear that, whatever they might be in public, Mr and Mrs Hartwright scorned humbug in their intercourse with each other.

When, an hour later, Mr Hartwright's invitation to luncheon was handed to Masollam,

that great Asiatic mystery was in his most youthful mood: his erect frame and sparkling eyes quite startled the waiter who had helped him to his room the preceding evening. Mr Carabet had arrived early, and had been imparting information for some time, apparently of a cheering kind. He had even had the honour of breakfasting with the sage, who, after looking at his watch, turned to his daughter.

"Amina," he said, "Mr Hartwright has kindly invited us to luncheon. As we shall not need to start for more than a couple of hours, suppose we walk round with Carabet and see Sada?"

"You should have seen the astonishment of the natives," observed Carabet to his companions, as he led the way, "when I first dazzled their eyes with a glimpse of the taste and the splendour of the East. The curiosity and interest which it excited in a second-rate town like this convinces me that, with the growing taste for æsthetic decoration, a great field is open to enterprising speculators from the East, if they would try their fortunes in the largest centres of population. As it is,

I believe mine is the only establishment of the kind outside of London. And I——”

“Remember, my son, that it is only a means to an end,” interrupted Masollam, “and do not let your trading instincts divert you from the higher aims which give our lives a meaning unknown to the world at large. You distract me with your commercial gabble.”

As he thus spoke, they turned down the street in which Mr Carabet's shop was situated, and which seemed rather too quiet to be considered eligible as a business locality; but possibly it had other advantages which compensated for this inconvenience. The *bric-a-brac* in which he dealt was almost exclusively oriental. Besides a very fair assortment of Egyptian and Syrian antiquities, which had every appearance of being genuine, there were Persian carpets and brass-work; silks from Bagdad; filigree silver-work, *kuffiyehs* and *abâyehs*, from Damascus; Bedouin bangles, olive-wood, and mother-of-pearl ornaments from Jerusalem, and many of the cheaper articles of Eastern manufacture adapted to all classes of customers. Indeed in some respects

the collection seemed too good for the country town in which he had established himself, and implied a confidence in the artistic and æsthetic tendencies of the inhabitants which it was extremely improbable that the results would justify. That, however, was Mr Carabet's own affair. He was in the habit of assuring his customers that he had no reason to be dissatisfied with the patronage he was receiving. He depended for it, he said, not so much upon the people of the town as of the country. His reputation was spreading. People interested in such things made long railway journeys expressly to see his collection; and he had the satisfaction of knowing that while he was putting money into his pocket, he was the means of developing in the manufacturing and rural districts of England a taste for art, which could only be accomplished by persons who were willing to take the risk of forcing it upon their notice by bringing treasures of this description to their very doors. Indeed he carried his zeal for the general good in these matters so far, as to exhibit specimens of all the different descriptions of fraudulent imitations which are manu-

factured to order, and are current in the East, for the benefit of the unwary traveller; and he even derived a small income by giving private lessons on the subject. Mr Carabet, who had an artless and unsophisticated mind, was wont to confess to the customers with whom he dealt the most largely, and from whom he obtained the highest prices, that he had scruples of conscience lest his pupils, instead of being amateurs and tourists, who came to him to learn how to buy the true, were themselves manufacturers of base imitations, who came to learn by minute examination of the originals how to make the false. The frankness with which Mr Carabet asked the advice of high-minded customers on this knotty point, his great learning as a numismatist, and the anxiety he showed to adjust his prices to the intrinsic value of the articles he sold, made it impossible for any one to suspect that he was himself one of the most skilful fabricators of forgeries living. But it was none the less a proud boast of Mr Carabet's, and a true one, that nobody who came to buy genuine antiques from him had ever purchased a forgery, or even paid a higher

price than the article was worth. In propounding his moral difficulties to his customers, however, and explaining to them the nature of the frauds perpetrated by less scrupulous dealers than himself, it never occurred to him to ask whether they considered it dishonest for a man to make forgeries and sell them confidentially as such, to men who came to buy them. As he was a quick and remarkably intelligent man, with a considerable charm of manner, which was rather enhanced than otherwise in the eyes of the natives by his eager efforts to master their language—in which, during nearly a year's residence, he had made tolerable progress—he had, at the expiration of that time, won for himself a fair amount of respect and popularity, which would have been far greater were it not for a circumstance to which I am about to allude.

His establishment was a modest one, and consisted of a small house in an unfrequented street, the lower portion of which was devoted to the shop in which his articles were displayed, and to the storage of his wares. Above this, he lived alone with his sister,

Sada, who was known by name to his neighbours as Miss Carabet, and with whom he had returned from the East two or three months before. I say known by name, because she had never been seen by any of them. This they naturally regarded in the light of a personal injury, to which insult was added when the most persistent inquiries addressed both to the cook and housemaid—who were themselves townspeople, and burning with curiosity—were absolutely fruitless. Mr Carabet occupied the whole of the first floor, and his sister the whole of the second. She performed all the menial services required to keep her own apartments in order herself, and was known to take her exercise on the leads, because she was a constant object of observation through opera-glasses from the back windows of the upper floors of the houses in the neighbouring street, but they were too far off to enable the observers to distinguish her features. She was always seen drying her clothes upon them, from which it was inferred that she had washed them herself, and this was borne out by the testimony of Mary and Jane. Neither of the servants above named were

allowed to ascend to the second storey : this was a privilege which Mr Carabet reserved for himself. He caused sufficient to be served for two at each of his meals, and always carried up his sister's portion before sitting down to his own. The natural presumption was that she was idiotic or insane ; but as her brother usually spent some portion of each day with her, and, so far as could be gathered from the close observation of the servants, treated her with marked consideration and respect, a certain discredit was thrown upon this hypothesis.

There was another mystery connected with Mr Carabet which also exercised the imaginations of his servants—neither of whom, by the way, slept in the house ; and this was the locked room on his own floor. Into this room no one but himself was allowed to enter, under any pretext whatever ; in fact it was impossible, for he always kept the key in his pocket. Indeed his first act on taking the house was to have a patent lock put on the door. When he was not in the shop, which he usually left in charge of a trustworthy lad, except when he was summoned by a customer, he was

either locked up in this room or up-stairs with his sister, who seemed in some way to assist him in his occupation, for he was constantly carrying small objects up and down.

Visitors who did not come to buy anything were so rare, that both the cook and the housemaid rushed to the top of the kitchen stairs when they heard a rustle in the passage, and great was their astonishment when they saw a lady and gentleman enter Mr Carabet's sitting - room. This was immeasurably increased when, from a coign of vantage on a landing, they watched their master open the mysterious chamber, and usher his visitors into it. But a still more astounding surprise was in store for them ; for a few moments later the male visitor issued from the chamber alone, and deliberately walked up-stairs to Miss Carabet's floor, followed about a quarter of an hour afterwards by the female visitor. They must have remained there at least an hour. Mr Carabet, in the meanwhile, had locked himself into his room after his lady visitor had left it, and stayed there until both the lady and gentleman had finished their visit to Miss Carabet ; when, summoned by a knock

at the door, he emerged, locked it again, and they all three left the house.

“Well, I never seen the like of it,” said Mary to Jane, as they descended to the lower regions to discuss this remarkable incident. “One would ha’ thought that old gentleman ’ad stayed up with Miss Carabet twenty years by the look o’ him, instead of an hour by the clock. Did you see ’ow he went up two steps at a time, and came down a ’oldin’ on by the banisters, as if ’is legs would give way under him, like a old man of eighty?”

“Ah, I did; and I see more than that. There was dimonds in that young woman’s ears worth a mint. I couldn’t take my hi’s hoff of ’em,” responded the cook. “A beauty she is, to be sure! Mark my words, Mary,—there’ll be a tragiety committed in this ’ere ’ouse some day; and now I know why I dreamt, no longer ago than last night it was, that I was in the witness-box, and Mr Carabet a standin’ right hopposite to me, as it might be there, with a rope round ’is neck.”

“It may have been meant for an awful warning,” said Mary.

“That’s just what I says to myself,” returned her companion. “A warning received means, by contraries, a warning given, I says ; and so soon as Mr Carabet comes ’ome, I’m blessed if I don’t give it.”

The cook had not long to wait before an opportunity was afforded to her of putting her threat into execution ; for Masollam dismissed Carabet at the door of his room with a gesture of impatience, and turning to his daughter as soon as he had disappeared, said, in a voice so feeble as to be almost a whisper—

“I did wrong, Amina, in paying that visit when I did—it will make us late for our appointment ; but it cannot now be helped. “Quick,” he added, as he sank at full length upon a couch ; “put your hands upon my head.”

At the same moment, with rapid but trembling fingers, he undid his shirt-collar, and bared the upper part of his chest.

The girl, to whom the injunction seemed familiar, pressed both her palms upon his temples, from which she had drawn back the heavy locks, and stood for a few moments motionless. Then she slowly moved one hand to his forehead, while she placed the

other upon the lower part of the back brain, and again pressed, but in an opposite direction, with the same firm but gentle force. As she did so, her own respiration underwent a remarkable change. The breathing became deeper, fuller, and more prolonged, until her lungs seemed to acquire a power of unnatural expansion, while that of her father appeared altogether to have ceased: his eyes had closed, his whole frame stiffened, as the gentle heaving of his chest subsided into complete quiescence; and, except for a faint colour in his cheeks, which was not the hue of death, he would to a casual observer have presented all the appearance of a corpse. Amina now withdrew her hands from her father's head, and pouring a few drops of a liquid, which had a strong aromatic odour, from a small phial into some water, she steeped her hands in it for a few moments, then taking a chair, she drew it to the side of the couch, and lifting one of the apparently lifeless hands, held it between both her own, watching, as it seemed, for some indication known to herself, to guide her as to her further proceedings. She sat thus for half an hour, motionless, except for the deep,

measured breaths, under the influence of which, at long intervals, her bosom rose and fell. Suddenly her face flushed, a slight tremor shook her whole being, her breath came in short quick gasps, with great apparent difficulty. Instantly letting drop the hand which she had hitherto clasped, she placed her own upon that part of Masollam's chest which was bared, and rubbed it briskly. After a few moments her exertions were rewarded by a quiver of his eyelids, which he slowly raised, drawing a deep, full breath: it seemed as though it were answered by a corresponding change in the respiration of his daughter, and for some minutes their breathing was absolutely synchronous. At last Masollam passed his hand two or three times over his eyes, and said—

“Carabet has been faithless.”

“In what respect, father?”

“He has been corresponding with your mother without my knowledge.”

“Then she also has been faithless for not telling you of it.”

“She acted for the best—she was afraid it might cause me suffering to know it, but she

did wrong : she gave him directions without consulting me, which have resulted in far greater mischief, and therefore suffering, than if she had shown me Carabet's letters."

"Had they reference to Sada?"

"Yes."

"Did she say nothing to you about it before I came up-stairs?"

"What could she say? she knew nothing about it. I only myself knew it a moment ago. It has just been presented to me in a form which has enabled me to read it."

"Did you see anything else—anything to help you in our approaching visit to the Hartwrights?"

"Have you not learnt, child, that the conditions under which I am enabled to penetrate into regions which are closed to the common herd, are encompassed with strict limitations? I was taken away to be made aware of a certain specific fact connected with my own people, and the special influences under which they act. When the time arrives for me to be brought into relations with those which affect the people we are going to see, and revelations are necessary with regard to them, they will

be made to me. However, I have seen something which may be of use ;” and he went to a table and wrote hurriedly for a moment. “Meantime,” he continued, “the external sources of information which I possess, and the facts which have already come to my knowledge, will suffice for the present. We have not a moment to lose, however, if we are to avail ourselves of them : quick, order the fly.”

“It has been standing at the door for the last half-hour, father : I ordered it to be ready at one, before we went out—it is only half-past now ; and we can make the man drive fast.”

CHAPTER IV.

MR CHARLES HARTWRIGHT'S FINANCIAL
CONFIDENCES.

CHARLES HARTWRIGHT had spent so many of the earlier years of his life on the Continent, in connection with his brother's financial enterprises, that he spoke French fluently, and on the entrance of Mr Masollam and his daughter, addressed them in that language with all the *empressement* of a man accustomed to foreign ways, and desirous of making a good impression upon his guests.

"Our mutual friend the Count, to whom I am indebted for the pleasure of making your acquaintance," he remarked, "failed to tell me in his letter whether this was your first visit to England, and whether you are acquainted with our language, which must be my apology for addressing you in French."

“It is the first visit to England of my daughter, but I spent some of the earlier years of my life in this country,” remarked Masollam in English; “and as I am anxious that she should acquire English more perfectly, and I myself am a little out of practice, you will be doing us both a kindness to let us continue our conversation in it.”

Hartwright complimented his guest, not without reason, on the excellence of his accent, and Mrs Hartwright drew a sigh of relief at finding that her own linguistic acquirements were not to be tested. As two of the young ladies and one of the young gentlemen were present, and the conversation at luncheon turned chiefly upon topics political and social, it is without interest for our readers.

According to a preconcerted scheme, it had been arranged between the worthy couple whose guests the Masollams now were, that after luncheon Mrs Hartwright should take the lady into the garden and estimate her value, and her husband should retire into his study with her father, and judge what use was to be made of him; and that on meeting afterwards, they should signify the result to each other by a certain secret code of signals, and

that Mr Hartwright would be guided thereby as to the nature and extent of the invitation, if any, that was to be extended to them. In pursuance of this arrangement, Mrs Hartwright carried off Amina to the conservatory, to show her some exotics from the East; and Masollam accompanied her husband to his own den, to test the merits of some Syrian tobacco.

"I must apologise for the somewhat disordered condition of the room," said Hartwright; "but the fact is, as Santalba will have perhaps informed you, that we were meditating a trip to the Continent, and I have only put it off at the last moment in consequence of difficulties raised by the man to whom I expected to let my house during my absence."

"The Count merely told me that he thought there were some matters in which my experience might be of service to you, and as I was coming to England at any rate, begged me to lose no time in calling upon you: he is so old and valued a friend of mine, that I was only too glad to think that I could be of use to one with whom, as I understood, he had been so intimately associated in early life."

"We were a good deal thrown together in

some enterprises abroad at one time—for my brother Richard had such a high opinion of his sagacity, that he confided to him many of his most important affairs, in which I was also interested. That some tie of a very close, and I may almost say mysterious nature, existed between them, connected probably in some way with their financial relations, may be inferred from the fact that on his death, which took place a few months before Sebastian came of age, he not only made the Count his son's sole guardian, but made a will leaving his entire property unreservedly to Count Santalba. It seems that there was a private understanding, that on Sebastian's coming of age, the Count should transfer it to my nephew, though this did not appear in the will."

"And did Santalba make the property over to his ward on the latter attaining his majority?" asked Masollam.

"I believe he did. I have no means of knowing exactly. At all events, he made over enough to make my nephew an extremely wealthy man."

Masollam's brow clouded, and for a moment he remained buried in deep thought.

"Go on," he said, suddenly, and in a somewhat more peremptory tone than was quite agreeable to his host.

"I have little more to say," continued that gentleman. "For some time past I have had but little intercourse with Santalba, who seems to have entirely abandoned his old pursuits, and to have withdrawn from the world of which at one time he was a distinguished ornament, and to lead a mysterious and secluded life, apparently connected with a mystical society of some sort, the nature and objects of which none of his old friends have been able to understand. The last time I saw him was at my brother's funeral. Since then he has taken no notice of several letters which I have written to him, the last scarcely a month since, in which I referred to certain difficulties I now find myself placed in. I am happy to think," continued Hartwright, with a polite inclination of the head, "that I am indebted to it for the honour of your visit: it proves at least that he is alive, and that I may still regard him as a friend. Perhaps you can throw some light upon his strange conduct."

“Yes,” said Masollam, slowly, with one of his sudden changes of manner, in a voice that sounded to his startled auditor like a distant echo, and eyes so shrunken that they were barely visible in the depths of their enormous recesses, “there is no man living who can throw so much light upon your friend’s life as I can ; but,” he added, and paused as though taking a mental inventory of the moral and intellectual faculties of the man he was speaking to, “it would only dazzle you if I did.”

Hartwright felt a shiver pass over him as his singular visitor, whose head had been bowed forward as though in an attitude of intense inquisition, threw it suddenly back, and projected his burning glance upon him. It was as though he had withdrawn the slides of a couple of dark lanterns, as if to give point to his remark.

“Would only dazzle me,” he murmured, repeating mechanically Masollam’s last words ; and making a violent effort to shake off the impression they had produced, he added, “Be it so : I really have no great curiosity in the matter. If it amuses Santalba, it does not

hurt me." He spoke half mockingly, half testily, annoyed with himself at the fleeting emotion he had experienced, and it was a moment or two before he completely recovered his equanimity. After a pause, which Masollam showed no inclination to break, he said at last—

"You are perhaps aware of the contents of the Count's letter?"

"I am," replied his visitor, "and am only waiting to know in what manner I can serve you;" and fitting a cigarette into a long amber mouthpiece, he lit it, as an intimation apparently to his host that he was as patient as he was indifferent on the subject.

Hartwright laid his cheek on his hand, and seemed for some moments lost in meditation.

"Mr Masollam," he said at length, "half confidences are worse than no confidences. I tell you frankly, I should like first to know what your motive is in putting yourself out of your way to try and serve me, before I give you all mine."

"My motive, as I have already told you," replied his guest, "is to serve my friend: that I cannot serve him, or he me, without each of

us serving in one sense himself, arises from the fact that, as our aims and objects in life are identical, our interests must be identical also. What those aims, objects, and interests are, it is impossible, for the reason I have already stated, for me now to impart to you."

"You think they would dazzle me, eh?" said Hartwright, with a sneer.

"Are you in earnest in asking that question?" exclaimed Masollam, with such a sharp, stern emphasis, that Hartwright was taken aback by it.

"I did not mean so much to ask a question," he stammered, "as to repeat what you said. As, however, it is asked, I should be glad to have an answer."

"Pardon me. I do not wish to press you to ask it—we can leave the matter where it is: or if you really desire to know more,"—and Masollam leant forward and extended his hand,—"I must request you to place your hand in mine."

Hartwright, anxious to retrieve the breach of politeness of which he had been guilty, did as he was asked, and became instantly aware that he had never felt such an uncom-

fortable hand in his life. He had not observed anything peculiar about it on the occasion of their first meeting, nor could he accurately describe why it was unpleasant now : it was not cold, nor hard, nor clammy—on the contrary, it was warm and soft ; but there was an indescribable feeling of thinness and unsubstantiality about it, which did not strike one at the first touch, but seemed to grow upon one the longer the contact was maintained, until it produced a sensation of nervous irritability which became almost unbearable. Hartwright was by no means a man of nervous temperament ; but for some time after he got back his hand, he felt, as he told his wife afterwards, as if it was quite different from his other one, and had been tampered with in some way.

Mr Masollam, on releasing the hand of his host, turned upon him a smile of affectionate interest and urbanity as he observed—

“ Further investigation convinces me that I was mistaken in my first appreciation. I now perceive that I was wrong in supposing that any light which I might throw upon the subject of your inquiry would dazzle you. The

capacity of being dazzled, implies the capacity of receiving light."

"In other words," said Hartwright, who did not fail to apprehend the full force of this remark, "you mean to convey to me politely that I should be incapable of understanding the aims in life which animate Santalba and yourself."

"I think it possible that, in a vague and general way, you might understand the aims, though it is quite impossible that you could sympathise with them. What you are absolutely incapable of apprehending are the methods we employ to accomplish those aims, and the processes necessary to the achievement of the great ends we have in view. I do not speak thus in a sense which is in any way derogatory to your natural intelligence, which is great. It is not the fault of any man that he was born without an ear for music, and should neither sympathise in the object which Beethoven had in view when he sat down to compose a symphony, nor apprehend the methods by which he arrived at it. You have very fine talents, and cannot do better than use them for the purposes for which they can

be made most available. It has pleased Providence to endow me with gifts of another kind, and, as I have already said, they are at your service—that is to say, if you are satisfied with this explanation, which is the only one I can give you, of my motives for offering them.”

There was an assumption of patronising authority and calm superiority on the part of the speaker which was calculated to irritate the vanity of his listener, the more especially as he was conscious that he was being irresistibly imposed upon by it. At the same time, his confidence in Santalba’s judgment, and the allusion contained in the letter of the latter, to the danger of his allowing his own narrow prejudices to interfere with his interests, disposed him to weigh carefully in his mind the consequences of rejecting an offer made under such singular conditions. After a few moments’ reflection, he came to the conclusion to take Mr Masollam at his own valuation, and to admit him frankly into his confidence.

“You know possibly something of my family and myself from Santalba, and have doubtless heard him speak of my nephew,

Sebastian Hartwright, if you do not know that young man personally," he said.

"I have heard so high a character of him from the Count," returned Masollam, "that it has given me a great desire to make his acquaintance, which I have never had the pleasure of doing."

"I should say he was a young man remarkably receptive of that species of light to which I am unfortunately so blind," rejoined Hartwright, who had not quite got over the feeling of offence to which Masollam's previous remark had given rise. "He is one of the privileged few whom, I understand, Santalba still admits to his intimacy, and indeed entertains views the most strange and fantastic upon many subjects. However, these are not what I now desire to discuss, though it may be necessary to allude to them hereafter. His father and I," pursued Hartwright, after a short pause, "were the only children of a civil engineer who had not made a success of his profession, but who, nevertheless, gave us both a good education, and died in extremely mediocre circumstances. Our mother did not long survive him, and at the age of two- and three-and-twenty we

were left to push our fortunes in the world. It is unnecessary for me to describe the details of my elder brother's rapid and most successful career as a contractor for railways and other public works. They were principally in foreign countries, many of them undertaken in conjunction with the Count, who, though noble, was in early life impecunious, and whose foreign training—for he had been in diplomacy—and extensive knowledge of public men, rendered him a most valuable colleague. Unfortunately, my brother did not entertain the same opinion in regard to myself in that capacity. After associating me in one or two of his earlier enterprises, he left me to push my own fortunes, which I did, *tant bien que mal*, and settled down here some years ago with my wife, having had no great cause to complain of fate. Unfortunately, just before my brother's death we had a rather warm discussion upon a family matter, which left a coolness between us, to which I attribute the fact that he died with barely a mention of me in his will."

"Will you allow me to ask what was the subject of difference?" interrupted Masollam.

“My wife and I thought that it would be desirable, if possible, to bring about a union between my eldest daughter Florence and Sebastian, more especially as the young lady manifested a decided *penchant* for her cousin.”

“Was it reciprocated?”

“Not exactly; but Sebastian was an obedient son, and, I have no doubt, would have consented had his father pressed him. This he refused to do on the score of his youth,—hence our difference. But to continue, the whole property, which must amount to nearly a million sterling, invested principally in coal-mines and house property in this town, for which, as you are perhaps aware, Sebastian is the sitting member, was left to Santalba, and, as I have already explained, subsequently transferred to Sebastian by the Count.”

“Who appears to have carried out the testator’s wishes in a most honourable manner,” again interrupted Masollam.

“I am not disputing that; my remark had reference to the fact that, if the matrimonial alliance to which I have alluded was prospectively desirable during my brother’s lifetime, it is much more so now that my own

financial position has become compromised, and that his son has inherited his property, and should be much more easy of accomplishment, since the father is no longer alive to throw obstacles in the way."

"Such being so palpably the case, how is it you have not accomplished it? I suppose you have adopted the usual methods for throwing the young people together. I think that is the correct phrase,"—and Masollam smiled with such a sweet expression of sympathy and interest, that Hartwright failed to detect the sneer that it concealed.

"Everything that an affectionate father, a devoted mother, and a daughter as accomplished and dutiful as she is attractive—you will make allowances for a parent's partiality—could do, has been done. Sebastian constantly comes and stays with us when on a visit to his constituency: he is uniformly kind to his cousins, and at times especially so to Florence; but there appears to be some subtle influence at work, which always seems to prevent him from—from—coming to the point, in fact."

"Perhaps he is in love with some one else."

"No; we have been very particular in our

investigations in that matter, through some friends in London who take a warm interest in him, and have excellent opportunities of watching his proceedings, and we are most positively assured that such is not the case."

At this moment the door was opened, and a servant entered with a telegram.

"For Mr Masollam, sir," he said, giving it to that gentleman, but addressing his master, who was instinctively holding out his hand for it.

With an apology for opening it, the recipient cast a momentary and indifferent glance at the contents; then, as he carelessly twisted it into divers shapes, finally thrusting the hand which held it into his pocket, he remarked, with the distant air of a man who is chiefly occupied with the contemplation of his own affairs, and takes no trouble to conceal the fact that he is being bored—

"And you wish to enlist my services in discovering this subtle opposing influence, and overcoming it, eh?"

There are few things more irritating to a man's vanity than to force his most intimate confidences from him, and then to treat them

with levity. And there was a lurking mockery in Masollam's tone as he uttered the last words, and then became suddenly absorbed in watching the convolutions of a wreath of tobacco-smoke, which stung Hartwright to the quick. For the second time during the interview he felt himself invaded, as it were, by such a sensation of antipathy, as to make it difficult for him to resist putting an end to the conversation by an outburst of insolence; but his better judgment suggested, after a moment's reflection, that there was nothing to be gained by quarrelling with his guest, after having in some measure put himself in his power, and that the only course left to him was to smother his indignation, and put his trust in Santalba's recommendation. He determined, however, to waste as few words as possible, and replied with a sullen bluntness, "To make a long story short, I want you to exercise those mysterious powers which Santalba hints that you possess, and to which you seem to make pretension, and bring about a match between my daughter and my nephew."

"By means of a love-philtre, perhaps?" and this time the sneer was undisguised.

“I do not pretend to know the difference between the methods employed by sages and those practised by witches ; I have not much confidence in either of them,” retorted Hartwright, angrily. “Nor, if you will pardon my saying so, am I aware of my having given you any reason to employ a tone towards me which savours of contempt. Perhaps,” he added, with a scornful curl of his lip, “it is because I have not yet alluded to the delicate subject of remuneration for your services ; but you must perceive that the sum *en jeu* will furnish an ample margin to meet charges of this nature.”

The speaker had scarcely finished the sentence when, to his consternation, his strange guest was seized with an uncontrollable fit of trembling, which lasted for more than a minute.

“What is the matter now ? have you caught a chill ?” exclaimed Hartwright. “Will you let me send for a glass of wine ?”

“Don’t chatter any more, but tell me how much money you require at once.”

Masollam’s eyes were closed as he said this in so low a tone as to be scarcely audible,

while the purport of the remark was so unexpected, that Hartwright literally did not know whether to believe his ears. A prey, for the moment, to a conflict of emotions, his common-sense and urgent needs once more came to the rescue, to save him from an outburst of temper at the rudeness of his guest's exclamation, as he replied somewhat surlily—

“A couple of thousand pounds would give me time to look about: I should still require to let the house.”

“It must be to me, then,” said Masollam, in the same voice; and he at the same time drew out his pocket-book, with a deliberation that almost amounted to effort, and taking a cheque from it which was already filled up in Hartwright's name, he handed it to his host. To the astonishment of that gentleman, the sum inscribed was exactly the amount he had mentioned, but it was still unsigned.

“Give me a pen,” murmured Masollam, barely opening his eyes, as he held out his hand; and on Hartwright complying, he slowly traced his name in the corner. He had no sooner done so than another slight shiver

passed over his frame. He pressed his hands over his eyes for a moment, and then looked up with a total change of feature and of manner. "And now, my dear Mr Hartwright," he said in a natural tone, and with great sweetness of expression, "let me congratulate you on the great temper, tact, and moderation which you have shown throughout this interview, which I have endeavoured to make as short and as little painful to your feelings as possible. When you come to know me better, you will make allowance for my mental and bodily peculiarities : we all have them, you know, only mine are somewhat more marked than those of other people. By the way, Sebastian is rather an uncommon name for an Englishman ; how did your nephew come by it ?"

Masollam's transitions, both of manner and matter, were so sudden, that Hartwright was still almost too bewildered to reply.

"First," he said, "let me express my thanks for——"

"Don't go back on that now," said Masollam, in a hurried voice almost of alarm.

"But you will surely require security ?"

"Stop, will you!" thundered the old man, springing to his feet, and bringing his fist down on the table with such violence that the inkstand clattered; and then, sinking back into his chair, he resumed, "We were talking about that interesting nephew of yours and his singular name."

"Yes," said Hartwright, now completely cowed; "he is called, I imagine, after one of his mother's family. She was a Spaniard. On one occasion my brother was nearly three years absent from England; on his return he came back with a wife and a baby. It was rather a romantic story. She eloped with him from a convent, I believe; but I don't know the particulars. You must apply for them to Santalba, who, I believe, was a connection of the late Mrs Hartwright. In fact, I wonder, as you know him, and show so much interest in the family"—here Hartwright glanced at the cheque—"and know so much about its financial necessities, that you are not familiar with the birth, parentage, and education of us all."

"I am not of a prying nature," said Masollam, with an amiable smile. "Shall we see what has become of the ladies? My dear Mr

Hartwright, your very kind invitation to move from the hotel here has taken me a little by surprise, and I must carry away my daughter now if we are to be back to dinner : ladies are such slow packers, you know."

Of all the shocks which Hartwright had experienced in the course of this one remarkable interview, this was destined to be the most violent and unexpected. What did the man mean by accepting an invitation to "move" from the hotel here, which had never been tendered to him? In fact, Hartwright had only just decided in his own mind to make the signal agreed upon with his wife as a preliminary to offering his guests the hospitality of the house for the night. Masollam observed the shade of annoyance and surprise which his remark had occasioned, and continued—

"You will now be able to postpone your trip abroad indefinitely, and we shall have opportunities while living together of discussing those domestic and financial problems which are vexing your spirit, under conditions which will enable me to judge how they may be solved in the manner you desire—conditions which it was impossible for me to command

during one short interview. Which way?" he asked, for by this time he had walked into the hall, followed by his host, and seemed to regard the arrangement as finally settled.

Hartwright, too much engaged in collecting his thoughts to make any further remark, opened a glass door into a conservatory, through which his wife and daughters, accompanied by Amina, were returning to the house.

"Amina, my child," said Masollam, immediately on seeing her, "Mr Hartwright has been so very kind as to invite us to come and stay with him while we are resident in this part of the country, and in fact has gone so far as to change his own plans and postpone his departure for the Continent indefinitely. As we have important business affairs to settle together, which require our immediate attention, it is necessary that we make the move at once. You will recognise the importance of this prompt action later," he said, turning to his host; "and now I must ask you to allow us to run away for an hour or two. At what time do you dine?"

"At a quarter to eight," replied Hartwright, somewhat surlily. His wife was at that mo-

ment glaring at him with such an expression of indignation and amazement, that he was afraid to manifest a politeness which, to do him justice, he was far from feeling.

The Masollams had scarcely taken their departure, and Mrs Hartwright was giving vent to her pent-up feelings in a higher key, and in stronger language than was quite consistent with her social aspirations, when, to her husband's great relief, and before he had found a moment to enter upon an explanation, she was interrupted by the arrival of another telegram, this time addressed to himself, and which ran as follows :—

“Parliament will be dissolved immediately. Expect me to dinner to-night.—SEBASTIAN.”

“The plot seems to be thickening. There is another surprise and another guest for you.” And Hartwright dexterously covered his retreat by putting the message into his wife's hands, and vanishing into the sanctum where he had so lately been closeted with his strange visitor. “I wonder,” he muttered, as he sank with an intense feeling of relief into his arm-chair, and

his eye fell on the drawer in which he had locked the unlooked-for cheque,—“I wonder whether that old impostor was referring to Sebastian’s arrival to-night, when he talked about my soon recognising the necessity of prompt action. It certainly is strange that he should have hit off so precisely the amount I needed, and have forced himself upon us exactly in the nick of time to meet Sebastian.”

As he was thus ruminating, Masollam and his daughter were rolling back to town in the fly, and the former was in the act of remarking, as he tore up into minute fragments a telegram which Amina had just been reading, and threw them out of the window—

“Cottrell did that well; it reached me most *apropos*, and the news it contained of Sebastian’s intended arrival to-night enabled me to force the situation. Carabet was very accurate in his estimate of our friend’s financial needs, too—or rather, I suppose, the butler was; but I never should have thought of taking a cheque for the amount in my pocket, had I not seen myself giving one to some one last night when I was away.” Being “away” meant, in Masollam’s parlance, the trance con-

ditions into which he was in the habit of falling. "It is a large sum," he added, with a sigh, "but I believe, with care and skilful handling it will turn out a profitable investment. A great deal will depend upon you, Amina, and upon your management of this lad Sebastian."

From which it may be inferred that Miss Masollam was completely in her father's confidence. This, indeed, was the profound conviction of that young lady herself, but it was an error from which I would guard my readers.

CHAPTER V.

MISS FLORENCE HARTWRIGHT'S SENTIMENTAL
CONFIDENCES.

WHEN it came to be known to the younger members of the Hartwright family that, for reasons which were not made clear to them, the proposed trip to the Continent had been indefinitely postponed; that Mr Masollam and his daughter had been invited to take up their residence at the family mansion; and that their cousin Sebastian was expected to arrive that evening,—a more than ordinary commotion was produced; while the strain to which Mrs Hartwright's temper was subjected by this sudden revolution of her plans, was not calculated to remove the friction which resulted therefrom. Partially dismantled rooms had to be hurriedly refurnished; extra supplies sent for from town; servants to be persuaded

to resume their functions, who had made arrangements for leaving; trunks to be unpacked; and, worst of all, explanations to be invented, which should satisfy the gossip to which so unusual an occurrence was sure to give rise.

“Oh, bother!” said Laura to Florence, as both those young ladies were standing knee-deep in their respective wardrobes, in the room which they occupied together. “I told Susan to put my pink-satin dress in this trunk—and now I’ve tumbled everything out on the floor, and it’s not there; and Susan has had leave for the afternoon to look for another place, which I hope she has not found—and I’ve got nothing to wear this evening! I am certain that dress Miss Masollam had on was made in Paris: did you ever see such a lovely fit? I did feel such a dowdy; and it will be worse to-night, with this grey old thing!” and she bestowed a contemptuous kick on a heap of flounces at her feet.

“Don’t distress yourself, dear,” observed her sister, with a smile so markedly amiable that an experienced observer of young-lady nature would have had no difficulty in translating its meaning; “nothing that either of

you might wear would make any difference. Miss Masollam never could either look or feel a dowdy. It is your misfortune, not your fault, Lal, that you were born one. It is silly to complain now."

Laura cast an envious glance at the tall graceful form of her sister. "It's fortunate you have given up all idea of Sebastian," she remarked; and then, as a bright thought seemed to strike her, she opened her grey eyes and stared into vacancy, as though transfixed with its brilliancy.

"Well, dear," asked Florence, "does that amiable reflection suggest some new idea to you?"

"Indeed it does, Flo. They are meeting here by appointment—I am certain of it. Miss Masollam is just the kind of girl that makes up her mind to marry a million sterling, and does it; and," she added, after a pause, "you are just the kind of girl that makes up her mind to do the same thing, and doesn't."

"There!" she muttered to herself, as she buried her head in her trunk, "that was for saying I was born a dowdy." From which it will appear that, though the Miss Hartwrights bore the reputation among their acquaintances

of being "thoroughly amiable girls," they occasionally departed from their public rôle in the privacy of the bed-chamber.

Florence knew her sister too well to prolong the encounter, more especially as the bluntness of her suggestion *lui donnait à penser*. She had anticipated with some little anxiety the possibility of her finding a rival in the beautiful stranger, but it had never occurred to her before that there was likely to be anything preconcerted in the meeting. Still, if such did happen to be the case, it would be better to be on the spot, and judge for herself, than, by going abroad, to abandon the field. For some time past she had encouraged the idea in her family that the match might be considered hopeless, for she had come to the conclusion that unintentionally they were the main obstacles to it. But in point of fact nothing was further from her purpose than to give up the hope upon which the affections of a lifetime had been fixed ; and she had good reason for believing that the situation was not so desperate as her father, in his description of it to Masollam, had given the latter to understand.

She well knew, what her parents had failed to perceive, that she was the magnet which attracted her cousin to the house, on the somewhat rare occasions when he honoured it with his presence, and that nothing but the high respect he entertained for his father's memory and wishes while living, the absence of any such respect for his uncle, a marked aversion for his aunt, and an utter want of sympathy with any of the younger members of the family but herself, had interposed a barrier to her own dearest wishes: for it is due to Florence to say that she loved her cousin for his own sake as well as for his money's; though, had he been a poor man, she would have sacrificed her inclination to those more practical views of life in which she had been early trained, and found in the nearness of the relationship an insuperable obstacle to a closer union. "If I had not been so violently thrown at his head in the first place, and so heavily handicapped by my family in the second," ruminated this young lady, as she sat on the edge of the bed and watched her younger sister getting more and more dishevelled in her efforts to construct a suitable toilet,

“there never would have been any difficulty. I could have overcome his scruples about his father’s wishes. But now, what with having made a false start and carrying so much weight, if there is to be a rival in the field as well, I shall have my work cut out for me.”

Florence had picked up a good deal of racing slang, it will be perceived, from her brothers, besides having sporting proclivities of her own, which she carefully concealed from Sebastian.

“There will be just time,” she murmured, as she glanced at her watch; “how lucky it was that papa failed to sell the pony-carriage and ponies!”—a reflection which was suggested by a determination to which the young lady had arrived, as the result of her review of the position of matters generally.

In accordance with the fashion of the period, the Miss Hartwrights enjoyed a large amount of individual liberty; and half an hour later, Florence might have been seen “tooling-along,” as she would have herself expressed it, in a dainty little turn-out, to the Tongsley station,

to meet the express from London, due at half-past five o'clock.

"Send William and your traps in a fly, and let me drive you home," she said to her cousin, after they had exchanged a cordial greeting; "and don't look so flattered and gratified, sir, at the proposition: I assure you it is justified by the sternest necessity. I want to have a serious talk with you on business, before you see papa. You know"—and she looked up in his face with a pleading expression—"you are our nearest relation; and now that a crisis has arrived in our domestic affairs, who is there but you I can confide in? Papa never tells me anything, but mamma thinks he does, and is jealous of my influence with him. Laura never thinks of any one but herself, and my brothers only of the next sporting events. I am sure they might as well try their hands at writing novels as make the kind of books they do, for all the profit they bring them," continued Florence, ruefully. "The fact is, we are ruined: both the elder boys are over head and ears in debt, and so is papa, and I am sure I don't know what is to become of us."

"He wrote some time ago to tell me he

was in difficulties, and I thought I had given him enough to help him out. I only did it for your sake, Flo," added Sebastian, reddening slightly. "It is the third appeal he has made to me since my father's death; and as he did not reduce his establishment upon a former occasion, when I had made it the condition of my loan, I should have refused him this time had I not felt that you would be the chief victim. You may judge of my surprise, then, when I heard, only a few days ago, that you were on the point of breaking up your home and leaving for the Continent. I should have come down at once, but was detained by the political crisis."

"Well, you have just arrived here in time for a domestic one, for we have undergone another revolution since then," said Florence, "and it is one which causes me the greatest anxiety: that is just why I took the strong measure of coming to meet you alone. There was an old Jew—at least I think he is a Jew, and I strongly suspect he is a money-lender—who came to lunch with us to-day. He was closeted with papa for an hour after lunch, and the result was, that at the end of the

conference we were informed that our Continental trip was given up—we were to have started to-morrow, you know—and that the old man and his daughter are to come and live with us. From what I can make out from mamma, who was too furious to enter upon a full explanation, they seem to have planted themselves upon us indefinitely. What other conclusion was it possible for me to arrive at, than that he has in some way completely relieved papa from all his embarrassments? I am not naturally timid, as you know, Sebastian, but he was really a terrible old man: I never felt such a combination of fear and antipathy for any one. I am sure he has some reason for wanting to get us all into his power. I feel like a fly just beginning to flutter on the edge of a spider's web. Then he has got a daughter. I am sure he uses her for a decoy when he wants to get hold of young men. She's an awfully pretty girl," concluded the young lady, spitefully.

"Why, my dear Flo, you quite take my breath away: this is a domestic revolution with a vengeance, with an interesting touch of mystery in it too. Let us hope that your

heated imagination has exaggerated the gravity of the crisis. I have no doubt I shall be able somehow or other to save the situation. I am glad I arrived so opportunely. Don't alarm yourself about that terrible old man : I shall soon be able to fathom his designs, if he has any, and those of his lovely daughter."

"I didn't go so far as to say she was lovely, or that she had any designs," said Florence, with a pang. And she half thought of verifying the suspicion which had produced it, by asking her cousin if he had ever heard of a Miss Masollam ; but she changed her mind, and simply added, "Well, I hope you may find it as easy to arrange as you seem to think. Don't say anything of all this, or seem to know anything, when you meet papa and mamma. I only wanted to prepare you, and consult with you as to what it is best to do."

"It is impossible for me to give any opinion upon the subject until I am in full possession of all the facts."

"I feel a presentiment of misery," said Florence ; and she added a pocket-handkerchief to the whip and reins she already had in her hands, so as to be prepared for the

next emergency. "It is very cruel of papa to drag his children through all this humiliation, and let entire strangers into the bosom of his family,—and such strangers." Here she applied the handkerchief. "I do hope you will be able to see a way out of it, for me at all events. I don't think any of the others feel the degradation of it all as I do." Here she removed the handkerchief, and looked up at him with eyes that had not become red, but were most becomingly brimming.

As Hartwright gazed into them, and wondered whether they were going gently to overflow or not, he felt an irresistible desire to stay a trembling drop with something more consolatory than words. She looked at the moment so beautiful and so unhappy, and he felt such deep pity for her woe—the road, moreover, at this spot was so deserted—that he ventured to impress a cousinly kiss upon her forehead, merely as an evidence of fraternal sympathy. He could not, however, resist the impulse, which was not quite so brotherly, of saying—

"Never mind, dear, whatever may happen to the others; perhaps, so far as you are per-

sonally concerned, there may be a way out of it." And then in a panic lest he should be still further betrayed by his feelings, he added, as he remembered all the objections to a marriage, towards which he was now rather prompted by compassion and a long-standing intimacy than urged by any more powerful sentiment,—“But it is quite impossible to decide anything until I know more. I was only thinking”—and in his attempt to extricate himself from the false position into which he was floundering, he made matters worse—“that, somehow or other, we must take care that you are not sacrificed to—ahem—to, ah, any old Jew money-lender, you know.”

The girl, who, during this tender passage, had allowed her ponies to drop into a walk, looked up at her cousin with a startled and horrified expression.

“Why, Sebastian,” she exclaimed, “what can you mean? how could I personally be sacrificed to this man? I told you everything, thinking that you would say something to console me, and instead of that you say things that quite terrify me,”—and this time the brimming eyes overflowed in real earnest.

“My dear Florence, I assure you I didn’t mean anything,” said poor Sebastian, once more a prey to his natural tenderness of heart. “I don’t know enough to be able to mean anything that can alarm you. All I wish you to understand is, that whatever happens, you must put perfect trust and confidence in my affection, and that, rather than see your happiness endangered permanently, I would ask you,”—he was going to add, “to find a refuge in the love which I offer you,” when he was interrupted by the rattle of a rapidly approaching carriage, which seemed so close behind them as to cause him to look round, while Florence made way for it to pass. As it did so, a fair face appeared at the window, and its owner, as she bowed smilingly to Florence, accompanied her salutation with an almost imperceptible sign of recognition to Sebastian, which that gentleman was too much confounded with amazement to acknowledge until it was too late. His spasmodic attempt to do so, however, and the glance to which it was the response, were not lost upon his cousin, who exclaimed—

“Good heavens, Sebastian, do you know her?”

"I met her only two nights ago in the gallery of the House of Commons, and it was certainly rather a surprise to me to see her turn up so suddenly and unexpectedly here. She seemed a mysterious sort of person, with an odd name—Masollam, I think it was. But how on earth does she come to know you?"

"My acquaintance dates from a still more recent period. I only saw her at lunch to-day for the first time. Her father is the old money-lender you have just been sacrificing me to," said Florence, somewhat bitterly. "Perhaps you know him too?"

"I did not know she had a father," replied Hartwright, who fell into a fit of musing which lasted till they reached the lodge gates, and which Florence was too much preoccupied with her own thoughts to wish to disturb. If these were somewhat of an agitated character, they were not altogether unpleasing. Never before had her cousin so nearly committed himself in the sense she desired; for if it is not exactly complimentary to be married out of compassion to the man one loves, it is, at all events, better than not being married to him at all. Had it not been for the inoppor-

tune appearance of the lovely vision at the carriage-window at the most critical moment of her cousin's speech, all uncertainty might now have been at an end. But the golden moment was lost. The suddenness of the surprise, and the turn it gave to the conversation, made it impossible for her to lead her companion back to the delicate ground he was treading with such hesitating steps, when he was suddenly scared off it. Would so lovely a face be one of evil omen, destined ever to come between her and the fulfilment of her hopes? Was it only her own heated imagination, as this vague presentiment shot through her, that read in those lustrous eyes a glance of warning and of menace? And as the startled look of her cousin recurred to her memory, and she observed the reverie into which he had since fallen, her suspicions took more definite shape, till the plant of hope which but a moment before had been so vigorously pushing forth its tender shoots seemed slowly to wither before them, and the possibility contained in her sister's suggestion that the meeting had been prearranged, seemed to acquire stupendous proportions. Yet she knew

Sebastian to be the soul of truth, as he was of honour, and had such been the case, he never would have said that it was a surprise to him to meet her. On the other hand, why did Miss Masollam seem so perfectly self-possessed? and why, even if the meeting was unexpected on the part of her cousin, should it have produced so marked an effect upon him?—and she once more uneasily glanced at him, as she pulled up with rather a stylish flourish at the door of the paternal mansion. “There is a mystery somewhere, and it’s a very uncomfortable one,” she muttered, as she consigned Sebastian to the servant who was to conduct him to his uncle, while she tripped up to her room to dress for dinner,—“but I will get to the bottom of it before I go to bed.”

In common with other young ladies of the period, Florence Hartwright had a profound confidence in her own power of grappling with any mystery, and of solving it at the shortest notice. She had yet to learn that the more deeply you dive after solutions, the more hopelessly entangled do you become in problems.

CHAPTER VI.

SEBASTIAN DOES SOME DETECTIVE WORK.

WHATEVER defects may attach to the character of Orientals, there is one from which they are conspicuously free,—they are never snobs. This reflection suggested itself to Sebastian when, upon the occasion of his first introduction to Masollam, he contrasted the dignified bearing of that gentleman with that of the master of the house. A moment after, Mrs Hartwright entered the room where they were assembling before dinner, followed by Miss Masollam, and the comparison was again unfavourable to the former. Where, he wondered, could these strangers have picked up these manners of perfect self-possession? Had they been accustomed to good society, or was it to be attributed to the instinctive good-

breeding of the race from which they sprang ; and if so, what was that race ? His cousins were already in the room as he pondered thus, and he felt that Florence's eye was fixed upon him, as he overheard one of her brothers murmur to the other, as he stared in open-eyed admiration of the stranger, that she was "a regular screamer." Miss Masollam made no sign of recognition, but waited until Sebastian was formally presented to her, when she quietly remarked, in a tone audible to the whole company—

"I am so sorry, when you called upon me in London, that I missed you. Indeed it could not be helped. It must be so. I did not much mind, because I knew soon I should see you. I told Reginald Clareville to tell you so. Did he indeed give my message?"

With a smile of fascinating innocence, a captivating foreign accent, and in these simple little broken sentences, did Miss Masollam explode her first shell in the midst of the Hartwright family.

Charles Hartwright glanced at his nephew. How was it, thought that gentleman, that when, half an hour before, he had told him

that he was to meet Mr and Miss Masollam, who had been invited to come and stay some time in the house, Sebastian had been silent as to his having any previous knowledge of them? This was decidedly suspicious, and Charles Hartwright was a man of suspicious temperament.

"Who is this girl," mentally exclaimed Mrs Hartwright, "who calls Mr Clareville 'Reginald' in this familiar way?" and she bitterly remembered a futile attempt she had once made to get invited to one of Lady Clareville's draws, and the refusal of her nephew to use his influence to procure her an invitation.

"I told you so," telegraphed Laura to her sister in an expressive glance. "You see she openly admits that she was to meet him here."

"So Sebastian called on her in London! he never told me that," thought Florence, flushing uneasily under her sister's triumphant gaze. "What a minx that Laura is!" and she darted a sisterly look at her to that effect.

"O naughty Sebastian," whispered the

younger brother to the elder; "who would ever have suspected that you could have a little game on of this sort? Look at his face, Ned."

It is an unfortunate circumstance that the expression of conscious innocence in a highly sensitive nature, which feels itself an object of unjust suspicion, is often, in the eyes of prejudiced and superficial observers, not to be distinguished from that of conscious guilt. The flushed cheek, the embarrassed manner, the stammering utterance, is in point of fact as likely to be the result of one as the other: it is purely a matter of temperament in both cases, and nothing can be more fallacious than to allow evidence of this nature to have any weight. But the Hartwrights were not a philosophic family; and even if they had been, the conflicting passions by which they were at that moment animated, would have put it out of their power to judge calmly. Being of a perfectly frank and loyal nature, and a gentleman to the tips of his fingers, Sebastian said, after a momentary hesitation, and with a somewhat heightened colour—"Clareville gave me your message; but I confess I had no idea its pur-

port was so soon to be realised. It was a matter of regret both to him and myself, when we called, that we had not the pleasure of seeing you. If I had known you were to be here," he added, with a light laugh, recovering himself somewhat, "I think I should have taken the liberty of bringing Reginald down with me."

"Insolent puppy!" internally. ejaculated Charles Hartwright; "he talks as if the house was his own." As he thought thus, he became conscious that Masollam's eye was fixed upon him, and felt irresistibly impelled to meet it. "It's true," he mentally added as he did so. "I am no longer master nor in my own house; it is that brute's leave he must ask."

"I wish you had brought him," said Mrs Hartwright to herself; and this reflection was mentally responded to by all the younger members of the family—so that when Miss Masollam said, "I wish you had brought him," it seemed an echo of their thoughts.

"It is not too late now—he is still in town; shall I telegraph?" asked Sebastian. But the query was not addressed to his uncle, whom he seemed unconsciously to ignore in

his desire to gratify the wishes of the fair stranger.

"I like him very much—he is so clever," she said in reply.

"An excellent suggestion, Mr Hartwright," said Masollam; "I know you agree with me."

"An excellent suggestion," murmured that gentleman, mechanically.

"Oh, quite too charming! do telegraph for him," exclaimed Mrs Hartwright, now that her husband had expressed his approval.

"Capital fellow, Clareville," chimed in the youths, who only knew him by sight.

"There's a *prix de consolation* for you," whispered Laura to her sister; "why don't you join in the general chorus of approbation?" But at that moment dinner was announced.

"It will be time enough if I telegraph after dinner—he will get it the first thing in the morning," said Sebastian, as, by Mrs Hartwright's desire, he offered his arm to his cousin, and led her in to dinner.

This was the telegram which Reginald Clareville's servant handed his master the

following morning, when he entered the bedroom of that gentleman to prepare his matutinal tub—

“Amina Masollam desires see you here immediately. Curious affair. Do come. Name hour arrival. I will meet you station.—Sebastian.”

“That ought to fetch him,” the sender had said to himself, while penning the above missive—and he was not mistaken. After a few moments of hesitation, in which perplexity and surprise were mingled with doubt as to whether he could free himself from various existing engagements, Clareville suddenly seized a pen, as if impelled by an overpowering impulse, and scribbled off in reply, “Expect me at half-past 5 P.M.” Even his servant was struck with the haggard countenance of his master as he took the telegram, and would have been still more surprised if he could have heard the soliloquy which followed.

“I am too miserable for it to matter much what I do,” muttered Reginald. “What an extraordinary night I have had! Thank God, I conquered at last—my mind is made up. I have no longer a career that can be ruined,

or a life that can be blasted, or political prospects that can be thrown away. I feel like a craft wrecked by a moral tempest which has suddenly and most unaccountably sprung up, and is driving me I know not whither : meantime, any port is good in a storm, so I'll run for the one Sebastian so unexpectedly offers, and do my best in the interval to repair damages, and clear away the traces of my agony."

Meantime Sebastian had determined that he would preserve an attitude of apparent indifference, and not attempt, by broaching the subject either to Masollam or his uncle, to solve the enigma of the presence of the strangers in the Hartwright family until he had received his friend's reply. "For," he ruminated, "two heads are better than one in a business of this sort, and Clareville is just the sort of fellow to tackle the girl, while I devote my detective faculties to her father." So he allowed it to be supposed that he was about to drive into Tongsley on his own affairs. Before starting, however, he had taken the opportunity of saying privately to his cousin Florence, "Find out if you can

from Miss Masollam, quite by accident as it were, and without exciting her suspicion, what hotel they stayed at in town. Don't press the point if it does not come naturally, as I can easily find out otherwise ; only I want to avoid as much as possible attracting attention to them by making inquiries."

As Florence was a young lady not devoid of intelligence, as the reader will have already perceived, she found no difficulty in carrying out her cousin's instructions.

"Oh, perhaps you can tell me," she exclaimed, running up, with an open letter in her hand, to Miss Masollam, who was taking a stroll in the garden just after breakfast. "I have just heard from a friend who is coming to spend a few days at Tongsley with her husband, who has some business here, and she asks whether we can recommend the new hotel, which has just been finished at the station. It has been so lately opened, that I have not met any one who has tried it: did you go there?"

"No," replied Amina; "we went to the George."

And it was straight to the George that

Sebastian, on receiving this piece of information, drove. On thinking over the matter in the silent watches of the night, it had occurred to him that a foreigner like Masollam would not enter into important financial transactions with Hartwright, whom he had never known or seen before in his life, without the assistance of some local attorney. And he now made inquiries at the George with the view of finding out whether the strangers had either received or made visits during their stay at the hotel. Here he heard that they had been brought there by Carabet, and gone out with Carabet, had been closeted with Carabet, and in fact seemed to have had no communication with any one but him. After obtaining all the information he could about that Oriental and his curiosity-shop, he determined to proceed thither on foot; and this he did all the more readily, as he was something of a numismatist.

Mr Carabet was disposing of a piece of *cloisonné* enamel, with a languid and indifferent air, to a lady for whose judgment in such matters he evidently entertained small respect, when Sebastian entered, and asked to be shown

some antique coins. The dealer's face immediately brightened, and, relegating his customer to his assistant, he produced a drawerful for Sebastian's inspection, watching narrowly, as he did so, the face of the latter as he turned over the contents. It was a very important matter in Mr Carabet's trade for him to form, as speedily as possible, an accurate estimate of the amount of knowledge possessed by those who came to purchase his wares. When, therefore, Sebastian remarked, after an inspection which lasted only a few moments, that he could not find a coin in the whole collection worth buying, and was turning away with a disappointed air, Carabet hastily exclaimed—

“Wait, sir; I have more”—this time leaving the shop, to return with a tin box, which he unlocked, and exhibited to his customer's appreciative gaze a very different assortment.

“You guard your treasures precious from the common herd, I see,” said Sebastian, smiling. “Have you never heard that the love of money is the root of all evil?”

“Not such very, very old money as this,

sir. No harm to love old money ; to love new money very bad."

"I am glad you think so. Is that the general opinion in the country you come from ?"

"No, sir ; everybody loves money there, just the same as here."

"I suppose they don't make it so easily, or you would not have left it to come here ?"

"Perhaps," replied Carabet, in a manner which did not altogether imply assent to this proposition.

"Where did you pick up this coin ?" asked Sebastian.

"At Bagdad."

"And this one ?"

"At Damascus."

"And this ?"

"At Ispahan."

"I suppose you made some place your headquarters ? Where did you generally live in the East ?"

"No, I never lived very long in one place. Here is indeed a rare coin," he added, changing the subject.

Sebastian saw that the man, who was ap-

parently in Masollam's confidence, was not one likely to be led into betraying it, and being afraid to excite suspicion by further inquiries, was about to make a purchase and take his departure, when Carabet was suddenly informed by his assistant that he was wanted. While his customer was waiting for his return to complete his purchase—too delicate a matter to be negotiated by an assistant—he overheard a loud female voice in what appeared to be the back passage.

“It's no use a-threatenin' nor a-arguin', Mr Carabet—I aint a-goin' to stay out my month in this 'ouse. If there aint been crimes in it already, it's my opinion as there will be. I told you the same thing yesterday.”

“Not so loud, my good woman.” And Sebastian could hear Carabet continue in low tones of expostulation, which seemed to produce an effect, though their purport was in audible, for the shrill voice replied—

“Well, if you let me see the woman you keep bottled-up up-stairs, and call your sister, as nobody 'as ever seen, except that old man and the lady as was with him yesterday, and let me wait upon her, I don't say but what I'll stay.”

“What a row that woman is making!” said Sebastian to the assistant, with well-feigned impatience. “Who is she?”

“The cook a-givin’ warning,” replied the youth, with a grin.

“Well, tell your master I could not wait; I shall probably look in again.”

“Now for the cook,” he said to himself, as he regained the street. “I am not sure that this sort of amateur detective work is very reputable,” he reflected, with a certain misgiving; “but it is certainly exciting, and I don’t think I do it badly; and,” he mentally added, “besides, it is justified by the circumstances.” It was perfectly clear to Sebastian’s mind that the visitors on the previous day could be none other than Masollam and his daughter, but the mysterious prisoner was a new feature. He thought he would linger a few minutes in the neighbourhood of Carabet’s residence, to cross-examine the cook in case she left it. He had not long to wait, for Carabet had failed to accede to her terms, to judge by the flounce with which she issued from the house and slammed the door behind her.

“I beg your pardon,” said Sebastian, ad-

dressing her with great politeness; "but by the merest accident I overheard you just now, when I was buying something in Mr Carabet's shop, give him warning, and his assistant told me you were a cook: is that so?"

"It is, sir," she said, still flushed with her late encounter.

"I suppose you will have to look for another place?"

"Yes, sir,"—and this time she dropped a little anticipatory curtsey.

"Well, if you will give me your name and address, and your references suit, perhaps you may not have far to go to find one." And Sebastian took out his pocket-book to make the necessary entry.

"Jane Slocum, sir, 3 Hartwright's Buildings," dictated the cook.

Hartwright's Buildings were a row of model lodging-houses for miners, which had been erected by Sebastian's father. A bright idea suddenly occurred to him. "If you go home at once, I will be with you in half an hour—you can get there by tramway in that time." And he hurried off, leaving Jane not a little flustered and bewildered, but convinced from

the gentleman's manner that the appointment was in earnest, and not one to be neglected. In half an hour to the moment, Florence's pony-carriage, of which Sebastian had taken possession for the morning, was pulled up in the suburban lane one side of which was occupied by Hartwright's Buildings, and Jane was standing at the door of No. 3 to receive her visitor, by whose equipage she was duly impressed.

"Now," he said, as he sat down in the little parlour, "I must first tell you who I am, because I am going to place great confidence in you. I am glad to find that I know your father well, as one who has been in my father's employ, as well as in my own, for many years. My name is Hartwright."

"What! Mr Sebastian Hartwright, our member of Parliament, and owner of the mine, and all these houses, sir?" ejaculated the cook, while she dropped a curtsey, quite out of keeping with the position of her hands, which were uplifted in amazement.

Sebastian nodded, with a smile, and continued: "I overheard what you said to Mr Carabet about the woman he keeps confined

up-stairs, and allows no one to see. I quite understand your disinclination to remain in a house where there is a mystery of this sort; but I have a particular interest in desiring to get at the bottom of it. What I wish to propose to you is to return at once to Mr Carabet, to tell him that you have thought over the matter and have changed your mind, and will remain with him as cook. If you will render me this service, I will triple the monthly wages you now receive from him; but I should expect you to be silent as to any knowledge of me, and to report to me everything you can learn of Mr Carabet's establishment, and those who frequent it, especially any visits which he may receive again from that lady and gentleman who called upon him yesterday. You can always see me while I am staying with my uncle, by sending me a message from the mine, where I will meet you when you have anything to communicate. You need not be afraid of doing this for me, as I am not prompted by any feeling of enmity towards any of those in regard to whom I desire information. On the contrary, I shall only be too delighted if the whole of what seems a mys-

tery can be satisfactorily explained, and if it can be shown that there has never been any ground for suspicion ; but the happiness of some persons for whom I have a regard is at stake, and I do not wish it to be sacrificed. I do not ask you to listen at doors or play the spy, but merely to keep me informed of what comes under your notice. I dislike mysteries, particularly when they are connected, however remotely, with those in whom I feel an interest ; and this is the case in the present instance."

If the truth must be told, Sebastian felt more scruples about making the proposition he was doing, than Jane Slocum in accepting it. The prestige which she would enjoy in her own eyes by rendering Hartwright the service he required of her, and the prospect of so large an increase to her salary, quite reconciled her to the humiliation of asking to be taken back into the service of her master ; and so far from having scruples on any other score, she determined in her own mind to exceed her instructions. So Sebastian drove back well satisfied with his morning's work, more mystified than ever since he had heard of the re-

cluse in Carabet's establishment, and not without recourse to a good deal of metaphysical hair-splitting, to which he was obliged to resort, to justify the course he was pursuing by the interests of morality in general, and of his cousin Florence in particular. He was, however, too honest an analyst of his own sentiments not to admit that he was conscious of a remarkable power of fascination in Amina Masollam, and of a no less strange but more unaccountable attraction towards her father,—and this in spite of a distinct effort on his part to resist both.

CHAPTER VII.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS AT THE TURRETS UNDERGO
A CHANGE.

WHILE Sebastian was employed in the manner described in the last chapter, the various actors in the drama, whom he left behind at The Turrets, were not altogether idle. Florence had been captured by her brothers, and carried away into a small den redolent of cavendish tobacco, and ornamented with guns, fishing-rods, brier-wood pipes, and sporting pictures, for the purpose of being "pumped" in regard to the strange and inexplicable turn of events, which had so far completely baffled conjecture on the part of the two youths in their vain attempts to read the riddle of the past twenty-four hours. They got small satisfaction from the young lady, however, whose dexterous

evasion of any direct replies only stimulated their curiosity the more, and while it heightened their opinion of her sagacity—as she intended it should—confirmed them in the conviction that she was in the secret; an impression which, considering her complete ignorance of it, she succeeded in conveying with great adroitness. But then, as she had more than once remarked to her father, when confidentially discussing with him her brothers' prospects in life, “they were such a pair of duffers.” Mrs Hartwright, who was occupied in performing precisely the same operation upon her husband in his sanctum, was more successful, and was not long in extracting from him a detailed account of all that had transpired during his interview with Masollam on the previous day, and of the manner in which the latter had unexpectedly come to his financial relief. Mrs Hartwright rather piqued herself on her talent for understanding men in general, and her husband in particular; and that she had some ground for this opinion may be gathered from the fact, that though she had been dying of curiosity to know all about it, ever since she had, in an unguarded

moment, given vent to her indignation the day before on being forced into an unexpected change of plan, she was able to control her natural propensities until she felt that her husband was beginning to lose a little of his self-confidence, and to crave for some of that feminine counsel and advice in which, sooner or later, he was always glad to find a refuge. Mrs Hartwright was in the habit of remarking, with a self-satisfied air, that Florence had inherited some of this talent—a fact which did not prevent her feeling a certain secret jealousy of her daughter, as it may be remembered that young lady had already hinted to Sebastian. While these several interviews were taking place, Masollam and his daughter were also engaged in a *tête-à-tête* on a bench under an old oak-tree, which they had discovered in the most remote and retired part of the grounds. Of the three conversations which were going on at the same time on the same subject, it is the only one worth reporting.

“You will understand, Amina,” Masollam was saying, in allusion to his interview with Hartwright on the preceding day, “that when he so totally misconceived our relative posi-

tions as to venture to allude to what he called remuneration in return for my services, it was necessary for me at once to reverse his ideas on the subject. He is a hard, bad man, who must be held with an iron grip. There are times when the subtle influences which radiate from his perverted nature cause me excruciating torture."

And here I must explain to the reader that I have a difficulty, not only in translating Mr Masollam's words from the language in which he was speaking, but in finding terms in which to express the ideas they contained, and which were derived from the conditions by which his organism was affected, and by which it was rendered susceptible to physical sensations, the nature of which were determined by the moral states of those with whom he was brought into contact. As illustrations of this phenomenon will hereafter probably occur in the course of the narrative, I will refrain from any further description of them now. That they were not peculiar to him, however, may be gathered from the remark which his last observation called forth from his daughter.

"I quite sympathise with you, father," she said. "I am afraid our life in this house, so

long as its present occupants remain in it, will be full of suffering to us both. In obedience to your instructions, I have been rendering myself sensitive to Florence."

"Well, dear, and what have you found?" asked the old man.

"I have been feeling very little yet but pain. She is not without high impulses and grand qualities," she added after a pause, "but she is vain, selfish," and she murmured, hesitatingly, "not altogether loyal."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean she is not altogether loyal either to her own highest impulses or her own warmest affections—in other words, to those she loves best."

"And whom does she love best?"

"Her cousin Sebastian."

"Does he return her affection?"

"Not in the sense she desires."

"Have you put yourself *en rapport* with him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"The time has not yet come," and a slight tremor shook the girl's frame; then, with a

sudden start, as though rousing herself from the dreamy manner in which she had been replying to her father's questions, she asked, "Has it, father?"

"No, my child, your instinct is right; but it soon will. Do you know what is the service Mr Charles Hartwright desires me to render him?"

Amina closed her eyes, and seemed lost in meditation.

"I think I can guess," she said at last. "To bring about a marriage between Florence and her cousin."

"Exactly so; and do you know why you and I have hurried here?"

"To prevent it."

"You are right again. I feared lest Sebastian should be led by his compassion to perform an act to which he would not have been prompted by his affections, and which he might have had serious cause to regret."

"You were right, father—you always are," and the girl looked up lovingly; "he has a generous nature and a tender heart."

"His friend will come to-day—at least I think so."

"I think so too," said Amina.

"Then you know what is in store for us both?"

"Yes."

"Do you think we are strong enough to bear the burden between us?"

"I can tell better after he arrives. I suppose," she continued, with a sigh, "that I shall have to undertake him?"

"Yes : leave Sebastian to me for the present. If we need reinforcements, we must send for Santalba and your mother."

As one result of the conversation which had taken place between Hartwright and his wife was, that the latter insisted on knowing whether Masollam had taken The Turrets definitely, and if so, for how long and at what rent, Mr Hartwright was now seen approaching in search of his guest, and the Masollams rose to meet him. After the abrupt manner in which the Oriental had terminated the interview on the previous day, Hartwright felt at some loss in recurring to the business part of the financial transaction which had then been so strangely forced upon him. He was emboldened, however, by perceiving a peculiarly

gentle expression on the countenance of the old man, who, as they turned back towards the house, slipped his arm into that of his host with an air of confiding familiarity, and said, with a smile, "Let us go for a few moments into your study and complete the arrangements which I was unable to attend to yesterday. I don't think I am mistaken," he added, as he stopped suddenly and laid his hand on Hartwright's shoulder; "it was for this purpose you came to look for me?"

It gave the person he addressed a peculiarly disagreeable sensation to find his thoughts and acts divined in this way, but he was rapidly arriving at the point where nothing that Masollam could say or do astonished him.

"Naturally," he replied, with a short uneasy laugh, "I knew that matters could not be left as they were, and felt sure that you would be prepared at the first convenient opportunity to discuss a few remaining details."

"'Discuss' is not, I think, the right word," replied Masollam, again taking his companion's arm and moving on. "See, Amina, there is Miss Hartwright making a bouquet! Go and

help her. Now, my dear Mr Hartwright," he continued, when his daughter had left them, "I suppose you wish to know whether I am your guest or you mine. I think I can relieve your mind on this point. From this moment you are mine, if—as I am sure you will be—you are prepared to fall into the arrangement I am about to propose. I will take your house for a year, with the right of renewal at the expiration of that term, at the rent which you had agreed upon with the gentleman who wished to have the repairs of the stables made at your expense. I will make no such stipulation. As I think it is desirable in your own interest that you and your family should remain for some time longer in this country, I will ask you all to continue to live in this house, without making any apparent change in your establishment, the style of which suits me very well. There is no need even for the servants to know at present that we pay them, and not you. These are domestic questions, the details of which Amina and Mrs Hartwright will have no difficulty in settling. If you have any delicacy in accepting my hospitality

on these terms, you and your wife can arrange with my daughter what proportion you should contribute to the general expenses : these are matters which I do not trouble myself about. In case you should desire to invite any friends to visit you here, I should expect first to be consulted in regard to them ; but in case I desire to invite friends of mine, I should wish to reserve to myself the privilege of doing so, without consulting you. Should I find, in order the better to carry out our joint purposes, that it would be desirable for you and your family to leave the house exclusively to me and mine, I will give you a week's warning of any such necessity, which, I hope, will be sufficient. No one need know anything of the details of this arrangement, except your wife and my daughter."

"How about the lawyer who draws the lease?" asked Hartwright.

"He will only know that he has drawn the lease ; and, I suppose, he can hold his tongue about that. Lawyers are not generally communicative."

"This proposition is so novel, and involves so many domestic matters for consideration,

that I am sure you will not expect me to decide with reference to it until I have consulted my wife."

"Send for her to come here at once, then." The peremptory tone in which Masollam uttered these words, suggested the idea to Hartwright that the Oriental was not accustomed to disobedience on the part of his own womenkind, and gave him a pang of envy. "Perhaps I had better go myself," he said; and after ushering Masollam into his study, which they had now reached, he departed, not without sundry misgivings, in quest of the lady of the house.

I will not trouble the reader with the details of an interview which resulted in an arrangement being concluded in the sense desired by Masollam, the advantages of which, so far as the Hartwright family were concerned, were put before Mrs Hartwright in so tempting a light, and she and Miss Masollam were left so completely mistresses of the domestic situation, that any doubts which at first suggested themselves to her mind, were speedily overborne by the serene reflection that a young girl from the East, who had never

been in England in her life, would necessarily be a mere puppet in her hands, and that practically her own prestige and an expensive establishment would be maintained chiefly with Mr Masollam's money. There were, moreover, several little household points on which Mr Masollam made concessions; while the confidence he showed in her capacities as a domestic manager, and the compliments he paid her, confirmed her in her conviction that her penetration of human nature, and especially of male human nature, was superior to that of her husband. She felt that Providence had, in the moment of their extremity, sent them an oriental millionaire, on whom she could exercise the peculiar talent upon which she prided herself, of "managing men."

Only one little point remained to be settled between Hartwright and his tenant—but here Masollam's manner suddenly changed. His eyes seemed to go out like extinguished lamps. His voice became hollow and distant, and his brow contracted, as if from pain. Slowly and with apparent effort he said—

"I will take that receipt for the £2000 that you talked about yesterday. I can now do, as

your host and tenant, what, for reasons that it is unnecessary to explain, it would have been premature to do then."

Hartwright, as he made out the receipt, puzzled himself in vain to think what these reasons could be, and handed it to Masollam, who, with an abstracted air, placed it in his voluminous pocket-book, and then abruptly rose and left the room.

"Ouf!" said Hartwright, stretching himself, with a sigh of intense relief. "Thank God, he is gone; his very presence seems to stifle me sometimes. What an old man of the mountain he is!"

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, Charles, by 'an old man of the mountain.' If it is a term of reproach, Mr Masollam does not deserve it. You men never understand one another. Now, the more I see of him, the more perfectly charming do I think him. Could anything be more generous and delicate than his conduct has been throughout? You will see in a week I shall be able to——"

And Mrs Hartwright performed a revolutionary movement with her two forefingers, to indicate the facility with which she intended

to turn Mr Masollam round them. "Old man of the mountain!" she repeated, indignantly; "he is quite too darling an old man."

"There is Sebastian come back," said her husband, glad to change the subject, as he heard the rattle of the pony-carriage, "and there is the luncheon-bell. He ought to have had an answer from Clareville by this time. It is very fortunate that he seems to have been too much occupied with his own affairs to think of meddling with ours. I expected his visit portended a storm, when I found he was coming down in such a hurry, and that he had discovered that the last loan I got out of him, on the understanding that it would clear me of all embarrassments, left me as deeply dipped as ever. I wonder his curiosity has not been more excited, considering our sudden change of plans and the strange guests he has found here."

"If you comprehended men better," retorted Mrs Hartwright, "you would understand that he did not come here to make a storm, as you call it, but to make love."

"Why, Florence told me herself she had given up all hope of him."

“Bah! I do believe you understand women less than men.”

“Why not call me a fool at once?”

“Because you are not, Charles—except in some things, and love-making is one of them.”

“You did not think so once.”

“Oh, don’t rake up old scores—it was I that was the fool then. Let us come in to lunch.”

The party were all assembled in the dining-room when Sebastian entered it. Turning to Miss Masollam—“Your friend, Mr Clareville, will be here this afternoon,” he said.

Florence’s eyes were fixed on Amina as the latter received this piece of intelligence, and she saw, or fancied she saw, something in that lovely and expressive countenance which sent a thrill of hope and of triumph through her whole being. “It is not Sebastian, but Clareville, she loves, and has come here to meet.” The thought flashed upon her with the force of a revelation. “Dear Miss Masollam,” she said aloud, “here is a chair; won’t you come and sit next me?”

CHAPTER VIII.

MR REGINALD CLAREVILLE'S POLITICAL
CONFIDENCES.

"Good heavens! old man, what is the matter? How ill you are looking!" was Sebastian's first exclamation on meeting his friend at the Tong-sley station the same afternoon.

"Yes, I feel rather seedy; that was why I accepted your invitation so promptly. I hope it is only a temporary fit of indigestion; but I am not quite sure whether it is the salmon or the political crisis which has disagreed with me. I was suffering morally as well as physically all last night anyhow. Now, tell me where we are going," added Reginald, changing the subject abruptly, as they took their seats in Florence's pony-carriage.

"To The Turrets—my uncle's house."

“Your uncle’s house!” exclaimed Reginald with amazement. “Why did you say nothing about it in your telegram? I have not the pleasure either of Mr or Mrs Hartwright’s acquaintance, and I certainly have no intention of forcing myself upon them as their guest. I supposed you had some sort of diggings of your own here, or I should never have accepted your invitation. It is not fair of you, and, I must say, not like you,” he continued, rather angrily, “to place me in this false position.”

“My dear boy, the whole situation is so strange that I could not explain it in a telegram of twenty words. That’s the worst of telegrams; they are always putting people into false positions—particularly statesmen and diplomats—even although they have ciphers to help them out of them. I confined myself to the literal truth; it was Miss Masollam invited you, not my uncle.”

“Well, but I can’t be Miss Masollam’s guest.”

“I don’t know that; I rather fancy you are.”

“What! in your uncle’s house?”

“As far as I can gather from my cousin Florence, who has been employing her afternoon in dexterously extracting the facts of the case from her father and mother, and receiving the confidence of the fair Asiatic, old Masollam seems to have hired The Turrets from my uncle, and insists upon the whole family remaining in it as his guests. This makes Miss Masollam mistress of the house, and I suppose she invites whom she pleases.”

Reginald glanced at his friend to see whether he was serious.

“Oh, there’s an old Masollam, is there?” he said at length. “I never heard of him before.”

“If you will apologise for saying that I have placed you in a false position, and express your gratitude to me instead for having placed you in a position which is as romantic as it must be gratifying to any well-constituted mind, I will tell you a great deal more that you never heard of before, in regard to which I desire your sapient counsel and advice. We have nearly two hours before us, which will give me plenty of time to prime you. There is no necessity for you to see any

of the party till you meet them before dinner, more especially as you know your hostess already."

"I apologise; but I shall reserve my expressions of gratitude until you have unbosomed yourself. Go on; I am all attention."

Sebastian's narrative was only interrupted by their arrival at The Turrets. The friends slipped unobserved into the house, when he resumed it in his own room, to the great interest of Reginald, who pondered for some time in silence when it was concluded.

"Am I to understand," asked the latter at length, "that you wish, as it were, to take me into the family counsel?"

"Only so far as I am personally concerned. It is not necessary that any of its other members should know of your being in my confidence."

"By any of its other members you don't mean to exclude your cousin Florence, I suppose, as, from your account, she is the only one who has consulted you on the subject?" and Reginald favoured his friend with a shrewd glance. "To be of any use I must be in full pos-

session of the facts," he added. "That must be my excuse for asking you what relations exist between yourself and your cousin."

Sebastian hesitated a moment.

"It has always been the desire both of my uncle and aunt that we should marry; but my father was strongly opposed to the match."

"And you did not care about it?"

"No; I did not wish to oppose my father's wishes."

"But the young lady, being dutiful, was willing to obey hers, no doubt," said Clareville, with a smile. "Well, I won't press the point," he added, as he observed a shade of embarrassment in his friend's countenance, which was a sufficient answer to his question. "Now in regard to the nature of the financial assistance which Masollam has rendered to Mr Hartwright, your cousin only assumes this to be the case, and therefore is quite ignorant of the amount."

"Quite," replied Sebastian.

"What impression does Masollam make upon you?"

"I am bound to say a most agreeable one. He is extremely intelligent, full of the most

varied information, which he imparts in a manner at once original and attractive. Florence described him to me as a terrible old man, for whom she has conceived the strongest antipathy. To me, on the contrary, he is one of the most engaging specimens of humanity I have ever met."

"And you feel the same, no doubt, about his daughter?"

"I don't feel anything at all about her yet. I admire her as I would a beautiful picture; but I am not especially attracted to her as a human being. She seems to me a far more puzzling and less satisfactory individual than her father."

"Puzzling and unsatisfactory certainly, but to me she is eminently attractive; however, perhaps that is because I am not under the spell of the father," laughed Clareville. "Now let us formulate our ideas a little. First, we must find out who these people are, and where they come from. Secondly, what the man's motive is, not merely in lending your uncle money—that may be explained by the rate of interest he asks—but in suddenly establishing himself in his house under such peculiar

conditions. Thirdly, it behoves us to get at the bottom of his relations with the curiosity-dealer, and the woman he seems to keep in his house as a prisoner. And, fourthly, it may aid in the elucidation of matters if we can discover who this mysterious female may be. No man has a right to keep a fellow-creature in solitary confinement in this country. We might invoke the arm of the law."

"Don't you think for the present it will be better to invoke the aid of the cook?" said Sebastian. "It may do more harm than good to act openly before we know exactly how the case stands. The woman may be a voluntary recluse, or partially insane."

"I don't much like the cook feature in the affair," observed Reginald; "it savours a good deal more of the detective than of the gentleman; but perhaps as an act of humanity it may be justified. It is not in the interests of your family, but of this poor unknown woman, that I consent to it."

"And it was only in her interests that I arranged it," replied Sebastian; "but I am afraid we shall have to do detective work ourselves, or employ detectives to do it for us,

if we are to find out who the Masollams are. I thought of writing and putting them on Miss Masollam's track at the Grand Hotel."

"No, don't do that," said Reginald, quickly.

"Well, suggest something else."

Clareville remained lost in thought for some moments.

"By the way," he exclaimed, suddenly, "there is that strange friend of yours that you once introduced me to in Paris, when you wanted to drag me into those psychical investigations which seem to me as unprofitable as they are fascinating to weak minds. I beg your pardon, old man, I don't include you. If, as your cousin says, this Oriental sets up as a sort of necromancer, they are sure to know something of each other. All fellows in that line are either in league together, and then they play into each other's hands, or else they are rivals, and hate each other. What was your friend's name, again?"

"Santalba ; but you are entirely mistaken if you suppose that he is either in league or in rivalry with any necromancer. I know no man who more thoroughly despises charlatan-ism of every description, or who possesses a

higher sense of honour. Nor have I been able to perceive any signs of it in Masollam, though he is evidently a man whose higher gifts and faculties have been remarkably developed. It was this about him which attracted me; and now that you mention it, I do see a strong resemblance in many points between their views, even during the short conversation which I have already had with Masollam on those subjects in which I feel a special interest. It is just possible, as you say, that they may know each other, though, if so, it is strange that I have never heard Santalba mention his name; however, I will write at once and ask him."

"Not so fast. Don't let us show more of our hand than we can help, even to the chivalrous and high-minded Santalba. First find out, if you can, from your uncle, how he came to know Masollam. Somebody must have introduced him, you know. And if you fail there, you can tell Masollam himself how like his views are to those of your friend, and draw him that way. It will be time enough to write when we know our ground a little better."

Mrs Hartwright's feelings of satisfaction at having the Honourable Reginald Clareville under her roof were somewhat damped, when, after he had been duly presented to her and the rest of the assembled company, with the exception of Amina, who greeted him with unembarrassed cordiality as an old acquaintance, Masollam offered her his arm when dinner was announced; and turning with the calm assurance of a host to Reginald, said, "Mr Clareville, will you take my daughter into dinner?" Charles Hartwright bit his lip; Florence linked her arm to that of her cousin Sebastian, with a comfortable sense of relief; and Mrs Hartwright, as she glanced at her companion, began to doubt whether, after all, she understood him so thoroughly as she supposed—doubts which were speedily set at rest by the profusion of compliments and pretty speeches with which the bland Oriental proceeded to overwhelm her.

"It was very kind of you," said Miss Masollam in French, in which language she was more at ease than in English, and speaking in a subdued tone, "to come to us in the midst of this political crisis, when I am sure

your parliamentary prospects must be absorbing all your time and thoughts."

"You are mistaken, Miss Masollam," Reginald replied, with a more serious manner than that which had characterised their first meeting in London. "I made no sacrifice in accepting your kind invitation; for I had just taken the most serious resolution of my life when Sebastian's telegram reached me."

She looked up at him with a glance of surprise and inquiry.

"I will tell you what it is," he continued, as though in answer to it; "I have made up my mind to abandon political life entirely."

"Now! at the most critical juncture of your country's fortunes!" she exclaimed; "at the moment when every true patriot with the influence and talents which you command, should devote himself to its service!"

"It is just because my country is likely soon to need my services, that I decline to devote myself any longer exclusively to the service of my party. I have done that too long already," he added, bitterly.

She watched him intently as he spoke.

"Explain to me," she said; "I am so igno-

rant of English ways. I thought that the difference between despotic government and free government was, that in one the king or emperor governed through his minister; and in the other, the people governed through a party. That is called constitutional government, or government by party; is it not so?"

This was not a very sentimental speech for a young lady to make, yet it went straighter to Clareville's heart than the most tender of glances, or the most significant of pressures. Thus are some men constituted, if the girls only knew it. There was nothing original in the definition, which was a very elementary one, philosophically speaking, nor in the form of its expression; but it seemed to touch a chord in Reginald's nature which was at that moment peculiarly sensitive, because it was still vibrating with the shock of the political agitation of pending events, and it seemed to convey to him an assurance of intellectual appreciation on the part of the speaker, of subjects in which he was most deeply interested, and of a faculty of sympathy which would warrant his discussing them with her. One of his chief reasons for responding so

promptly to Sebastian's telegram, was to talk over with him more fully than had yet been possible, the condition of public affairs, and his own position with regard to them. In Sebastian he knew he should find a sympathetic counsellor and confidant; but now in the very thrill of the tones he was listening to, he heard, as it were, the promise of a tenderer sympathy, of a loftier inspiration, than he could hope for even from a friend whom he esteemed above other men. He instinctively looked across the table at Sebastian as this thought flashed upon him, and could scarcely restrain a feeling of annoyance at perceiving how completely his attention was absorbed by the prattle of his cousin Florence.

Miss Masollam's glance had followed Reginald's.

"Perhaps you think that these are not subjects for women to discuss," she said, in a low and somewhat diffident tone.

"Pardon me," said Reginald, with a slight start, as he recovered himself from his momentary abstraction; "I was thinking exactly the opposite, and congratulating myself on having

found one with whom I can discuss them. Your definition of the difference between autocratic and constitutional, or rather responsible government—for there are countries which have constitutions without the government being responsible to the country, as it is in England—is substantially correct. Unfortunately, in politics as in religion, people attach too much importance to the form; and too little to the essence. It is the ‘letter that killeth, the spirit that giveth life.’ The worst form of government theoretically, becomes the best if all the administrative units are actuated by pure and high motives, and the best becomes the worst if these latter are dishonest and self-seeking; and when a political party, under what are called free institutions, becomes demoralised by private interests, internal dissensions, and inherent weakness, though it may not be corrupt in the worst sense of the word, the most precious liberties of the people are in greater danger than when they are in the hands of a single man who is patriotic, resolute, and free from the petty and personal ambitions which control the leaders of a party.”

“Is it because both parties in England are

open to this charge that you wish to withdraw from politics?" asked Aminia.

"Not altogether; I was talking of the drawbacks which must ever attend the system of government by party in the abstract. I do not go so far as to assert that existing political parties in England are worse than their predecessors, or that one is much more sinning in these respects than the other, though it has been necessary for me to go through a parliamentary experience myself to realise the full extent of the evil; still, if that were all, it is possible, though it would probably be difficult—and, with the modifications which the electoral system is undergoing, is daily becoming more so—for me to take an independent position, and obey the dictates of my conscience, rather than those of any political leader; but then I should have the disagreeable sensation of knowing that if my example were followed by many, the government of the country would be rendered impossible. That consideration, however—which has reference to a hypothetical state of things, that in practice is not likely to arise—would not in itself be sufficient to drive me out of political life."

“What is the consideration which does, then?”

“The fact that the highest moral aspirations suggest political, social, and economic problems, which are insoluble in existing humanitarian conditions, and one is therefore driven to the alternative either of violating one’s noblest instincts, or of withdrawing from political and social life altogether. Common-sense, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, is sense of such a very common description that its exercise must ever bring one into sharp collision with the most lofty ethical ideal. A man may attempt it in private life, and in these civilised days he would be considered a harmless lunatic, and thus escape the fate of the greatest moral Teacher that ever lived; but common-sense in a statesman or politician demands that when the nation he governs is smitten on one cheek, it should instantly return the blow; that when occasion requires, its life-blood should be poured out like water in defence of its commercial interests—in other words, of that money which its preachers proclaim to be the root of evil. Common-

sense demands that it should be externally professing one thing theologically, and practising the exact opposite politically, socially, and economically. Common-sense demands, in fact, that it should live a lie, and the odd thing is that so few seem troubled by the inconsistency. Those that are, and who try to carry their convictions into public life, are impaled on the horns of a dilemma, and if they are honest, find only two courses open to them. Either they must repudiate the policy of common-sense, and adopt what, in default of a better definition, I will call the policy of Christ, which would inevitably result in the conquest and annexation of the country by some foreign Government with a common-sense policy; or by a cleverer adaptation of that policy than their neighbours, they must be more aggressive, more grasping, more self-seeking, more skilful and unscrupulous in the games of war and diplomacy, and thus by the exercise of the most unchristian qualities, secure that preponderance among other Powers, which is the only sure foundation for the national prosperity. Honesty is only the best policy for a nation or for an individual, in the

lowest and crudest acceptation of the term. That honesty which consists in being true to the highest moral ideal, is simply worldly ruin. The disasters which are in store for England, result not from her dishonesty, but from the well-meant endeavour of her statesmen to practise a higher political morality than is current among other nations. It is not lofty enough to appear insane—the world has not yet said of them that much goodness has made them mad ; but it is sufficiently opposed to common-sense to appear intensely feeble, sufficiently impulsive to seem flagrantly inconsistent, and, in fact, inconsistent enough to look distinctly hypocritical. If the conscience of the nation and its rulers were so quickened as to make their political practice consistent with their religious profession, they would certainly seem mad, and their end might be as tragic as that of their hero who died at Khartoum. But if one man by his death could leave such an imperishable moral legacy to posterity as he has done, what might not the death of a nation accomplish ? Who can say that the moral standard, which is now a mere abstraction, might not then

become a realisation? Meantime I cannot be a party to a policy based upon spasmodic moral impulses, so weak and fitful that they shrivel to nothing before the blast of public opinion, and so tempered to suit the exigencies of party warfare or private ambitions, that in some cases their very sincerity is dubious. I would rather go upon the old middle-age lines of expediency and so-called common-sense than this, and secure the material greatness of the empire by adopting the selfish and unscrupulous policy of jealousy and rivalry of each other pursued by our neighbours. Better to live by the force of greed, than die of the rottenness of cant. I decline, however, to be a party to a policy either of greed or of cant. These are the reasons, Miss Masollam, which have influenced me in retiring from the arena of politics."

"Entertaining these sentiments," said Amina, whose abstracted air indicated that she was endeavouring to estimate the force and value of these remarks, "I can quite understand that your right field of action is not in the sphere which causes you such acute moral suffering; but it does not follow that those whom you

condemn as weak and spasmodic in their impulses towards a higher standard of international political morality, could do otherwise for the moment than give the best expression to them which seems in their power. Nor, on the other hand, are those to be blamed who conscientiously believe that the prosperity of England can best be maintained by following those traditional lines of policy to which its greatness has been due, even though they may be out of harmony with those higher moral aspirations, the growing development of which is the marked characteristic of the age in which we live.'

"It does not the less seem to me the duty," replied Reginald, "for those who are the most conscious of this development, to protest alike against the moral feebleness of its half-hearted representatives who discredit it, and the moral denseness of those who resist it."

"On the contrary, it appears to me to be inconsistent with a truly philosophic attitude of mind to be dogmatic about motives of action or lines of policy, inasmuch as the sort of power required for political action implies necessarily a one-sided view. The character

of force needed for the coercion of men and events is not such as highly strung and sensitive natures possess, whose functions lie in another direction, and it must of necessity be somewhat coarse, and relatively even brutal in its attributes. The most powerful man now in Europe is an illustration of force of this description."

"He has created an empire, and developed the arrogance and cupidity of his race. I don't see that the interests of humanity, or of international morality have been much advanced thereby."

"Pardon me, if I differ from you there. We are not yet in a position to judge of the degree in which the results of his policy may not, in their ultimate influence, exercise a beneficial effect upon those interests. It must often happen that an individual, powerfully and instinctively impelled, by virtue of the force which he feels to be inherent in him, to act with energy upon the external forms of life, is bound to set aside many interests for the sake of one; but in the long-run these may not suffer thereby. No one is in a position to assert positively that they will. Take, for

instance, the leaders of the most divergent political ideas. They may be equally honest, equally desirous of their country's good, or even of the world's good ; but as each one in advising a course of action builds upon the unknown quantity of the probable long chain of after-events, it becomes a mere matter of opinion which is good. Fortunately, in every stage of civilisation, by far the greater number of persons do not feel themselves called upon to face political problems with the breadth of view which produces in you the clear perception of the inconsistencies which render public life impossible to you. Opposing political parties have instincts just sufficiently broad to enable them to balance each other, and act without the sense of paralysis arising from the consciousness that they are grappling with problems incapable of solution. It is thus that the divine potency has ever worked through imperfect and often debased instruments, using first one side and then the other to correct the exaggerations of each ; and thus from time to time does the rugged flint of popular revolution come in contact with the cold steel of military despotism. The shock

each time is terrible, but a spark of sacred fire has flashed from it into the world's darkness."

The eye of the fair speaker kindled with the enthusiasm of her utterance as she stopped abruptly; and Reginald felt that his growing admiration for her somewhat marred his critical faculty in argument.

"The spark immediately goes out," he said, with a smile.

"But often not before it has touched tinder," she answered quickly.

"And produced a disastrous conflagration," he rejoined. "We might each continue the metaphor to suit our own side of the question; but I cannot admit that progress is necessarily evolved by the clash of evil passions."

"It would not be if they were all evil, or those who roused them were animated only by selfish ends. But, in point of fact, political excesses are generally the result of an effort to remedy existing evils, and often to evoke virtues. It is the underlying motive which secures the ultimate benefit to humanity, by drawing down a divine influence into the world."

“Nay, now you are becoming mystical, and beg the question that there is such a thing as a ‘divine influence,’ of which I have no sort of proof.”

“Why, you talked just now as if you were a Christian.”

“I hope not. I said that the altruistic morality insisted upon by Christ should be practically and uncompromisingly applied to the policy of the nation; and I am not aware that any Christians have gone as far as that. They don’t assert it, except theoretically, even of an individual. But there is nothing to prevent my being a materialist, and to my still according my complete adhesion to the ethical system taught by a Jew 1800 years ago.”

“I am a materialist too,” said Amina; “but that does not prevent my believing in a God, and in beings whom you may call angels, spirits, devils, or by any other name, because they happen to be invisible to you. It all depends upon what you mean by the word ‘matter.’ If you separate it from force of any kind, I deny its existence; if you do not separate it from force, you have no right to limit its existence to something conditioned on the

delicacy of your sense of touch, or the focus of your eye, or that of your microscope. The moment you admit that force cannot exist without a transmitting medium—which philosophically you must—matter is as good a name for that medium as any other; and the Deity, together with all the hosts of the peopled universes, and of those spiritual regions which are variously designated, become material. If you could only have the focus of your eye changed by a hair, you would find that matter, which is now invisible to it, is not so very different from that which is visible. But we have wandered from our subject, which was your political dilemma, and to which we had better not now return. Before we part, I will take care that you have a better proof than argument affords, of the existence of the region of invisible matter. I am the more surprised at your doubting it, because my friend Count Santalba, in Paris, told me that he knew you.”

“I only saw him once, and know him too slightly to have entered upon any discussion with him; and,” added Reginald, after a pause, “now I think of it, that may account

for the kind interest you manifested in me when we first met in the Ladies' Gallery of the House."

"Yes," she replied, simply, "it was from Santalba I first heard of you;" and then turning towards him, and fixing her large eyes upon his as she slowly rose, as the signal for the ladies to leave the table, she added, "and it is to him we owe our introduction to this house."

CHAPTER IX.

MINES AND COUNTERMINES.

THERE was a significance in the glance of Amina Masollam as she uttered the words which we have recorded in the concluding sentence of the last chapter, which was too marked to miss its effect upon a nature so sensitive as that of Reginald Clareville. "It was almost as though she had overheard our conversation," he said to Sebastian, as they smoked a cigarette together on the terrace before joining the ladies. "As much as to say, You need not resort to any such underhand means as you were proposing, to find out how we introduced ourselves here. Here is the answer to the question you want to ask, but do not dare. I read your distrust of us—but we scorn mystery."

“Scorn mystery, indeed,” remarked Sebastian; “I should think they did. There was a cool and frank audacity in the way Masollam displaced uncle Charles from the head of his own table, in the presence of the assembled company, and a sublime indifference to the effect it was calculated to produce upon them, which fairly took my breath away. The old butler’s face was a picture : did you see it ?”

“No ; I had only time for a hurried glance at your aunt’s, who was rising to put her arm in mine, when I was suddenly ordered off to Miss Masollam : it also appeared an interesting study. Well, as he has taken such a decisive measure, evidently with a view of exciting our curiosity, he can have no objection to gratifying it, and it is no impertinence on your part, as a member of the family, in requesting him to do so. He seems to me to court inquiry.”

“We shan’t have long to wait—listen.”

As the sash-door through which they had stepped out upon the terrace was standing open, the clear, resonant tones of the Oriental, which appeared pitched with design at a higher

key than was necessary, fell upon the stillness of the night.

“My dear Mr Hartwright,” he was saying, “I think you have every reason to be satisfied with the promptitude and efficiency of your lawyer. He impresses me also as being a person of discretion ; and now that our little business affairs have been so satisfactorily concluded, I will ask you to excuse me, while I join our friends upon the terrace,”—and, suiting the action to the word—“This is a luxury your climate rarely affords you,” he observed to Clareville. “Have you ever been in the East?”

“No,” replied Reginald.

“Then you don’t know what nights are. Let us sit down on this bench : I sometimes feel so much older than I really am, and sometimes so much younger—curious, isn’t it ? I have been feeling young nearly all day, and now I feel what I call an old fit coming on. That is why I must sit. You want to know who I am, why I have come and established myself here, and what is my motive for helping Mr Hartwright out of his difficulties. Is not that so ? You see I come to the point at once.”

The abruptness of this address did not disconcert the young men so much as it might have done, had their own previous conversation not in some measure prepared them for it.

"You have rightly anticipated," said Sebastian, "each of the questions which, as a relative of the family, the head of which is under financial obligations to me, I intended to take the earliest opportunity of asking—the more especially as I feel convinced that your motives in acting as you have done are not such as to need concealment."

"Pardon me, my dear Mr Hartwright," replied Masollam; "the present is not the earliest opportunity you have had of making these inquiries. We had a long talk yesterday upon other subjects, when you did not allude to them; but it is the earliest opportunity you have had since the arrival of your friend, and it is for his arrival that, like you, I have been waiting."

"I am not aware that I have any concern in the matter," said Clareville, who felt rather indignant at the somewhat uncalled-for snub which he thought Sebastian had received.

Masollam turned sharply on the speaker,

and his eyes seemed to gleam like points of fire in the darkness.

“What concerns your friend concerns you. At least that is his opinion, or he would not have waited to consult you before speaking to me; and you will allow me to add, my dear Mr Clareville, that when you say you have no concern in knowing who I am, and who my daughter is, you——well, you disappoint me: think it over now. Do you adhere to that statement?”

“I am not in the habit of making statements to which I can’t adhere,” said the other, hotly; for Masollam’s politeness exasperated him. “I don’t deny a certain curiosity, but I adhere to the assertion that it is no concern of mine.”

Reginald afterwards told his friend that he seemed to have put out Masollam’s eyes by this speech, the gleam in them vanished so suddenly.

“Well, well,” he murmured in his far-off voice, “I have been a little premature: I did not come here to gratify an idle curiosity. I thought better of you, young man;” and he rose slowly, and with great apparent

effort, from the bench on which he had been sitting.

"But I am not asking from any idle curiosity," broke in Sebastian quickly, seeing that he was about to leave them.

"Let me lean upon your arm ; I feel very weak. There—thanks ! No, my son, I have no fault to find with you. I could have told you all had you asked me yesterday, but you invoked your friend. You appealed to Cæsar, and to Cæsar you must go. Still, I could have told him too, had he been different. That will do. Good night ; I am going to my room : please ask my daughter to come to me there at once ;" —and Masollam tottered into the house alone, and Sebastian returned perplexed and disappointed to his friend.

"You spoiled everything, Reginald : why could you not say that it did concern you to know who he and his daughter are ?"

"Because I deny any man's right to tell me what to say. He is an old impostor, and she—is a witch, I think."

"Well, I must go and send her to her father, whatever she is ;" and Sebastian hurried off, leaving his friend to chew the cud of his

reflections in a distinctly dissatisfied frame of mind. He was angry with himself, because, if Amina was what he had called her, he was a fool to have been bewitched by her. If she wasn't, he was a greater fool still not to have read her rightly. He had lost his heart, he felt sure of that now, to a woman of whom he had spoken disparagingly to his friend, and of whom he had declared to her own father—who would certainly repeat it to her—that it was no concern of his who or what she was,—that his only interest in her was one of mere idle curiosity. He had been promising himself a prolongation of their conversation in the drawing-room, and now it was he who had been the means of banishing her from it, probably for the rest of the evening.

“No doubt I told a lie,” he muttered to himself, “when I said it was no concern of mine who she was; and it was that old brute with his glowing eyes and mocking manner who seemed to twist it out of me. It is a matter of supreme concern to me, on the contrary, who she is. Witch or angel, she is mine—ay, in spite of that detestable father-in-law. Florence Hartwright was right. He

is a terrible old man. I quite share her antipathy. He never had the slightest intention of telling us any of his secrets. He amused himself by taunting me, until he forced from me a denial of any interest in his daughter, and then dexterously used it to cover his retreat, and tell her about it before I should have time to see her again; and yet," he pondered, "considering I am not a bad match for an unknown Oriental, it is difficult to imagine what his game can be—unless, indeed," and he drew a long breath, as the full force of the revelation burst upon him,—“he destines her for Sebastian !”

Now it all became clear to him: it was a deep-laid plot of Masollam's to get the whole family completely into his power, and the price to be paid for their salvation from utter ruin would be Sebastian and his millions. The more he pieced his information together, the more it fitted into this hypothesis. “And this precious friend of Sebastian's at Paris,” he continued mentally—“this Count Santalba, who is so honourable and disinterested, has contrived the whole conspiracy, and is doubtless to share the profits. Who

so well able to keep his accomplice informed of the exact situation, domestically and financially, of the Hartwright family; to influence his young and confiding friend, in his own interest and that of this Eastern adventurer? Who better acquainted with the relations existing between Sebastian and his cousin Florence, and the danger which may at any moment put an end to all their mercenary projects? How fortunate that Amina possesses no attraction for Sebastian! Now that I am on the track, this fair cousin and I become natural allies. She is not, perhaps, all that I could have wished in a wife for Sebastian, but she is certainly more refined than the rest of the family."

If these were not exactly the words in which Reginald formulated his reflections, this was the groove in which they ran, as he proceeded to evolve schemes for developing Florence's ladylike instincts, by having her invited to Clareville Court, to which place of refuge he proposed to carry off Sebastian, and where he doubted not, under the influence of his mother and sister, Florence would show to better advantage than amid the

coarser surroundings of her own family. He felt sure that a proposal of this kind would meet with the warmest approval of Mr and Mrs Hartwright, whom he also determined to put upon their guard, so soon as he could venture, upon such short acquaintance, to broach so delicate a subject.

He no sooner arrived at this conclusion, than he felt that he was losing valuable time in not joining the rest of the party, the more especially as Sebastian had remained with the ladies, and his own non-appearance among them might seem singular. The absence of the Masollams furthered his designs. Mr and Mrs Hartwright had once more assumed a temporary reign in their own establishment; and while Laura, who had musical talent of a high order to compensate for her other deficiencies, was relegated to the piano, and her brothers played *bezique*, and Florence and Sebastian seemed confidentially engaged in a corner of the room, Clareville was enabled to devote himself exclusively to the two elders of the family, who had been burning for an opportunity, thus most unexpectedly afforded them, of giving such an ex-

planation of the anomalous condition of the household as should save their own dignity, and satisfy the natural curiosity of the visitor, whom they could not call their guest. This they were the better able to do, as the events of the evening had determined them to arrive at a sudden resolution; for once husband and wife had jumped absolutely at the same conclusion, which they had communicated to each other when Miss Masollam's departure from the room afforded them an opportunity of doing so.

"I must apologise, Mr Clareville," said Charles Hartwright, "for not receiving you as a guest in my own house. I assure you, when my nephew despatched his telegram of invitation, I had every intention of doing so, as, although I was in the act of letting my house to Mr Masollam, I did not intend to conclude the arrangement until your visit had terminated. He, however, made it a condition at the last moment that it must either be done at once or not at all; and as we were already packed up to go abroad, and could not afford a second time to lose a tenant after every arrangement for our departure had been made,

I was obliged to consent. But as we intend to leave the day after to-morrow, he might at least have had the decency not to assume the duties of host until I had left." *

"We must not be too hard upon Orientals, you know, who are quite unfamiliar with our ways," broke in Mrs Hartwright, who still had a lingering weakness for Masollam. "I assure you he was quite surprised when I hinted to him that he had placed us in a false position relatively to our guest—for we intended you to be our guest, you know, Mr Clareville; and he assured me that if he had had the least idea that it would have caused my husband any annoyance—and I was obliged to admit that it did—he never would have usurped your position, Charles. He said that he did it purely out of consideration for you, thinking you would be the last man to wish to appear in any house in a position to which you were not legally entitled, and the lease had already been signed. I then felt, that although, no doubt, it was unintentional on his part, he was placing you in a false position,—I did not so much care about myself,—and it was with great regret that we have decided

not to postpone our departure, as we shall leave you behind in our own house, Mr Clareville; where, as I have often told Sebastian, while we were masters of it, that we should have been so glad to receive you."

"You are very kind, Mrs Hartwright," said Reginald; "but I really hope you will reconsider your determination, now that I quite understand the situation, and agree with Mr Hartwright that it was one in which Mr Masollam had no right to place him: surely to delay your trip for a few days will make no difference. I hope under the circumstances you will not think I am presuming on a very short acquaintance—the more especially as Mr Masollam is, so far as I can learn from Sebastian, an entire stranger to you—if I venture to suggest that his motive in forcing this lease upon you so suddenly, and behaving as he has done since, was to drive you to adopt the very decision at which you have arrived. In other words, you are playing his game."

"What is his game?" asked Hartwright. Clareville made no immediate reply, but looked up as though accidentally, and let his glance rest upon the corner in which Sebas-

tian and his cousin were ensconced. Charles Hartwright's eyes instinctively followed Reginald's. He was a man of too hot a temper, and had been too much outraged in his pride, to remember that his departure would have precisely the opposite effect upon the fortunes of his daughter from that which Masollam had agreed to co-operate with him in achieving. He saw that he had been duped. And Clareville judiciously allowed this consciousness to work.

"Your own sagacity and knowledge of all the circumstances are so much greater than mine, Mr Hartwright," he said at length, "that I cannot venture on any suggestion which will not probably have occurred to yourself. In fact, as an entire stranger, I have already, perhaps, said too much. I can only excuse myself on the ground of my affection for your nephew, and my fear lest he should be ensnared in toils set by unscrupulous adventurers to entrap him and his fortune."

"I appreciate the kindness of your motives, my dear sir," rejoined Hartwright, "and beg to assure you that, so far from taking any offence

at any interest you may take in my family affairs, I shall, on the contrary, feel highly honoured by it. At the same time, your suggestion of prolonging our visit here, the force of which I fully recognise, is one which I cannot bring myself to entertain: the atmosphere of this house, or rather of its present master, has become absolutely intolerable to me. I confess to rather a violent temper, Mr Clareville, and I assure you that there are times when I can scarcely keep my hands off the old scoundrel. I really cannot trust myself to stay a moment longer under this roof than is absolutely necessary."

"I think it a pity that your whole family should be carried off to the Continent when they have friends here who, I know, would regret their departure," said Clareville. "Do they all know of your determination to leave England so soon?"

"Only Florence," said Mrs Hartwright. "I have not had an opportunity of telling the others: besides, she is the only one that matters."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh, she is in despair. She is too proud

to say anything, but I know it, and you can doubtless guess why,"—and this time it was Mrs Hartwright whose eyes rested on the corner, and Reginald whose glance followed hers.

"I am thinking of carrying off Sebastian with me when I leave this, to pay a visit to my people at Clareville Court: you know he is a frequent guest there, and a great favourite of my father's."

Neither of the Hartwrights could imagine what this remark was leading up to, so Mrs Hartwright discreetly confined herself to saying—

"That will be very nice for him."

"I was thinking whether I could not even make it nicer. He and his cousin seem such great friends, I am sure it would add to the pleasure of his stay if she were with us. Do you think if Lady Clareville invited Miss Hartwright to pay us a visit at Clareville Court, she could be prevailed upon to accept?"

"Politeness would require that the mother at least should be included," thought Reginald, "but that we really could not stand."

Whatever may have been Mrs Hartwright's thoughts upon that subject, she was too much

flattered and gratified by the proposal to allow them expression, while her husband's eyes sparkled with triumph.

"Both Mrs Hartwright and I feel only too much honoured by the proposal," he began; when, in order to stop any further protestations, Reginald rose, saying—

"Then I will go and make it to the young lady herself."

"We shall catch that old fox in his own trap yet," continued Hartwright to his wife, when Reginald was out of hearing. "He never would have gulled me with his fantastic assumption of magic, or whatever he calls 'his peculiar gifts,' had it not been for that letter of Santalba's. The Count's participation in the conspiracy to marry Sebastian to that girl—for that, I suppose, is what it amounts to—does, I confess, completely baffle me. Of all men that I have ever known, he, a friend of twenty years, is the one on whose profound knowledge of men and high sense of honour I thought I could the most implicitly rely, and yet he must now either be the dupe or the accomplice of this adventurer."

"I always tell you, my dear, that you men

never understand one another. I don't exactly know what you mean by the term 'adventurer.' We are all adventurers in a sense, but I have always thought that your friend Santalba was a sort of mixture of a fool and a rogue."

"Well, I shall certainly go first to Paris and make him explain his extraordinary conduct."

If Charles Hartwright could have availed himself of the facilities enjoyed by an author, to witness what was transpiring in Mr Masollam's room just then, he would have had occasion to modify that determination. This is what he would have seen. Stretched at full length on the couch, with a face furrowed with lines of deep suffering, and with drops of perspiration standing in beads upon his brow, lay Masollam ; while standing near him, and holding in his hand a telegram, was a young man in a capacious ulster, the folds of which concealed his figure nearly to his feet, and whose heavy black moustache and beard covered the lower part of his face. And this is what he would have heard.

"Dear child, it cuts me to the heart to send you out in such a guise, on such a fatiguing

errand, at such an hour of the night ; but you know that combinations made in the invisible can only be met by a promptitude corresponding to their rapidity of change. The moment I came into full sensitiveness to Reginald Clareville, I perceived that it would be impossible for us to go through with this struggle without help, and that Santalba and your mother must manage to get here by to-morrow night at latest, by the same train that we did. This can only be done by the immediate despatch of a telegram, the address of which must be unknown to any one in this house : there is no one but you to take it ; and to ensure this secrecy, there is no alternative but for you to go on foot. That was why, to save time, I told you to dress while I wrote the telegram : now you have the explanation of the cipher it contains. I will sit up for you and let you in ; how long will it be before you are back ? ”

“ What o’clock is it now, father ? ” asked the girl, in a voice slightly muffled by the heavy moustache from behind which it issued.

“ A quarter past eleven. ”

“ And it is five miles there and back. I

shall hire a fly back as far as the lodge-gate, which is never locked. I can slip through unobserved. I shall not be much after half-past twelve."

"Have you got your little revolver?"

"Yes."

"Well, follow me, in case any one sees us: the servants will have to get accustomed to my habit of letting any one I choose in and out of my own house at all hours of the day or night." And the pair glided stealthily from the room.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOT AT THE TURRETS THICKENS.

THE following day passed uneventfully at The Turrets. There was a general sense of a strained situation all round, which seemed to impose a certain reserve even upon the most thoughtless and youthful members of the Hartwright family. Masollam had sent word by Amina that he was unable to leave his room in consequence of what he called his "attack" on the previous evening. "Attack of what?" Charles Hartwright had asked, with a very perceptible sneer.

"I think the doctors would call it an attack of the nerves," replied Amina; and Hartwright felt that his sneer was returned with interest.

The announcement which he thereupon made

that he had arrived at the determination of leaving The Turrets on the following morning early, with his wife and family, was received by Miss Masollam with one of those conventional expressions of regret, the hollowness of which she was at no pains to conceal. In fact, Florence told Sebastian afterwards that it seemed rather to afford her satisfaction than otherwise. That young lady herself was in the seventh heaven of delight, for Reginald had shown her the letter he had written and despatched to his mother by the first post, telling her to address the answer to his own lodging in London, where Sebastian, who had agreed to accompany the family to town, was to call for it; and as Clareville Court was only a couple of hours from London, he was to accompany his cousin there as soon as the day of the visit was fixed, after which the remainder of the family were to prosecute their journey to the Continent. It had not been without difficulty that Clareville had induced Sebastian to consent to this arrangement, as the latter felt that he was abandoning an investigation which, in the interests of his uncle's family and of the unknown prisoner at Carabet's, for

whom he was haunted by a strange feeling of sympathy, he felt bound to prosecute; but, as Reginald had pointed out, now that the mystery of Masollam's introduction was removed, and Santalba was a man, in his friend's judgment, above suspicion, there was no longer any immediate hurry. Santalba's character was a guarantee for the Masollams and for all their acts. That, although it was very far from being the opinion of Reginald, was a point upon which his friend continued firmly to insist; and, for the moment, it chimed in too well with Reginald's plans for him to wish to controvert it.

"Miss Masollam has expressed her hope that I should continue to consider myself her guest for a few days longer," he continued, "and this will give me an opportunity of prosecuting those researches in which you are so interested, and which seem to affect so nearly the fortunes of your family, under more favourable circumstances than you could have done."

"And also," added Sebastian, with a laugh, "of prosecuting that farther investigation, in which, I am aware, you feel no concern, as to who Miss Masollam is."

“I admitted a lively curiosity in the matter,” rejoined Reginald, “and I do not deny that the general strangeness of the situation is one of sufficient interest to tempt me to stay a few days longer.”

The fact was that, before Reginald had this conversation with Sebastian, he had already passed a very pleasant quiet hour, under the remote tree already alluded to, with Amina, and had fallen more deeply than ever under the charm of her intellectual gifts and uncommon beauty.

“Is Mr Sebastian Hartwright going to leave to-morrow with the rest of the family?” she had asked; and Reginald had replied that his friend’s plans were not absolutely decided, but that he believed it to be highly probable. Then she had raised her eyes to his in a dreamy way, and said simply—

“And you?”

And Reginald had answered that he would leave it for her to decide what he was to do. And she had unhesitatingly replied, “There are many reasons why I think you had better stay.” But when he tried gently to lead her on to talk of herself and her own past life, in

his endeavour to solve the mystery of her high mental attainments, and familiarity with those social and speculative questions by which his own mind was occupied, she had said, with a marked emphasis which convinced him that her father had repeated to her his unlucky remark of the previous evening, "You must let me choose my own time for satisfying your curiosity;" and after a pause she added—as the result apparently of an after-thought—"and method of doing it." And then, without giving Reginald time to excuse himself, she had turned the conversation upon those topics which she knew would be of the deepest interest to her listener, who, as he wondered at the breadth and originality of her views, felt more and more conscious that he had no alternative left to him but to worship blindly at her shrine, and to trust to time and opportunity to reveal its mysteries.

Charles Hartwright was the only member of the party who was thoroughly out of temper. In the first place, he could not disguise from himself the fact that he had been duped by a stranger, who had wormed himself into his confidence and then betrayed it—who had in-

sulted him in his own house, and who now, by shutting himself up in his own room, and refusing to see him when he had requested an interview, had deprived him of the opportunity of venting his indignation in words, and of giving Masollam what he called "a piece of his mind." The fact that he had resolved to pour out the vials of his wrath upon Santalba in Paris, was small consolation; for in doing so he was depriving himself of the one man upon whose advice and knowledge of financial men and affairs he had most relied for assistance—so much so, that every time he thought of his coming interview with his former friend his resolution wavered. When he had told his wife that one of his reasons for first going to Paris was, "to take that traitor, Santalba, roundly to task," she had said, "Pooh, my dear! you will do no such thing. I understand you better than you do yourself. If he has done you an injury, you can give him a gentle hint to that effect, and tell him that you expect some reparation for it. That will be a far wiser course than bursting out upon him the moment you see him. If he does nothing for us, it will be time enough for you to go and insult

him." Thus did Mrs Hartwright combine a good deal of the wisdom of the serpent with the cackle of the goose ; and as her husband's experience had taught him that her judgment was better than his when he happened to be in a passion, he swallowed his indignation without further remark, and sat down to pour out his spleen in a letter to Masollam, which he would leave behind to be handed to that gentleman. But it happened in the case of Charles Hartwright, as it so often does with persons of violent passions and hasty impulses, that he occasionally formed plans and even took measures based upon the anticipation of hypothetical conditions which were destined never to arise. That evening when the party were assembled for dinner, and Miss Masollam appeared a few minutes late, she took Hartwright's arm, saying, as she did so, in English, in those soft clear tones which were nevertheless audible to the whole company—

"I must ask you to take me to dinner, Mr Hartwright. Poor papa ! he is still too tired to come down. He begs you will excuse him ; and now, instead of going to bed, he must sit up till twelve o'clock. He has just heard that

mamma will arrive to night—she will bring with her Count Santalba.”

Thus did Miss Masollam explode her second shell in the midst of the Hartwright family—and then, without allowing time for more than a rapid exchange of bewildered glances between the persons most interested in this piece of startling intelligence, she marshalled the party in to dinner.

Hartwright was too dumfounded to say anything. “Confound it!” he muttered internally, “this disarranges all my plans. I suppose I must stay here now to meet him;” and the considerations which ensued upon this reflection reduced him to silence, as he contemplated an interview with Santalba, at which Masollam would certainly be present, and when the task of calling on them together to account for their conduct towards him, presented a prospect which gave rise to a variety of conflicting conjectures and emotions.

“I suspect this will upset Florence’s little apple-cart,” said Laura, who was bringing up the rear with one of her brothers, expressing her sentiments in language especially adapted to that young man’s comprehension. “I should

not wonder if she was done altogether out of that visit to Clareville Court, upon which she has set her heart."

And indeed her sister was at the same moment whispering to her cousin, "Was there ever anything so unfortunate? I am sure papa will give up his idea of starting to-morrow, as I know one of his reasons for going to Paris was to see the Count, whose arrival here at such a moment may give an entirely new turn to all our plans."

"So there's a mamma, is there?" murmured Reginald Clareville to Mrs Hartwright; "that is quite a new feature in the domestic arrangements of the Masollam family. The plot is decidedly thickening; she may be what in modern parlance is called 'an important factor' in it." And this reflection threw him into a reverie as to the influence which the presence of this hitherto unknown quantity might exercise upon his own hopes and prospects.

"This is very sudden news," said Charles Hartwright at last, in his abrupt and somewhat coarse way, to Miss Masollam. "You did not tell us before that your mother was alive,

and that you expected her arrival so soon with Santalba?"

"Didn't I?" replied Amina, looking up calmly into his face—and then seeing it growing purple with suppressed anger at her coolness, she added, "I suppose papa forgot to ask me to tell it to you till just now; had he been well enough to see you, he probably would have told you before. I know he felt sure you would be glad to hear it, as it may save you a journey to Paris. If you will give us the pleasure of your company here for a few days longer, papa told me to say to you that the Count will tell you many interesting things that he is not well and strong enough to talk about himself."

"Of course, Charles," said Mrs Hartwright across the table, "we shall give up all idea of starting to-morrow. I should so like to make Mrs Masollam's acquaintance."

"You can do that and still start to-morrow," gruffly responded her husband. "However, I have done with plan-making, and shall be guided by circumstances after I have seen Santalba."

And so the matter rested for the present.

Soon after dinner, Amina, with many apologies, withdrew to her father's room, saying, as she did so, that Mr Masollam had given orders that the new arrivals were to be shown up at once to his own apartments, so as to avoid the necessity of any of his friends putting themselves to the inconvenience of sitting up for them. As this was regarded as a polite intimation on the part of the master of the house that he did not intend to gratify any idle curiosity that night, and as everybody present was bursting with a private commentary on this new phase of affairs, which would not bear public discussion, the party broke up at an earlier hour than usual.

It had scarcely struck midnight when the various couples who were engaged in different parts of the house interchanging the views suggested by the sudden and unexpected arrival of Mrs Masollam and Count Santalba, were interrupted by the rumble of a carriage, for which they had been listening for some minutes past, upon the gravel approach leading to The Turrets. Ned Hartwright, who had been sent by Laura

on a reconnoitring expedition, was looking through the chink of a slightly opened door, leading from a passage into the entrance-hall ; and this was what he saw : First, Miss Masollam, who appeared almost at the first sound of the bell, and who was immediately afterwards joined by Mr Sharp the butler, who, on opening the front door, gave ingress, to Ned's surprise, to Carabet, the curiosity-dealer, whose shop the youth had occasionally visited when in search of oriental trinkets to serve as presents to the fair objects of his fleeting affections. Carabet, with every demonstration of respect, proceeded to help out of the carriage a very upright and stately lady of rather over the middle age, with very black piercing eyes, an unusually dark complexion, very regular features, and the traces of great beauty, adorned with more jewellery than generally befits a travelling costume, about which there was nothing uncommon but the head-dress, which consisted of a handkerchief almost as large as a small shawl, of rich silk, fringed with long tassels of twisted silk and gold, and which was pinned closely under her chin.

Amina threw herself into this lady's arms, and Ned's indignation was excited by the coldness with which the salute on both Mrs Masollam's cheeks was returned by that lady, when he thought how differently he would have acted had he been in her place. She was followed by a middle-aged man, slightly below the average height, with iron-grey hair cropped very short, mild blue eyes, a black moustache, aquiline features, small hands and feet, and a general air of distinction which did not need the assistance of a tailor to assert itself, though Ned, with the eye of a connoisseur, pronounced the fit of his travelling tweed suit perfect. When, to his amazement, this gentleman took Amina in his arms and kissed her with as much warmth as he would have done himself, Ned felt even more stirred to the depths than he had done before, and treasured this item of his observation as a piece of intelligence which he would withhold for the present, and impart to his sister Florence, or to Sebastian, or even to Reginald Clareville, according as opportunity might arise, and attendant circumstances might sug-

gest the effect to be produced by it. Carabet now humbly took his leave and retired. The butler led the way, followed with stately dignity by the old lady ; while the Count, holding Amina's hand, brought up the rear.

The only words uttered throughout was when Amina, speaking French, said to him, "We must be quick ; we have not a moment to lose." All which was duly reported to Laura, excepting the extremely affectionate terms upon which the Count appeared to be with Miss Masollam—and this would have been worth all the rest—which just shows how important it is for persons engaged in underhand operations of this sort, to have a spy upon whom they can absolutely rely. If Ned could have followed the party up to Masollam's room, as he longed to do, he would have had much more to report or to conceal, as his fancy or love of mischief might suggest. He would have seen Masollam stretched apparently upon a bed of sickness, and in such a condition of absolute prostration and exhaustion as to be unable to recognise the new-comers ; he would have seen

these latter, in active co-operation with his daughter, proceed to apply restoratives of which the medical profession have never dreamed; he would have seen the old man at length return to consciousness, and then, if he could have understood the language in which he spoke, he would have heard him say strange things incomprehensible to him, but apparently pregnant with weighty meaning for those to whom they were addressed, and he would have been amazed at the rapidly returning indications of an inflowing of life and vigour, until at last, when the restoration was complete, he would have heard the old man tell his attendants to go and take some rest; and, immediately on their withdrawal, he would have seen him rise from his bed and dress, and take his hat, and let himself stealthily out, and go round to the stables and quietly saddle a horse, and ride quickly into town; and he would have seen him let himself into Carabet's house with a pass-key, and Carabet come out and walk the horse up and down for nearly an hour, to the great perplexity of the policeman on duty; and at

last he would have seen him emerge, mount, and ride home, and get into bed again just as the day was breaking. All this Ned missed, because he had not an invisible lamp, which would have thrown a flood of light upon the destiny of those whose fortunes in the tangled skein of life we are considering.

CHAPTER XI.

COUNT SANTALBA.

MR MASOLLAM never looked younger, stronger, or more thoroughly full of vigour than he did on the morning following the occurrences narrated in the last chapter, when he was among the first of those to assemble in the breakfast-room. He was followed soon after by Santalba and Sebastian, who had already been out together for a morning stroll. The former bowed somewhat distantly to Clareville, and greeted the rest of the party with the cordiality of an old acquaintance, not seeming to notice the cold and markedly rude manner of Charles Hartwright.

“Although I have not had the pleasure of seeing any of you since you were children,” he said, turning to the younger members of the

family, "I have dandled you all by turns upon my knee ; and you, Miss Hartwright, ought at least to remember me."

"I thought I should do so when I saw you, but I find I don't," replied Florence.

"Ah, I forgot, my hair was not grey then, and I wore a beard. It was part of my travelling costume in those days ; but now that I have become a quiet stay-at-home person, it is an appendage with which I have dispensed."

At this moment Mrs Masollam entered with Amina, and was duly introduced by her husband to the assembled party.

Clareville was at once struck by the strong contrast she presented in every respect to her daughter. Not only was her complexion much darker, but her beauty must have been of a different and less refined type ; whereas Amina's eyes were large and lustrous, and, except when they flashed with some unwonted excitement, were soft and beaming : her mother's, though not less bright, were smaller and more piercing ; and Reginald fancied there was an expression of latent treachery and cruelty in them, which almost gave him a shudder. While in manner she possessed all the native dignity of

an Oriental, it was also essentially oriental in its manifestation. The ease and grace of a woman accustomed to society were entirely wanting. She maintained a coldness and indifference of attitude which seemed too nearly allied to contempt to be altogether polite. Possibly, thought Reginald, it is partly the result of reserve, arising from a consciousness of the absence of any social training. As he looked at her low narrow forehead, he doubted that her intellectual faculty was likely to be of a very high order; but the somewhat heavy chin, stern lines which age had worn at the corners of a remarkably well-cut mouth—the flexible nostril, with its upward curl, and the penetrating but covert glance—suggested a resolute and subtle nature, which it might be difficult to coerce, and dangerous to trifle with. It was evident, also, that she was far inferior to her daughter in linguistic acquirements. She knew no English, and only spoke a few words of French with difficulty. As, moreover, she was too proud to show her ignorance of it, she confined herself chiefly to monosyllables.

The result of his observation was to throw

Reginald into a reverie of despondency, which was slightly tinged with mortification, when, on looking suddenly up, he caught Amina's eye, and fancied he detected the faintest suspicion of a smile hovering about the corners of her mouth. "She is reading my thoughts as though they were an open book," he said to himself, as he withdrew his eyes quickly. "She may not be a witch ; but she certainly is an enchantress of a very dangerous sort ;" and he repressed the sigh which rose in his breast.

"My wife can't talk in any language which you can understand, my dear Mrs Hartwright," said Masollam ; " don't trouble yourself to try and make conversation. Indeed she is not a talkative person in any tongue ; that was the reason I married her. But she has a great gift"—and he glanced at Clareville as though bespeaking his attention—" which you, of all women, will appreciate, for you share it with her to a remarkable degree,—she thoroughly understands men."

Mrs Hartwright gave a little flutter of satisfaction, and turning to Mrs Masollam with a beaming smile, exclaimed, " Oh, then I am

sure we shall understand each other ;” while Reginald felt that the remark had been aimed at him, and that he was still bearing the consequences of his unfortunate encounter with Mr Masollam two evenings before.

“I suppose you got her here to explain me to you,” he felt strongly inclined to retort, but remembered that, under the circumstances, discretion was the better part of valour, the more especially as Mr Masollam was saying something to his wife in an unknown tongue, which Mrs Hartwright flattered herself was a translation of her last amiable remark, but which Reginald felt certain was an allusion to himself, as Madame Masollam, after listening to it, honoured him with a languid stare, and then proceeded to pick a bone of grilled chicken with her fingers.

“How in the world did such a mother ever come by such a daughter !” was Clareville’s internal comment on this proceeding, when Santalba suddenly interrupted his gloomy reflections, and with the instinct of a well-bred man, who feels that the situation all round is painfully strained, created a diversion by launching into the field of politics,

which at this juncture, whether at home or abroad, afforded abundant material for conversation. Charles Hartwright alone was too much preoccupied with his own sullen ruminations to take part in it; and when, after breakfast, Masollam said, "My dear Mr Hartwright, I hope you will join Santalba and myself in my room; we have some affairs to talk over which will be of interest to you," he replied in a harsh tone, "With your permission, as I intend to leave by the afternoon train, I will first ask Count Santalba to favour me with a private interview for a few moments, after which I think everything that can be of interest to me will have been said; and as I shall have very little time left at my disposal, I shall ask you to excuse me from joining you as you propose."

Masollam shrugged his shoulders with an amiable smile. "Be it as you will," he said. "Santalba, I shall expect you when Mr Hartwright has done with you; and if he sees fit to change his plans once more, which I regret to think is now highly improbable, I shall be glad to see him too."

Hartwright led the way to the den which

he still called his own, followed by the Count, the imperturbable expression of benignant serenity which rested on the countenance of the latter, forming a marked contrast to the striking variations which were the characteristic of Masollam's every movement and play of feature. A close observer of Santalba's face, however, might have recognised that, underlying its extreme gentleness, there were indications of great moral power, and high intellectual capacity. If he had learnt to control the passions of his nature, there was in the deep blue of the calm reflective eye, in the massive forehead and somewhat projecting brow, a latent force, which was none the less there because it was held in complete subjection, and which perhaps asserted itself all the more powerfully over the natures with which it came into contact, because the organism in which it was stored bore a placid surface. Hartwright, though a dense man, so far as his own organic sensitiveness was concerned, was painfully conscious of this when he found himself alone with his former friend. The Count did not seem the same man that he was when he had seen him last—an indefinable

change had taken place, which made him feel ill at ease. In order not to be betrayed into an outburst of temper, he had been preparing some carefully weighed and cuttingly polite sentences by way of opening the interview, which, as he felt the influence of the benevolent and almost tender sympathy of Sant'alba's gaze, seemed singularly out of place. The latter perceived the momentary embarrassment, and laying his hand kindly on his shoulders, said, "You are in trouble, old friend, and, with an imperfect knowledge of the circumstances, are inclined to lay the blame on me. If you will assume, for the sake of argument, that you may have jumped to this conclusion upon insufficient data, perhaps you will find that I can explain everything satisfactorily. I would spare you the regret of feeling afterwards that you have formed needlessly, harsh and unjust judgments."

"If I have been induced to form harsh judgments," said Hartwright, "it is because they are supported by facts. I shall only be too glad to find that they are unjust. May I ask what was your motive in introducing Mr and Miss Masollam to me?"

"I sent him to you in answer to your letter to me asking for assistance in your financial difficulties. I understand he has afforded it to you."

"He has lent me some money, certainly, and I have now discovered his object in doing so, though when I asked him what it was at the time, he put me off with some grand phrases about its being an act of service to you; and as I believed I could trust you, I felt satisfied. Indeed I supposed, as he was such an utter stranger to me, that he was in some way commissioned by you to give me the money. I also asked him for advice and assistance in another matter, for, relying on that foolish passage in your letter about his goodness and his wonderful gifts, I took him into my entire confidence. Now I see that his loan was as treacherous as his advice."

"What was his advice?"

"It had reference to a marriage which I am trying to bring about between my nephew and my daughter Florence—of which he approved, and which he promised to use his gifts to accomplish."

"I think, if you will try and recall the

exact particulars of that interview, you will find that it is your memory that is treacherous, not his advice. See here," and Santalba drew a paper from his pocket, which, on perusing it, Hartwright found, to his surprise, contained a report as nearly as possible verbatim of what passed on the occasion of his first interview with Masollam. "My oriental friend," pursued Santalba, "is a very careful man, with a very tenacious memory; and it is his habit, after important conversations—such as the one under consideration—to record them for future reference, in case of such necessity as has now arisen. You will see he did not express approval of the marriage you desire, and that he carefully abstained from making any promise or offering any advice in regard to it."

"I don't deny the verbal accuracy of this report, but a man may imply a great deal in his manner without committing himself in words. He distinctly wished to produce the impression on my mind that he would use his gifts to further my views; look at his allusion to the love-philtre. It is now clear to me that the whole thing has been a plot from the

beginning, and that his object in coming here has been to marry his daughter to my nephew, and by getting me into his power financially, to avert the danger of my opposition."

"I should have supposed, had that been his object, that the easy thing would have been for him to wait till you and your family were safely abroad, and then he need neither have lent you money nor feared your opposition, for the field would have been free. You need have known nothing about it."

"Pardon me; had he not come just when he did, Sebastian, who arrived only a few hours later, would have been here alone; and Florence told me in confidence that she feels certain that her cousin was on the point of proposing to her, when he was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Miss Masollam at a carriage-window which passed at the moment. I have no moral doubt that had it not been for the most inopportune arrival of the Masollams, the marriage would have been arranged ere this. What other conclusion can I come to but that you, who know my nephew so well, and were aware of his father's objections to the match, got wind in some way of the

state of affairs?—perhaps through some of the peculiar gifts with which you and the whole Masollam family seem endowed,” he added, with a sneer, “and were determined to thwart it for your own purposes. If Masollam can capture Sebastian’s millions for his daughter, it will be certainly turning his gifts to good account; but I am surprised that you should be a party to such a conspiracy.”

Santalba listened to this outburst with unruffled composure.

“I have been thinking,” he said, after a pause, “how I could best convince you of the utter delusion into which you have fallen in regard to this whole matter. On the whole, after weighing what you have said, I have come to the conclusion—a very disagreeable one, I assure you—that it will be better for the present to leave you in it. Had you been a man of different temperament it would have been otherwise; I should have been able to take you partially into my confidence, and, as the result of it, you would no doubt have seen fit to postpone your departure, and to have listened to some further explanations which Mr Masol-

lam was prepared to give you. As it is, it would be useless my renewing his invitation that you should accompany me to his room."

"Quite," broke in Hartwright, fiercely.

"I supposed so, and do not mean to renew it. Meantime I am at liberty to tell you this much, that I have made arrangements with Sebastian to remain with us here, instead of going to pay his projected visit just now to Clareville Court to meet Miss Hartwright; so I am afraid the engagement upon which you have set your heart is not to take place yet, at all events."

Hartwright received this piece of intelligence with a display of temper and violence of language which, as Mrs Hartwright had predicted, rendered it impossible for him afterwards to appeal to the Count, had he so desired, for that assistance which he believed the latter was so well able to afford.

"I will trust to time to right me in your good opinion, Mr Hartwright," Santalba said, rising. "Meantime you will excuse me for terminating an interview which it will serve no purpose to prolong. As it is probable that you will now adhere to your intention

of leaving to-day, and I may not see you again, I desire, before we part, to say that, while I regret your violence, I do not resent it, and should even again offer to serve you, were I not assured that I should only expose myself to your further suspicion by doing so." And without waiting for Hartwright's reply, he left the room, and ascended to Masollam's apartment.

Hartwright went at once in search of his wife and daughter. The news of Sebastian's treachery, as he called it, blinded him to all considerations of policy, and his only thought was to lose no time in shaking the dust from off his feet against the whole party, who, to his excited imagination, seemed to have entered into a league to betray him. His fury was in no degree mitigated by the fact that he could not find those he sought. None of the servants had seen either of the ladies, and he searched high and low for them in vain. They had seen Mr Clareville and Mr Sebastian go out for a walk, but had not seen either Mrs Hartwright or Miss Florence since breakfast. The fact was, that at that moment those ladies were sitting with Miss Ma-

sollam under her favourite tree, having been carried off there by Amina, after she had exchanged a few words with Sebastian, who had in like manner, apparently in obedience to orders, gone off with Reginald in the opposite direction for a walk.

"I am so glad, Mrs Hartwright," Miss Masollam was saying, "that you and Miss Hartwright agree to my proposal. She must let me call her Florence, now that we are to live together. As soon as Mr Sebastian Hartwright told me that he had agreed to the Count's plan, provided I could induce Florence to stay, I felt that not a moment was to be lost in getting your consent. I had hoped that you would all have remained, but my father says that he is sure Mr Hartwright will not agree to that. I suppose there is no doubt that if he will not stay himself, he will allow Florence to remain as our guest?"

"I am not quite so sure of that, my dear," replied Mrs Hartwright. "Charles is a man of a peculiar temper—in fact I am the only person who ever understood him—and if I cannot persuade him nobody can. But you may be sure I will try, and I think I shall succeed,"

she added, with an assured little toss of her head. At this moment Hartwright's voice was heard bellowing the names of his wife and daughter in another part of the garden ; and Mrs Hartwright jumped up, saying, " Now, you two get back to the house as quickly as you can without meeting him, and let me manage him alone."

Mrs Hartwright's confidence was not misplaced. This turn of events was so different from what Hartwright had anticipated ; it was so difficult to perceive in it any confirmation of his suspicion, or to discover a trap, that beneath the sullen acquiescence which he at last yielded to the proposal, there lurked a mingled feeling of satisfaction and bewilderment, which had the effect of reducing him to a state of decent civility towards all those with whom he came in contact—indeed, when he heard of the stipulation which Sebastian had made as the condition of his own change of plan, he was forced reluctantly to doubt whether he might not have done his nephew an injustice. .

Clareville was not so easily reconciled to the new proposition, which it had been Sebastian's

task to convey to him. He had very little faith in Florence's power of fascination, and a great deal in Amina's. "It is a mere blind," he thought. "Sebastian would not stay without Florence, and they saw that if I packed them both off to Clareville Court, and enlisted the sympathies of my mother and sister in the young couple's love-affairs, it would be fatal to their plans; so rather than risk it, and in order to avert suspicion, they have decided to take the far lesser danger of keeping Florence here, especially as they could not keep Sebastian without her. *Coûte que coûte*, they are bent on securing his money-bags, that is certain; the question is, will Amina be a party to the plot? That she can win Sebastian from Florence to herself the day she chooses, I know them all three now too well to doubt." This gave rise to a very painful series of reflections in Clareville's mind, all the more so because he could not confide them to his friend, to whom the dissatisfaction he manifested at the change seemed exaggerated and incomprehensible.

"It is very kind of you, old man," said Sebastian, "being so disappointed at our having to give up our visit to your people; but

it is only a postponement, you know. I will write to Lady Clareville and explain the circumstances, as well as I can."

"You can't do that," said Reginald, "without giving the reasons which Count Santalba urged upon you to agree to the change of plan, and you have not told me yet what they were."

"The fact is," said Sebastian, with some embarrassment, "they are rather difficult to explain to an outsider. Santalba has, as you know, been the friend of my lifetime. He was the one man in the world my father loved and trusted above all others, and if I had not inherited the same sentiments towards him, my experience of his truth and goodness would have led me to acquire them. We have certain views of life in common, and I admit that, knowing the lofty motives by which he is governed, I often allow myself to be influenced by him, without requiring him to tell me all the reasons on which he bases his advice."

"Hum," grunted Clareville, in a disapproving and somewhat contemptuous manner. "I should have thought you were old enough not to be in leading-strings to any man."

"It is not a matter I can enter upon," replied Sebastian, shortly. "I am only in leading-strings because I like it, and because he is leading me where I want to go. You might as well say that you are in leading-strings to the Prime Minister when you vote the way he wants you."

"So I do, and that's just the reason I won't do it any longer."

"That is because he happens to have lost your confidence; but Santalba does not happen to have lost mine. When he does, I will follow your example. By the way, you have not told me what you think of him."

"I have not seen enough of him to judge definitely; but I am quite ready honestly to admit that, considering how prejudiced I was against him, I am surprised myself at the favourable impression he has made upon me."

Sebastian's eyes glistened with delight as he heard this confession.

"If for no other reason, I should have been a fool," he cried, with enthusiasm, "to leave the two best friends I have in the world, and whom it has been the desire of my life to bring together, for the sake of any girl. I

may tell you this much," he added, after a pause, "it is for your sake, and on your account, I am staying."

"And it is for your sake, and on your account, that your cousin Florence is staying; I suppose," rejoined Reginald. "It seems to me that if you don't marry her after this, you will be behaving badly."

"I might just as well say that it is for Miss Masollam's sake, and on her account, that you are staying, and that if you don't marry her after this, you will be behaving badly."

"It is by no means the same thing; however, I can neither fathom your motives nor force you to reconsider your decision. One thing is certain, that there is a mysterious game of some sort on foot, in which it seems to me I am getting involved with you, and which we neither of us understand. You admitted that when you telegraphed for me."

"Yes; but I did not then know that Santalba had a hand in it."

"Has it not occurred to you as a strange and suspicious circumstance, that although you have known Count Santalba all your life, he should never have informed you of the

existence of the Masollams, with whom he seems to have been in such close relations during all that time?"

"I knew that he had derived much of his remarkable knowledge and conversance with oriental subjects of a theological and mystical character from an Eastern sage, whom I have heard him allude to as 'the Master'; but I never heard his name, and when I have pressed him for fuller information on the subject, he answered that the day would come when, if I desired it, I should be initiated by the Master himself into these knowledges, but that at the time I asked for it, an introduction to him would be premature. You must remember that although I have known the Count all my life as being a friend of my father's, it is only since the death of the latter that I have been intimate with him, and since then his conduct towards me in carrying out my father's wishes in regard to his property, which for some reason that I could never understand he left away from me by will, has been so thoroughly honourable as to place him above all such unworthy suspicion as I see you entertain in regard to him."

"Is he married?" asked Clareville.

"His wife died some years ago. I only remember as a child seeing her once; but I have heard from my father that she was even a more remarkable person than he is. The Count himself rarely alludes to her, and then only in such terms of admiration and respect as amount almost to veneration."

"Had they any children?"

"I remember once hearing him talk of a daughter who, I think, he said was then in a convent in Paris, but it was some years ago; and as he has never mentioned her since, I have shrunk from all reference to her, thinking she might be dead."

The more Clareville pondered over the situation, as they walked for some time side by side in silence, the more completely perplexed did he become. He had a curious consciousness of being in the meshes of a net, which was stealthily and mysteriously enveloping him, without any apparent effort on the part of the agencies of which he was the victim. He looked back to the night when, after his conversation with Masollam, the whole conspiracy burst upon him like a revelation, and he had lost not a

moment in forming a plan which should defeat it. At the time, he had congratulated himself on the ingenuity and promptitude he had displayed in devising, in the course of a few hours, a method of removing Sebastian and his cousin from the danger of having their love-affairs interfered with, and of securing a fair field for himself; but in the very nick of time there suddenly appears upon the scene the only man in the world who had influence enough with his friend to upset the whole scheme, and form a new combination even more dangerous than that which he had destroyed. After what Sebastian had just said, and after what he had himself observed of Santalba, he felt convinced that the latter had only to use his influence with his friend to induce him to give up all thought of marriage with his cousin; but on the other hand, he further reflected that the Count's influence with Sebastian was so unbounded, that had he desired to see him married to Amina, with whom some mysterious tie apparently existed, it did not need all this intrigue and conspiracy to bring it about. Again, while he felt a most profound mistrust and suspicion of the Oriental and his wife, neither Count

Santalba nor Amina inspired him with the same sentiments; on the contrary, he found a difficulty in reconciling himself to the idea that they were either mercenary or treacherous—but this rendered the near relationship of the one and the intimacy of the other with the Masollams, and the apparent hearty co-operation and complicity of both in their designs, all the more inexplicable. Unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, Reginald at last said abruptly, “Well, as it seems that there is nothing more to be said on the matter, suppose we turn homeward and see what is the last new development.”

But it was not at The Turrets that this was to be looked for. Jane Slocum was in fact watching it through the keyhole of a room in the upper floor of the house inhabited by Mr Carabet, the curiosity-dealer.

CHAPTER XII.

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

As the process of looking through a keyhole is doubtless one with which the reader is familiar, it is unnecessary for me here to expatiate at length on the various disadvantages attending this method of observation. Certainly one of its most fatal defects is the very limited area which is embraced in the range of vision. Not merely does this often prevent you from seeing anything interesting, but it exposes you to the danger of having the door suddenly opened by a person within approaching it from the side ; and, knowing Mr Carabet's habits, it was this contingency that Jane most dreaded. The unusual circumstance, however, of a visitor to Mr Carabet's sister, had so piqued her curiosity that it induced her to incur this

serious risk ; and on seeing a strange, foreign-looking lady, who had first been shown into the first-floor front, emerge therefrom at the heels of the curiosity-dealer, and proceed to follow him up the narrow staircase, Jane, who had been watching from a post of observation below, slipped off her shoes, and nimbly tripped up in pursuit. It was not the first time she had applied her eye to the aperture at which it seemed now to be glued. And she had sufficiently often seen the solitary occupant of the room cross her field of vision to be familiar with her appearance. She was a short and rather stout woman, apparently about fifty years of age, or perhaps more, with large blue eyes, and a complexion which was somewhat too dark to match them ; in fact, it was this contrast between the colour of her eyes and that of her skin which appeared to Jane her most marked characteristic. Apart from this, there was nothing striking in her features, which, without being regular, would have been pleasing, were it not for an abiding expression of profound melancholy which seemed stamped upon them. Her dark-brown hair was confined in a sort of gauze kerchief wound about

her head, with an end hanging down her back, where the thin threads of gold with which it was interlaced did not escape the observation of the cook, nor did a heavy necklace of twisted silver, with bracelets of the same material, which even in her solitude the recluse appeared to cling to as ornaments. Her costume consisted of an under-garment which Jane described to Mary as a muslin night-gown, over which was a robe of red and yellow satin, open to the waist in front, and reaching to the ground; her feet were thrust into embroidered slippers. She seemed to prefer as a seat a low cushion to a chair; and she occupied herself on the various occasions when she had been watched, sometimes with embroidery, sometimes with weaving little mats of coloured straw, and sometimes with washing pieces of copper brought to her by Carabet, with a mixture, the nature of which remained a mystery. All that Jane could make out of her interview with her present visitor was that the latter was also seated on a cushion on the floor at her side, and speaking to her in an unknown tongue; but she was invisible from her point of observation, and so was Carabet.

That the communication was a painful one she gathered from the fact that, from time to time, the woman made gestures of despondency, while her low tones seemed those of supplication, and a tear-drop occasionally trembled on the fringe of her long dark lashes. The interview came to an end so suddenly that, had Jane not taken alarm at a movement of the chair upon which Carabet seemed to be sitting, she would have been caught *in flagrante delicto*; as it was, she effected her retreat in safety, and took another careful observation of the visitor, as, followed by Carabet, she got into the carriage, which had been waiting at the door. Jane Slocum's first impulse was to write at once to Sebastian, to appoint a meeting at the rendezvous agreed upon; but she afterwards reflected that some new development was occurring, and that she might have something more interesting to report by waiting twenty-four hours. The result proved the correctness of her calculations.

Immediately on his return from escorting the lady, Jane knew not whither, Mr Carabet sent for both his servants.

“You will be glad to know,” he said, “that I have made arrangements with the lady who visited my sister to-day, and who is a relative of mine, to take her back to her own country. She will leave to-night by the mail; but as that does not arrive here till after midnight, I shall not expect either of you to sit up. I will take my sister to the station myself. I only mention it, because I know that you will be glad to hear that she will be more happily provided for than she could be while she remained with me, and that the objection you both felt to remaining in my service will be removed, while your work will be a little lighter.”

“It was not the work I minded,” said Jane; “it was a pleasure to cook her little bite for the poor lady. It was the keepin’ of her shut up, as I objected to. I ’ates mistries. Will she be kep’ a prisoner in her own country, sir?” she pursued, eager in quest of further information; but Mr Carabet was not to be drawn from the shell of his reserve.

“As I said before, there will be no occasion for your sitting up,” and he went up-stairs to the second floor, ignoring Jane’s last query.

"There will be just all the occasion in life for my sittin' up, Mr Carabet," she muttered after him, as she watched his retreating figure ; but she gained little by her vigilance. She heard the rumble of a fly a little after midnight, which stopped at Carabet's door. She saw that individual open it, and beckon in the coachman, who followed him up-stairs, and shouldered Miss Carabet's trunk. "His sister, indeed," whispered Jane to Mary, whose curiosity also prompted her to mar her night's rest. "I wonder whether she is his sister. She ain't a bit like him, and it's my belief she is a married woman. She's a deal better lookin' nor ever he was ; she 'as a reel nice face, and maybe when she was young it was a pretty one ; she's a regular furriner, anyhow. If they are a-goin' to travel with her, I wonder they don't dress her up properly, instead of 'avin' her look like a guy."

While these asides were going on, Carabet, who was carrying some smaller parcels and shawls, followed by his sister, had descended the stairs and passed through the front door, which he shut after him, so that the servants only knew, as they heard the rumble

of the carriage, that the mystery by which they had been oppressed had been lifted from the house, and with the inconsistency of human nature, or, at all events, of the feminine portion of it, they were conscious of a sense of injury; they were deprived of a certain notoriety which they had enjoyed among their acquaintances, and of a grievance which they had come to regard as a sort of perquisite connected with the place, and they felt ill-used by its removal accordingly.

The following morning, as Sebastian was dressing for breakfast, his valet put the following note into his hands:—

HONORED SIR,—Plese to metc me to-day at the ofice at the mine at 3 o'clock.

JANE SLOCUM.

This invitation was punctually responded to by Sebastian, after a consultation with Reginald. “You will go, of course,” the latter had said.

“I have my doubts about doing so. Now that I know that Santalba must be a party to the whole transaction, I feel as if I was

a sort of spy upon him, and I had come to the conclusion that I would tell him all about my discovery of the imprisoned female, and ask him who she was; but, what with the Hartwrights leaving, and Florence wanting me to take her into Tongsley afterwards, I never got a chance."

"It was most fortunate you did not. Now, don't think I have not the highest opinion of Count Santalba, or that I like this spying business. You know it was I who objected to it the most strongly at first; but I implore you to be guided by me in this matter. Let us sift it a little further ourselves before we make a clean breast of it to Santalba, or expect him to make a clean breast of it to us. Had he not had some good reason for keeping it secret from you, he would have taken you into his confidence ere now. No doubt he is waiting for what he feels is the proper time; let us follow his example. Do not let either of us give or require confidences prematurely. If, as you say, and as I would fain hope, there is nothing *louche* in this whole matter, he cannot be injured by our satisfying ourselves of it without troubling him. Go, then, and meet

Jane Slocum, and let us hear what she has to say."

Sebastian's scruples thus overcome, he repaired to the rendezvous at the hour named, and listened attentively to the cook's story. From her description of the visitor, he easily identified her as Madame Masollam; but as he had met that lady at breakfast and lunch, it was clearly untrue that, as Carabet had given the servants to understand, she had herself accompanied his sister to her own country, wherever that might be. The amount of falsehood thus introduced distressed Sebastian, if it were true that Santalba was a party to it; and when he made his report to Reginald, only confirmed that gentleman's suspicions. "We must find out," he said, "from the clerk and people on duty at the station last night, whether any person answering the description of Carabet's sister went by it. Any individual so singularly attired must have attracted observation." But their inquiries proved futile; and it was evident that wherever Carabet had conveyed the unfortunate lady on the previous evening, it was not to the station.

Meantime the departure of the whole Hart-

wright family, with the exception of Florence, had considerably diminished the party at The Turrets. Moreover, since the Masollams had so suddenly entered into possession, the whole *personnel* of the establishment had been undergoing a silent and gradual change. This had been facilitated by the fact that, as we know, the Hartwrights had already discharged some of their servants before the arrival of the Masollams. Mr Masollam's own private servant had come from Paris with Madame, who also brought her own maid, while Santalba had brought his valet. Carabet had had a confidential interview with Mr Sharp, who had agreed to stay; a departing housemaid had also been replaced by one sent by the curiosity - dealer, and Mrs Hartwright had carried off her own maid with her to the Continent. Mr Sharp had been given to understand that the wing of the house which had been appropriated by the Masollams was to be attended to entirely by their own servants; and both he and the fragment of the old household which still remained, soon perceived that a sort of freemasonry subsisted between the three servants who had arrived

from Paris, which entirely cut them off from the interests common to the servants' hall. In fact, a gloom appeared to have settled over that portion of the establishment since the introduction of the three foreigners, who, although they knew a smattering of English, seemed to hold aloof from their fellow-servants, and to be on terms of intimacy with their masters and mistresses, and of secret intelligence with each other, which caused them to be regarded by the other domestics with a certain awe, not unmingled with suspicion, and, in the case of the new housemaid and a groom, with superstition.

While life below stairs presented these unusual and somewhat incongruous conditions, life above was undergoing a still more remarkable and radical change, which impressed itself, as was natural, most forcibly upon Florence, who, while she had no reason to complain of it, felt as if her old home was undergoing transformation at the touch of some enchanter's wand. It was, moreover, something so entirely different from what she expected, when she had only consented to be the guest of people so inexpressibly repugnant

to her as the Masollams, by the prospect of finding her refuge in her cousin's company.

To her surprise and delight, ever since the departure of her own family, Masollam had confined himself to his room, upon the plea of the increased frequency and severity of his nervous attacks, where his wife generally remained in attendance upon him. Even upon the rare occasions when she joined the family circle, her reticent and self-absorbed manner, coupled with the difficulty she found in expressing herself in any known tongue, isolated her from the English members of the party. She appeared to Florence, but more especially to Clareville, who watched her narrowly, to exhibit a marked coldness towards her daughter, while there was an apparent lack of sympathy between herself and Santalba, which caused him some surprise and food for contemplation.

This practical withdrawal on the part of both the Masollams from their active *rôle* as hosts, left the charge of the establishment, and its social and domestic duties, to devolve upon their daughter, who was on such terms of affectionate and confidential intimacy with

Santalba, that she seemed almost unconsciously to transfer them to him, or rather to allow him to assume the position which her father had abdicated. Clareville soon became aware that, under the influence of this extraordinary man, who was becoming a greater enigma to him than Masollam himself, a delightful sense of calm, almost amounting to languor, was stealing over him. He could scarcely realise that only a few days before he had been tossed upon the stormy billows of political life, a prey to the doubts and anxieties which were suggested to him by his sense of duty, and by what had seemed a sudden quickening of his own moral nature, of which he could render no account. He, who believed in nothing of what the world calls religion, and had often read with cynical amusement and incredulity the narratives of conversion which had from time to time been forced upon him by those who professed to be interested in his soul's welfare, had suddenly found himself stirred to the depths by a new and unknown force which would give him no peace, but which had apparently originated in the innermost depths of his own being. He

had undergone a species of moral earthquake, and a fire, the existence of which he had never suspected, had burst through the hard superficial crust of his worldly nature, and for a moment spread over the surface of his being a sense of ruin and devastation. From the first moment of his intercourse with Amina Masollam, he had become conscious of a power which she seemed to possess, to lull and calm his vexed spirit, and he attributed to this the irresistible fascination which she exercised over him ; but, being a man somewhat given to the analysis of his own feelings, he refused to put the cart before the horse in her case. "I do not love her because she soothes me," he reflected, "but she soothes me because I love her." But this process of reasoning did not apply to the effect which he was conscious that the influence of the Count was exercising upon him. He could not say of that influence that it was agreeable to him, because he had been attracted to him from the first ; for it was just the contrary, and his original antipathy, which had been based on prejudice, was being converted into sympathy under the potency of a spell for which he could not

account. Next to Amina herself there was no one in whose society he felt such a delightful sense of repose. He still shrank from broaching those topics upon which his own soul was most painfully exercised; but, from a thousand little signs, he felt convinced that Santalba was not ignorant of their nature, and he felt no resentment at the conviction, which gradually forced itself on his mind, that the long conversations, which he now had abundant facility for enjoying with Amina, were repeated to Santalba, and that he was an object of the deepest interest to both. He felt convinced that some close tie existed between them; but it caused him no jealousy, though all he could extract from Amina, when he asked her point-blank whether she was related to him, was—

“When we are alone I always call him uncle; but he is not really my uncle, and I love him better than anybody else in the world. That is all I can tell you now.”

“What! better than your own father and mother?” exclaimed Reginald.

“I said that was all I could tell you now. Please don’t ask me anything more about it.”

And Reginald was silent ; and, what was more surprising, felt satisfied.

It will readily be supposed that, under these circumstances, he ceased to trouble himself further about the fate of the woman who had been spirited away in the night from Carabet's. If Sebastian was satisfied, and he seemed disposed to let the matter drop, it was no business of his. And so the days glided by, and the troubled waves were stilled ; and he began to wonder, as he thought of the unexpected haven of rest which Sebastian's telegram had procured for him on the morning of his despair, whether, after all, there might not be a Providence.

During all these days he made no inquiries after Masollam, preferring to ignore his existence, as the very thought of him seemed to introduce a disturbing element into his soul's tranquillity. Madame Masollam, too, had gradually given up appearing even at meals ; but he was aware that both the Count and Amina spent many hours, both of the day and night, in their apartments. He now began to perceive that a certain method seemed to regulate the intercourse of all the

inmates of The Turrets. He observed that, while no restraint appeared to be put on his intercourse with Amina, she regulated its extent by a scrupulous attention to her other duties. Among these was a devotion to Florence, which much puzzled him. For several hours a-day, these two young ladies would be together. Sometimes the Count would join them; and it gradually dawned upon Clareville that never, by any accident, did he find himself alone with Miss Hartwright. As he did not especially care for her society, it was only by degrees that he became conscious of this fact. He had indeed been too much absorbed in his own affairs to pay much attention to that young lady; but now he became aware that, under the new influences to which she was being subjected, her character was undergoing a very marked change. What excited in Clareville's mind further conjecture and surprise, was her acquiescence in the reserve which Sebastian seemed to impose upon himself in his intercourse with her. Finally, he began to suspect that there was a delicate process in operation by which the cousins were to be weaned from each other;

and he felt his old suspicions arising, only to be indignantly suppressed, when he remembered that they could only prove true by proving Amina false ; for although the object of his devotion had always warned him so sternly away from delicate ground, whenever he began, however distantly, to allude to his own sentiments, and had scrupulously confined their intercourse to those topics in which they felt a common interest and sympathy, he flattered himself that she was neither unconscious of the state of his feelings towards her, nor unresponsive to them : he had nothing, however, but his own sanguine hopes to base this latter conjecture upon. Nor was there any means by which he could arrive at any positive conviction upon the subject, without disturbing the peculiar moral conditions which now reigned at The Turrets, to a degree that might involve his own immediate departure. There seemed to be a sort of potent hidden law in operation, which imposed its inward restraint with more or less force upon every member of the party. It was most marked in the Count and Miss Masollam, both of whom seemed to act, even in the

minutest details of everyday life, under some strong internal effort which never relaxed its vigilance, or permitted impulsive or spasmodic conduct of any sort,—at the same time, without impairing a spontaneity in speech and action which constituted their chief charm. Sebastian was under a similar influence of suppressed effort, but in a far lesser degree; while Reginald felt that both Florence Hartwright and himself were, so to speak, rendered involuntary and unconscious subjects of this subtle rule, to the gentle and benign control of which they felt compelled to submit, if they desired to remain members of the household.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME MASOLLAM'S SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED.

THERE was a side-entrance to The Turrets besides the regular approaches from the front and rear—a sort of postern opening into a shrubbery, through which a winding path led to a door in the wall which surrounded the grounds, and which afforded those who had a private key a means of access to the house, unobserved by its occupants. It was in a passage leading to this side-entrance that Madame Masollam had appropriated a room to herself as a boudoir, which her disinclination to mix with the rest of the party rendered almost essential to her comfort. Here one morning she was seated in a flowing oriental robe, which answered the purpose of a dressing-gown. By her side was a spirit-lamp,

which had evidently been used for the preparation of the small cup of black coffee which stood on the little round table before her. Between her fingers was a cigarette, which she had just lighted, and the fumes of which she was inhaling with that dreamy languor which is induced by the first whiff of the first cigarette of the day, and which makes it superior to any other. She was gazing out of the window with an air of abstraction, watching apparently the tints of the early morning as they flushed the eastern sky, for the sun had not yet appeared above the horizon. Presently she muttered something, probably a curse, on the English climate, as with a little shiver she rose and stirred the fire, which, although it was summer, had evidently been kept in all night. Then she finished her coffee and her cigarette, and, throwing away the end of the latter with a gesture of impatience, muttered something else; and to judge from the unamiable expression of her countenance, this time her anathema had reference possibly to an individual. She was apparently expecting some one, for she rose and went to the window which looked over the path in the shrub-

bery, and returned in a moment with a sigh of relief.

"Why are you so late?" she asked snappishly, as a moment afterwards the curiosity-dealer entered the room.

"In this country, my dear, I should be considered decidedly early," replied Carabet in Armenian, which was evidently the mother tongue of both of the speakers. "What kind of a night has the Master had?"

"Bad. I have not had a wink of sleep. Things are going from bad to worse. Something must be done, and that promptly, or we shall have had all our trouble for nothing. Santalba and Amina have gone over to the enemy. I always told the Master that they would end by betraying us, but he would never believe it. You know how he is! Amina and Santalba have only got to pass an hour alone with him, and he forgets all he has arranged with me, falls into all their views, and becomes a mere tool in their hands."

"*En revanche*, Tigranuhe, you must remember that you and I have only got to pass an hour alone with him, and he forgets all he has arranged with them, falls into all

our views, and becomes a mere tool in our hands. It is strange," he continued contemplatively; "there is no man, I suppose, in the world so much and at the same time so little of an individual as he is."

"That is because there is perhaps no other man in the world so highly developed as he is, whose nervous organisation is so keenly sensitive to all the passing emotions of those with whom he has established an internal *rapport*. For the time that any individual influence is thrown violently upon him, he almost feels himself to be that individual. And as this peculiarity is more marked in him than in any one else, his own individuality becomes marked, from the very fact that it is constantly assuming, in an intense and exaggerated form, the individuality of others. Hence he is made up of contrasts, and his impulses are always extreme—and what is more extraordinary, the will by which they are animated is far more potent than it is in the persons from whom he derives his impulses. Thus it is, that many of the most powerful and influential men in the world of politics, society, or commerce, derive their strength

from their faculty of absorbing and turning to account the brain and will power of others ; but the power thus derived is more the power of influencing others, than of maintaining a fixed purpose of their own. In politics, for instance, such men seem weak and vacillating, and possess the extraordinary gift of rendering others, who are not naturally so, as weak and vacillating as themselves."

"You have become quite a profound philosopher, sister, and have developed a power of analysis I did not suspect."

"I too have a faculty of absorption, and I have lived with David Masollam for nearly forty years. Do you suppose I have gained nothing from daily contact with such a mind as his ?"

"Which from your account is made up of the minds of others."

"Only in the sense that it receives too deeply their impressions ; but in itself it is a greater mind than any of those whose impressions it receives. . To know that, one has only to see what it can do in isolation. And this brings me to what I want to say to you now — something must be done to remove Santalba and Amina from his side."

"I thought Amina could be relied upon."

"Not now. She has fallen completely under the control of Santalba."

"When did you discover that he was a traitor?"

"I began to suspect it in Paris."

"Why, it was he who gave the Master a warm letter of introduction to the Hartwrights. That was not the act of a traitor."

"No; it began to develop later than that. It was in the course of our conversations in Paris, after the Master had left, that I began to perceive that he would only remain faithful to us as long as the acts of the Master squared with what he felt to be right. You remember writing to me about Sada. I consulted him about what should be done, and he presumed to criticise not only my action in the matter, but the judgment of the Master himself."

"Perhaps he thought that you had influenced it."

"And if he did, is it not my function to do so, in the relation I hold to him as his wife?"

"I see," said Carabet. "You desire that great and powerful mind to receive exclu-

sively the impressions cast upon it by yours, and to give effect to them, as he with his varied gifts alone can do, in action."

"I do not desire that as a personal wish, or from any mean and selfish motive, but from the conviction that our faculties supplement each other, and that together, if no adverse influences intervene, we make up a combination that nothing can conquer, thanks to the spiritual forces which we control."

"Or which control you," said Carabet. "Why should you be afraid of these adverse intervening influences, if you have more powerful spiritual forces at your control than they have?"

Madame Masollam looked at him suspiciously. "I don't quite like the tone of that remark, brother," she said.

"Oh, I am all with you," he exclaimed hurriedly, and with a shade of alarm in his voice. "You need never be afraid of my turning traitor, or having an opinion of my own, apart from you and the Master. I am, as you know, your slave in life and death. I only wanted to understand the nature of the influences with which we have to fight.

They must be powerful, to cause you so much anxiety."

"They are terrific: because they are intrenching themselves in the only two natures which are a danger to us, because they have been trained and prepared to fight with us, that is why I call them traitors."

"In what particular direction is their treachery developing itself now?"

"First, Sada's removal from your house was done at Santalba's desire. It was at his instigation that the Master paid her that midnight visit, and then directed me to go and make arrangements for her removal, and I was unable to induce him to reverse his decision. It is the first time such a thing has ever happened," she added bitterly. "Secondly, neither Amina nor Santalba is obeying instructions. Amina is instructed to use all her influence with Florence, to wean her from her attachment to Sebastian; instead of that, she is rendering the girl more attractive to him, by developing her moral and intellectual faculties, while Santalba seems to be aiding and abetting her. Her duties are towards Sebastian, not Florence. She seems

now to have decided to obey Santalba instead of the Master. All last night he was suffering physical agonies from her disobedience."

"Has she been spoken to about it?"

"Not yet. The Master wished you to be present. I will tell him you are here,"—and Madame Masollam left the room. In a few moments she returned, saying, "I am going to bring Amina. The Master says he wishes you to go to him at once."

When Carabet entered, Masollam, or, "the Master," as he was generally called by those immediately connected with him, was still in bed; his face was haggard, and bore traces of recent suffering. "You have heard what the business of the morning is from Tigranuhe," he said in a low voice. Replying softly in the affirmative, Carabet sat down by the bedside. "I want you to fix your will as strongly as possible in support of mine, while I am talking to her," he next said—and Carabet signified a silent assent. Masollam then closed his eyes, and nothing more was said; even when Madame Masollam entered with her daughter, the old man maintained his motionless attitude, apparently ignoring

their presence. This silence continued for at least a quarter of an hour, none venturing to move, much less to break it by words.

At last Masollam exclaimed with a groan, "I cannot bear the pain of this. Amina, you are killing me."

The girl lifted her trembling eyelids. "You know I never want to give you pain, father," she said; "what can I do to relieve you?"

"The only sure way would be to leave the house. Your presence in it, now that you have proved unfaithful, is a cause of constant suffering to me."

"Would it not do as well if Santalba were to leave it?" suggested Madame Masollam.

"Better; but he might not go, and I can not risk his refusal."

"But I am not conscious of having been unfaithful; if you will tell me what I have done, I may remedy it, dear father," and Amina leant forward and touched his hand. He snatched it away as though stung by a scorpion. An expression of intense distress flushed Amina's countenance at this action. "I was here with Uncle Santalba last night,

and you did not seem to feel anything wrong about either of us then," she went on.

"I need not explain to you, child, who have seen so many of them, how suddenly and unexpectedly these revelations come upon me. You had no sooner left, than I perceived the cause of the dumb pain I have been suffering from for the last three days, and could not account for."

"But mother spoke to you about it first. Was it not she who said that your suffering was caused by us?" and as she spoke she saw something in the expression of her father's face, which made her turn her flashing eye upon her mother.

"Suppose it was, child—what then?" and Madame Masollam fiercely met her daughter's gaze as she spoke. Amina's eyes dropped.

"Where do you want me to go, father?" she asked meekly.

"I don't want you to go," he sighed, "if I could only see some other way out of it."

"As her Uncle Carabet seems more to be relied upon than her Uncle Santalba, why should she not go to him?" again suggested Madame.

Masollam made no answer, and again closed his eyes.

"There are many reasons why that would not do," he said at length. "Do you think, child, I can trust you, if I try you again?" he added, after another pause.

"I think so, father; I was not willingly unfaithful."

"No; your infidelity was too subtle for you to be externally conscious of it. Now I think I can take your hand," and as though bracing himself for an effort, he held out his own. Amina placed hers in it.

"I feel Santalba's hand," he murmured, "and I feel Clareville's, and I even feel something of that young Hartwright woman. How is it, Amina, that you cannot hold yourself closed to the invasion of every personality you come near? You know I warned you against Clareville. I did not think," he added, with a heavy sigh, "that I should ever have to warn you against Santalba."

"Don't you think you had better send for him now, and explain that he is causing you pain? I am sure he is as unconscious of any willing infidelity to his trust as I am."

“Had that been so, I would have sent for him, as I have sent for you. No ; you must brace yourself to the effort, he must know nothing of what has passed. Be affectionate to him as ever, and from time to time, I suppose, I shall have to see him ; but close up every avenue of sympathy, both to him and to Clareville. Your manner to the latter must change entirely—to him be cold and reserved ; to Sebastian, with whom we really have to do, for we should not be here but for him, be cordial and affectionate, he must be won, and though you knew this, acting I suppose under Santalba’s influence, you have neglected him, and devoted yourself to those who do not need your devotion. I shall soon know,” he added, in a warning voice, “whether the internal conditions have changed, and whether you have been able to repair the grievous error into which you have fallen. If you cannot, you may prepare in three days to return with Carabet to Damascus. I wished for your presence,” added Masollam, turning to the latter, “that you might know why a journey was possibly in store for you, and be ready for it.” And he lifted his hand with a gesture which

indicated that the business of the morning, so far as he was concerned, was at an end.

Amina, who, by a powerful effort of will, had deprived herself during the interview of that consolation to which she, in common with the rest of her sex, usually resort under trying circumstances, gave vent to her feelings in sobs upon her pillow, in the privacy of her own room. While Madame Masollam, in the privacy of hers, remarked to her brother with the air of one who has scored a victory, "She will never be able to hold out. It will be very inconvenient, no doubt, but you may make up your mind, my dear brother, for a journey to the Pearl City of the East."

CHAPTER XIV.

A LITTLE TELEPATHY.

CALMS are proverbially treacherous, and for some days previous to the interview which we have described in the last chapter, Clareville had been haunted by a dumb sort of presentiment that there was a storm brewing. He could give no reason to himself for this feeling of uneasiness, and attributed it to that vague instinct of mistrust of which we are sometimes conscious, when events run too smoothly to seem altogether natural, and our happiness is too complete and too unexpected, to have in it an element of permanence. He had written to his mother immediately on the change of plan, to explain why the proposed visit of Sebastian and Miss Hartwright was indefinitely postponed, and to account for his own

absence and seclusion in such stirring times ; and he had spent some part of the night which preceded the events described in the last chapter in writing a letter to his father, announcing his intention to withdraw from public life ; and he added that his friend Sebastian Hartwright had arrived at the same determination, and had induced him to join in certain investigations in which they were both interested, and which would necessitate, for a time at all events, a certain degree of retirement from the spheres of their former activity. There was no *assertio falsi* in this statement, though there was a very distinct *suppressio veri*. He said nothing in these letters of the Masollam family, or of Count Santalba ; much less that, as the result of many long conversations with Amina, he had decided to enter upon a course of moral and physical experiment, with the view of testing in his own person the truth of certain conclusions in regard to the nature and extent of the human faculty, and the laws governing the vital forces which control it, at which she, in common with Santalba—who, however, had so far studiously avoided discussing these sub-

jects with Reginald—seemed to have arrived. It is possible that he was influenced in this decision as much by his love for Amina as by his love for truth, for our highest motives in life are seldom unmixed ; and it is, moreover, certain that he was not indifferent to the fact that his most intimate friend would be engaged in the same pursuit.

When he looked back at the extraordinary change which a few weeks had worked upon all his views of life, he could hardly believe that he was the same man who was so lately spinning round in the social and political whirlpool, making splash enough as he did so, to raise the hopes of his friends, and to gratify his own vanity. He marvelled much at the combination of circumstances which had forced him not only to withdraw from it, but to enter upon a course of research which, of all others, had been most anti-pathetic to him. It had sufficed for the silent watches of one night to tear away what he could only describe to himself as a sort of barrier between an outer and an inner conscience, of the very existence of which he had been hitherto unaware. His old conscience

had, so to speak, disappeared. It had been a good workaday sort of conscience — the average conscience of an English gentleman and a man of honour; a conscience that would scorn a base action according to the standard recognised in society of what baseness is; a conscience very particular indeed about money, especially where gambling debts were concerned — not perhaps quite so particular about tradesmen, but even they had not much to complain of; a conscience also particular about women, especially those whose husbands were his own personal friends; a conscience that forbade him under any possible circumstances to tell a lie, except where a woman was concerned — and which was, above all things, scrupulous that its own dictates should not be violated. Altogether, it had a very fair glimmering light of its own, one that Clareville had been able to see his way very well by, for a matter of nearly thirty years; and his neighbours had recognised it as one quite as highly quickened as theirs, so that he was known among them as an honourable high-going fellow; but its lamp had been eclipsed in a night by the effulgence of a moral ray that had

shot across his being, revealing to him a code written as though in letters of fire, and which seemed imperatively to demand of him the sacrifice of himself, with all his personal aims and ambitions, at the shrine of his fellow-men. He who could believe neither in God nor in immortality, saw by the light of this new revelation that he had practically carried his scepticism so far as to disbelieve even in humanity, and the humiliation of this discovery prostrated and appalled him; but the agony of it was not destined to endure without alleviation. The pain of the blow that felled was more than compensated for by the tenderness of the arm that uplifted. There is in the joy of illumination which attends a divine revelation, ample reward for the momentary blindness produced by its first flash upon the moral eyesight. Thus it was that as Reginald, at first stunned and blinded, awoke, as it were, to new moral consciousness, he felt the peace of the new religion which had burst upon him flood his soul, and, under the impulse of it, dedicated himself to the service to which he felt that it had called him. The interests of self, of family, of party, even of country, which

he had till now thought supreme, sank into insignificance. The cry of the universe for help seemed to ring in his ears; but as he listened to it, the sense of his own impotence became so overwhelming that the ray of hope and of joy went out, and he fell into a deep sleep, with the sense of despair oppressing him like a nightmare—and all he knew when he awoke was that his decision had been irrevocably taken, and that, even if it was all a dream, it was one which conveyed a truth, the spell of which was destined to change the whole current of his life. He was conscious of more than this. He remembered that at the moment when in his sleep his despair seemed most acute, an impression had been conveyed to his mind that he would not be left to grope in vain for the method of putting his resolution into practice, but that he would find a way open to him; and as he thus dreamt, a bright female figure seemed to flash out of the gloom, lighting it for a moment with a supernatural radiance, and as suddenly disappearing, and he thought he recognised in it the fair unknown whom he had met in the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons. He was

pondering over this when he received Sebastian's telegram and decided to accept the invitation it contained ; and now, reviewing the events which had since occurred, he could recognise a method in the guidance which he was following ; for in his love for Amina, and her sympathy with his new aspirations, he perceived that her influence was probably the only one which could have induced him to experimentalise in the effort to realise them, in a direction which was altogether opposed to his inclination. His own crude notion as to the best way to give effect to his new humanitarian impulses, had been to bury himself in the slums of London, and go to work among its outcasts ; but she proposed something very different, and suggested processes of self-preparation for the work to which he felt himself called, so foreign to all his instincts, and so violently antagonistic to his prejudices, that it needed all his love for her, and all the influence of Sebastian, and the assurances of his friend that he too had determined actively to participate in the same effort, to reconcile him to this new departure.

"Remember," he said to Sebastian, whom

he met in the garden in the early morning after he had arrived at this decision, "I go into this to satisfy Amina and you"—he had taken to speaking of her as Amina now; "but I positively decline to be dragged into any kind of mysticism. She and you say we all need some kind of moral preparation to be as useful as we should be. Well, I am quite ready to admit that; God knows there is plenty of moral repair needed in this hulk, which is inhabited by what I suppose you would call my soul."

"I am not particular as to terms," said Sebastian. "I am quite willing to admit that you have not got a soul, if you are ready to go to work for the purpose of making moral repairs upon your body."

"Oh, I am willing to call the moral part of my body my soul, provided you don't separate it from the other part and make it immortal!"

"Well, supposing, to avoid such clumsy definitions as a moral part and a physical part, we call the whole thing—you will admit you are a 'thing'?—your 'organism,' that will include your whole being—because, you know,

you are a 'being'—and postpone the question of its immortality indefinitely?"

"Yes," said Reginald, laughing, "I will grant you all that. I must say you are not exacting when argument is concerned. And when are we to begin our experiments?"

"That will depend upon Santalba. You have remarked how carefully he has avoided talking to you on these subjects."

"Yes; and it has rather surprised me, as I have led up to them several times."

"He was waiting for your decision; there was no use in his talking to you till you had decided."

"But he might have helped me to decide."

"He did not think it right to do so; and you see he was correct, for you have decided without him. He never wastes his ammunition."

"Well, I will try and receive the first broadside, whenever he thinks fit to pour it into me, with as good a grace as possible. By the way," and Reginald hesitated for a moment, flushing slightly as he continued, "you have not seen Miss Masollam in the garden anywhere this morning, have you?"

"Miss Masollam! No; what should bring her out at this early hour?"

"What can have brought you out at this early hour? I might as well ask," said Reginald.

"Suppose I put the same question to you, old man. I will tell you exactly why I am strolling about the garden at seven A.M., if you will tell me why you are."

Reginald paused for some time before he answered. "Agreed," he said at length.

"Well, I came out simply because Santalba told me last night to meet him here this morning at seven."

"Did he promise that he would be here?"

"No; he never promises anything if he can avoid it. He only told me to be here on the chance. He seemed to have something weighing on his mind last night. 'It is very likely I may need you to-morrow about something important,' he said; 'but I may be wrong; at any rate it will be best for you to be up and out as early as possible.' That is all that I know about it. He did not make it a matter of confidence, or I should not have repeated it. Now tell me your reasons."

“I don't mind telling you, because it only shows what tricks our imagination can play, and it compromises nobody. I got up because I distinctly heard Amina calling me from the garden. That is my window,” and he pointed to one immediately above them. “The tones were so distinctly hers, and in such deep distress, that I jumped up and looked out of the window, but I could see no one. I should have gone back to bed again, but I was so positively certain of her voice that I dressed and came down at once. Even still, I think, she must be in some other part of the garden; but I have been to her favourite seat and everywhere I could think of.”

“Have you been to the back shrubbery?”

“No, she never goes there; but we may as well look.”

“What did she say?” asked Sebastian.

“Only ‘Reginald,’ ‘Reginald.’ The first time I did not hear it so distinctly, for it seemed to wake me; but the second time it seemed almost like a cry of distress coming from the garden, and was unmistakable, for I was broad awake at the time. I must have

eaten something that disagreed with me last night."

"That might account for your dreaming you heard it, but not for your actually hearing it, as you say you did, when you were awake."

"It may be with one's ears as with one's eyes," answered Reginald. "If you look at something very hard, and then shut your eyes, the image remains for a few seconds stamped on the retina; so if you hear something in a dream, the sound may repeat itself on the tympanum after you are awake."

"My dear Reginald, that won't do—too thin. There is another far better way of accounting for it, and it ought to suit you, because it's scientific."

"Which is that?" asked Reginald.

"My poor friend," and Sebastian tapped his forehead significantly, "you are mad—clearly mad. That is the scientific explanation. The victim of hallucination. Never breathe a word of this to any one but me. I often hear voices like that, but then I am a confirmed lunatic. I was fool enough to mention it to several of my friends, and I don't feel that my freedom is worth a

day's purchase. Hark! there is a step on the path through the shrubbery. Come this way, and we will reach the door in the garden wall, and see if it is Miss Masollam; if it really was her voice you heard, you will have regained your sanity."

"I don't feel sure of that," grimly muttered Reginald to himself, as he bethought him that in the eyes of his family and friends his passion for the fair Oriental would be the greatest evidence of his insanity which he could afford.

He was interrupted in his meditations by a surprised whistle from his friend, as they both stopped suddenly at a point where they were screened by some bushes, and observed a man draw a key from his pocket, and turn it in the lock, and let himself out. "Carabet, by Jove! and with a pass-key, too. He seems to have been spending the night here. There is mischief brewing, depend upon it. This is what Santalba was feeling. I must hurry back; he may be looking for me." And dropping his friend's arm, Sebastian quickly disappeared.

"It is very strange," murmured Reginald, "the way I seem to be beginning to feel things

before they happen. For days I have been conscious that this calm could not last, and that a crisis was impending; and now that it is almost upon me, I can only vaguely make out that it is a conflict of forces which affects my own peace of mind and equilibrium in a manner hitherto unknown to me. Pah! it is too absurd. I am getting as fanciful and superstitious as a servant-girl. And yet if Amina should be in distress; and if there is some conspiracy against her; and this Carabet is the tool to be employed,—the sharp pain I felt the moment I saw him, may mean something.”

And Reginald slowly strolled round to the other side of the house, where he had first met Sebastian, who, as he now saw, had been joined by Santalba, with whom he seemed deeply engaged in conversation. On seeing him, the Count beckoned to him to approach.

“Sebastian tells me,” he said, laying his hand affectionately on his arm, “that you have made up your mind to devote your life and energies and your means to the cause to which we have dedicated ours.”

“I told Miss Masollam, after a long con-

versation which I had with her last night," replied Reginald, "that I would carefully consider the subject, and give her a definite answer this morning. I have considered it, and I have so far decided, that I have written to my father to prepare him for my withdrawal from the worldly career which I had proposed to follow; but this by no means implies that I commit myself to any adhesion to views, or belief in theories, the truth of which can only be tested by experiments. I at present believe in nothing beyond the bare fact that I have a duty to my fellow-creatures which must override all personal considerations, and which may possibly involve the sacrifice of preconceived opinions, and even of cherished affections. Hitherto I have nursed myself in the comfortable cradle of agnosticism, in the illusion, as I feel it may possibly be now, that I had not the faculty of mind which should enable me to discover truth, nor the energies of will which should stimulate me to do good. I have now decided to devote my life to the search of the highest truth I can attain, and to the performance of the greatest good in my power. That is

practically all that my decision amounts to. I know nothing yet of the processes to be followed for the higher development of my faculties ; but I am willing to test those which Miss Masollam assures me have proved satisfactory, both to her and to yourself, and of which it seems that my friend Sebastian here is also ready and willing to make trial, reserving to myself always the right, if they in any way violate my moral consciousness, to withdraw from them."

"I do not think that you will ever have occasion to regret your decision, even if it is wrong ; for if a man's motives be as pure and as noble as those by which you are animated, truth can be revealed to him by means of the very mistakes which he makes in the search after it ; provided always he has no other desire but to spend and be spent for his fellow-creatures. We all arrive at truth in different ways : here is Sebastian, who first plunged in search of it into the vortex of spiritualism, and is only just now recovering from a severe attack of esoteric Buddhism. Had he been actuated by no higher motives than vulgar curiosity, the love of the marvel-

lous, or the pursuit of a fashionable craze, he would have suffered injury,—as it is, he has received no harm. But you must be prepared for severe and unexpected tests.”

“I have already said that I am ready for them, provided they do not require of me anything of which my conscience disapproves.”

“I am here now,” said the Count with a grave earnestness of manner, “to offer you the first one ; and in doing so, I think it right to remind you—and I am sure when you have heard it, that you will agree with me—that if you find it to be one which it is impossible for you to accept, your visit here cannot be further prolonged.”

Clareville winced. “This is driving me rather unfairly into a corner,” he said to himself ; “however, in for a penny, in for a pound.”

“I am all attention,” he replied, turning to the Count.

“Take this paper, then, which Mr Masollam has requested me to hand you, and kindly read it with attention.”

Reginald sat down on a garden-seat and slowly perused the document, while Santalba paced the gravel walk in front of him. It was

in Amina's handwriting, and purported to be dictated to her by her father. It contained a minute analysis, a sort of moral diagnosis of the reader's own character; entering into details which Reginald felt that it was impossible for any one to know but himself, and tracing the moral processes by which he had been influenced from his youth to the present date, with an accuracy and knowledge which utterly confounded Clareville. He knew that he had allowed Amina to "draw" him as he had never been "drawn" before. He had revealed to her many of the secrets of his heart, and had frankly discussed the life problems by which his conscience had been exercised; but this could not account for the inspiration which had dictated in these pages incidents in his life, and the moral consequences that followed, which affected himself alone, and which were of the nature of inner experiences of which he had never spoken to living soul.

"Do you accept that as true?" asked Santalba, seeing that he had finished.

"I should be untrue myself if I did otherwise," answered Reginald.

"That being so, and in the presence of your

admission that he who dictated it has judged you accurately, I have to propose to you as the test which you desire of your own sincerity of motive, that you submit yourself, of course under the reservation you have just mentioned, to the absolute guidance and direction of Mr and Madame Masollam."

Clareville felt the blood leave his cheeks. The blow came from so unexpected a quarter that he almost staggered under it. It was as though some one had struck him from behind. He looked at Sebastian, and his friend's pale countenance was not reassuring. Amina's despairing cry, Carabet's furtive exit, which he had just witnessed, the mystery of the concealed woman, his old suspicions of the conspiracy, which seemed to afford the only clue to the Masollams' presence in the house at all—all rushed upon his mind with overwhelming force. His first instinct was to plead, as a valid reason for refusing this test, the reservation he had just made, and yet there was no moral ground for refusing it. The fact that he felt a violent antipathy to, and suspicion of, Masollam, and the most intense repulsion towards his wife, was no reason why he should

not place himself under their direction and guidance, if by so doing he could advance the ends he had in view. He had no proof whatever that Masollam had ever been guilty of any dishonourable action; the mysterious female might now be free, and might from the first have been a prisoner with her own consent. Amina's cry proved nothing, nor did the fact that Carabet was in the habit of visiting the house with his own pass-key. After all, the Masollams were Amina's parents, and must have instilled into her those noble sentiments which had so strongly attracted him to her. The more he analysed his feelings, the more he felt that they were based upon prejudice. Then he became conscious of a singular conflict in his mind; battling with his hatred for the Masollams—for the sentiment he entertained towards them can be described by no milder term—he felt an uncontrollable impulse to obey Santalba. Though the test was put to him as one which he was free to accept or reject, his liberty of choice seemed unduly interfered with by the collateral consideration that practically its rejection implied separation

from Amina, and, as he fondly believed, would cause her disappointment and distress ; while its acceptance would unite his aims and efforts to hers, and would in fact be the first link in a chain by which they might be bound, possibly for life, in the closest bonds of sympathy, of common interests, and of mutual co-operation. It flashed upon him that she knew of Santalba's intention to present this test to him now, and that the cry of distress he had heard, might be some inner mysterious appeal from her soul to his not to reject it. At first the fact that the singular document he had read was in Amina's handwriting had given him a strange shock. The idea that he had been morally dissected for her benefit was inexpressibly painful to him, —all the more so, as he felt that marvellous though the analysis was, its accuracy must still be largely due to the insight he had allowed her to have into his character. By degrees this reflection, instead of separating them, seemed to be drawing them together. A new tie had been established between them ; she knew him better than his own mother did now, and was therefore, in one sense, closer to

him than any living woman. Should he refuse the test, not only would it separate him from her, but it would fairly give rise to the suspicion, both in her mind and in Santalba's, that he was animated by a petty motive of wounded vanity. As he thought thus, he became strangely overpowered by a conviction that the bare idea of rejecting the test now offered to him, constituted an infidelity to his own highest aspirations, and to the sentiments to which he had so recently given utterance, and would give the lie to his own perfect sincerity of purpose. He was conscious, while these conflicting emotions were raging within him, that the mild eyes of Santalba were fixed upon him, and he imagined, as he caught his glance, that he detected in it a shade of anxiety. "I believe he and Amina are honest, at any rate," he said to himself, "so here goes. I won't refuse my first fence; it will be time enough to bolt off the course if these infernal Masollams expect me to be a party to any of their conspiracies, or do anything I don't think right." Then turning to the Count,—“It is a nasty pill to begin with,” he observed, “and I hope

there will not be many more like it; but you may consider it swallowed."

Santalba drew a long sigh, as though of relief.

"And you, my boy," he said, turning to Sebastian.

"Oh, I accept."

"Then I think the business of the morning is settled—it must be getting near breakfast-time. There is Miss Hartwright taking a stroll, and I think she would like you to join her, Sebastian. You can tell her what you think best. Amina feels much encouraged about Florence."

And the Count and Sebastian moved off in opposite directions, leaving Clareville a prey to conflicting and distinctly painful emotions.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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M A S O L L A M ;

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

A NOVEL

BY

LAURENCE OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'PICCADILLY,' 'ALTIORA PETO,' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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PART I.

(Continued.)

MASOLLAM:

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST TESTS ARE APPLIED.

WHEN Reginald Clareville came to breakfast, he was more than usually on the alert to detect those signs of a change which the events of the morning, coupled with his own intuitions, led him to forebode. The unwonted appearance of Madame Masollam at that meal afforded him therefore at once a subject of uneasy conjecture, more particularly as it presented forcibly to his consciousness the new relation in which he stood with regard to that lady. He fancied he could detect in the cruel glance

of her eye, as she greeted him, a flash of triumph, and he suspected that Santalba had already communicated to her the result of the morning's deliberations, and the decision at which he had finally arrived.

"Amina sick," she said in English, turning sharply upon him as he was thus ruminating; and then she added some words in Arabic to Santalba, which Reginald did not understand, and concluded her remark with a short harsh laugh.

The Count looked grave, but said nothing; and for the rest of the meal Reginald perceived that he was seriously preoccupied.

"Is Amina too unwell to come to breakfast?" asked Florence.

"Yes," replied Madame.

"Do you know what is the matter with her?"

The only answer Miss Hartwright received was a little upward toss of the head, an almost imperceptible raising of the eyelids, and a slight click of the tongue, which was Madame Masollam's habitual way of implying a negative, and was more expressive than any form of words, as it seemed to convey an intimation

on the part of the person addressed, not only that she did not know, but that she did not care.

"I'll run up and see whether I cannot take her some breakfast."

"From what Madame Masollam has just told me," interrupted the Count, with more vivacity than was his wont—for Florence had impulsively risen from the table—"I think Miss Masollam wishes to be left alone."

Florence hesitated, and looked at Madame Masollam.

"Mr Hartwright can go," said that lady, in her bad French.

Florence seemed perplexed and a little shocked and disturbed at this unexpected suggestion. Sebastian glanced at Santalba.

"Madame Masollam appears to think that her daughter would like to see you in her own bedroom," said the Count, with a marked emphasis, which left the young man more undecided than ever, as it seemed to imply a disapproval on the part of Santalba which he shrank from openly expressing. This was the more puzzling, as, not half an hour since, Sebastian had promised the Count to submit himself in everything to Amina's parents.

“Go to Amina in Mr Masollam’s bedroom,” said the lady, with her usual abruptness, addressing Sebastian.

“I suppose it will be my turn next to obey orders,” thought Clareville to himself, as Sebastian rose and left the table. But Madame Masollam continued her meal, which consisted of nothing but a cup of coffee and a piece of dry bread, in silence ; and Reginald and Florence discussed the weather with great earnestness, until, after the lapse of a few moments, they were relieved of her presence.

“Miss Masollam’s indisposition will deprive you of her society to-day, Miss Hartwright ; but I do not think it is anything serious. I should recommend you to go out for a ride with Mr Clareville. I am sorry I shall not be able to accompany you ; but I have much to occupy me.” And so saying, the Count, with a polite bow, left the room.

In spite of his great equability of temperament and self-control, Reginald saw that he was much disturbed.

“What strange people they all are ! and what a mixture of extreme niceness and extreme nastiness ! Don’t you think so, Mr

Clareville?" asked Florence, now that they were alone. And without waiting for an answer, she continued, "I think Amina quite the most perfect darling I ever met. My one ambition in life is to try and be like her. I did not know such people existed. How could I, you know, bottled up here with papa and mamma, and Laura, and those empty-headed brothers of mine? It seems as if a whole new world had been opened up to me since I knew her. And then the Count, with his quiet, gentle, strong manner, is a perfect mine of information on every subject, and not a bit conceited. Don't you think him quite too charming? How two such nice people ever came to be so intimately associated with two such horrors as the old Masollams is what puzzles me—doesn't it you, Mr Clareville? I can't bear to think that a person I love so much as I do Amina can be their daughter."

It was in this rough-and-ready form that Miss Hartwright put into her own vernacular, sentiments which precisely corresponded with those of the person she addressed.

"I share your sympathies, your antipathies, and your perplexity in all respects, Miss Hart-

wright ; but it is a mystery which, so far, I have been utterly unable to unravel. I have, however, a singular sort of presentiment that to-day we are on the highroad to a *dénouement* of some sort. In the meantime, suppose we follow the Count's advice and take advantage of this beautiful weather. I will go and order the horses. It is not my affair if he set conventionalities at defiance," he reflected, as he thus proposed to carry out the Count's suggestion. "If the Hartwrights did not scruple to leave their daughter here, with no other chaperon than Madame Masollam, they would probably not object to my going out to ride alone with her."

"I wonder what confidential communication old Masollam has to make to Amina and Sebastian ;" and Florence added, after a pause, "I don't like it."

"There, again, I agree with you," said Reginald, as he left the room ; and the consequence of this little *impromptu* outburst of feeling on the part of these young people, led to an interchange of confidences between them in the course of their ride, that resulted in an alliance which was destined to be cordial and

lasting. As Reginald's own character deepened, he found himself correcting his habit of judging of people by their tricks of manner, their vulgarities of speech, and those superficial or acquired defects which are often mainly attributable to the accident of their early surroundings and education. His socially refined instincts had been so often jarred by Florence, and his attention had been so much absorbed by Amina, that his earlier impressions in regard to that young lady had been decidedly uncomplimentary. Perhaps the high appreciation she manifested for Amina first produced a modification in his sentiments; and then he felt a larger charity stealing into his soul for the world in general, as his own nature softened under the influence of the tender passion which had taken possession of it; and as he found that the aspirations to which his own quickened conscience had given birth, had taken more complete form in the mind of the beautiful creature on whom he had bestowed his love—that they had crystallised with her into a motive power by which she regulated her life, and on which she based her hopes of being of service to her fellow-beings. Flor-

ence, too, whose first impression of Reginald was that he was too haughty and cynical and indifferent to be "quite nice," had modified her opinion of him, under the same benign influence to which he had himself succumbed; while her love for her cousin had predisposed her to overcome all prejudices she might feel against his friend; so that now, under the pressure of that suspicion which they shared in common, and of that danger which seemed to menace the happiness of both, they were drawn into a sudden intimacy in the course of that one *tête-à-tête* ride, which revealed noble and unsuspected traits in the character of each. So true it is, that the grander qualities of the soul not merely lie dormant, but seem crushed out of existence by the platitudes, conventionalities, and the accidents of everyday life and environment, which so disguise and distort character, that the fairest masks may be successfully worn by the most unworthy, and the coarsest and least attractive by those who, in their deepest natures, and possibly unknown to themselves, are the most heroic. It is in the time of storm and stress, when the life-crisis comes, that the true lineaments of the

soul are revealed, and the strength of its fibre is tested.

As Florence Hartwright and Reginald Clareville rode slowly through the leafy lanes, and found a consolation in discoursing upon their mutual anxieties, and in confiding to each other those vague presentiments to which the minds of lovers are constitutionally prone, the shadow of that time was upon them, and they were instinctively bracing themselves to meet it.

They had wandered so far, and they had taken so little account of time, that they were a few minutes late for lunch, and found Amina and her mother, Santalba, and Sebastian, waiting for them. As Reginald touched Amina's hand, with an inquiry after her health; as Florence eagerly glanced at her cousin, to read, if possible, what had happened in his eye,—both knew that their worst fears were already realised. Reginald had told Miss Hartwright of the promise which he and Sebastian had made that morning to the Count, of obedience to the Masollams; and they knew further that, whatever their private feelings might be, Amina was too filial, and Sebastian

too loyal, to refuse compliance with any commands which they might have received. Amina's eyes bore evident traces of tears, while Sebastian sat, pale, silent, and moody, clearly under the weight of some great pressure of spirits. Madame Masollam scanned Reginald and Florence closely, but was reticent as usual; while all evidences of discomposure which Reginald had fancied he had observed on Santalba's countenance had disappeared, and he alone seemed cheerful, easy, and unembarrassed, making conversation for the rest of the party, with that charm of manner which was peculiar to him, and of which the most marked characteristic was that he seemed altogether to forget himself.

It was with difficulty that the equestrians of the morning could restrain the impatience with which they were consumed, to seek the private interviews which each felt to be necessary to the elucidation of the apparently altered position of affairs. There seemed to be no inclination, either on the part of Madame Masollam or Santalba, to throw any obstacle in the way; and Reginald, soon after lunch, found himself alone with Amina in a little morning-

room off the conservatory, while Sebastian had accompanied his cousin for a stroll in the garden.

“Do tell me,” said Florence impulsively, as soon as they were alone, “what has happened. I am sure old Masollam sent for you this morning to order you to marry Amina. Mr Clareville told me that you and he had promised the Count to obey the Masollams in everything. It was a most extraordinary thing for the Count to extract such a promise from you; very extraordinary in you to make it; but most extraordinary of all, if you have gone and sold yourself at that old monster’s bidding. Not but what Amina is a girl in a million; but she does not love you, Sebastian. I feel almost sure she loves Mr Clareville, though she would rather die than admit it. I have asked her ever so many times.”

“What a pace you go at, Florence, and what a hurry you are in to jump at conclusions! First, you are certain that I have been ordered to marry Amina—and next, that she is in love with Clareville; and you have not a shadow of proof for either assumption.”

“ Well, tell me, have you been ordered to marry Amina ? ”

“ I have been ordered to consider strictly secret everything that passed this morning, with the exception of certain things, which I have been ordered to tell you. ”

“ What are they ? ”

“ One is, that we should not talk to each other, except when it is absolutely necessary. ”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Florence, unable to believe her ears.

Sebastian repeated the message.

“ I never heard of such a thing ; I shall write at once to papa, to tell him I shall leave to - morrow, and ask him to meet me in London. ”

“ That was just what Mr Masollam said you would do when I gave you his message ; and the other thing I had to tell you was, to beg you not to do it. ”

“ Was the Count present when you had your interview, and received these extraordinary instructions ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ And what did he say ? ”

“ He never spoke throughout. ”

“Did Masollam send for him to be present?”

“I don’t think so; but really I can’t answer any more questions.”

“Well, it seems I am the only free person left in this house, and I shall not remain in it twenty-four hours longer.”

“I don’t think you are quite so free as you imagine, and I think you will remain. Don’t look so alarmed; you will not be conscious of any coercion being used in the matter. There now, I have told you all I had to say; you must not be angry with me. Go and talk to Miss Masollam and Reginald about it. I think you will find them in the morning-room. Wait a minute,” he added, as Florence was bounding off indignantly. “Let me think a few minutes.” Florence stopped, apparently a little overawed by the extreme restraint and trouble evident in her cousin’s manner. “Yes,” he said at last; “I have a right to say this, and I do so on my own responsibility; I was not told to say it, but I think I may venture so far. I implore you, Florence, even though I may not speak to you, not to leave the house—for my sake.”

“I can make no promises. The whole thing

is too monstrously ridiculous and absurd ;” and she left him in search of Reginald and Amina. This is what had passed between them.

“ I was quite anxious,” Reginald said, “ when I heard you were ill this morning, Miss Masollam. The more so, because I fancy you must have been taken ill just about the time I heard you call me.”

“ You heard me call you ?” repeated Amina.

“ Yes ; I could not have been mistaken.”

Amina blushed violently ; it was the first time Reginald had ever observed her so affected.

“ I can assure you most positively, Mr Clareville, that you were mistaken.”

“ Then how do you account for my distinctly hearing you pronounce my Christian name twice ?”

“ There are various ways of accounting for it. I believe the most common is by what is called ‘ telepathy,’ but you had better ask the Count for an explanation. I know what passed between you and him this morning. My father and mother were very pleased to hear it, when he told them. They have sent

their first instructions to you through me. I am afraid you will feel them rather irksome ; but I assure you, though you may not understand the reasons for directions which may appear rather arbitrary and unmeaning, if you have only courage and patience to endure, the day will come when you will understand."

"What are my instructions?"

"That you continue to prolong your visit here, but that we hold no communion together, beyond that required by bare civility."

"That is the second test, I suppose," said Reginald bitterly, after a pause, in which he was engaged, by a powerful effort of will, in suppressing the burst of rebellious remonstrance which sprang to his lips.

"That is perhaps the second test," she replied ; "I don't know."

"I will at least tell her I love her now," he said to himself ; "it is my last chance, if we are to be on terms of bare civility for the future." And he was on the point of giving effect to this resolution, when the door opened, and Florence entered.

"Just imagine, Amina !" she said ; "Sebastian has received orders from your father that

I am not to talk to him any more. Was ever anything so preposterous? Of course, under these circumstances, I shall leave the house."

"The same injunctions have been laid on Miss Masollam and myself," broke in Clareville, anxious to relieve Amina from the pain of answering.

"Then we will leave together."

"Rather let us stay together. You will not desert me?" and Reginald shot a meaning glance as he spoke, as though to remind Florence of the compact which had been the result of their morning's ride.

"Sebastian asked me to stay for his sake, and I refused; but I will stay for yours," she exclaimed quickly, as the thought suddenly struck her that she was acting under a purely selfish and angry impulse, and that to abandon her new ally in his extremity would be an act of baseness. "Who knows," she gaily continued,—for this young lady indulged in quick transitions of tone and temper, and it now burst upon her mind, or rather upon her heart—for the heart has more to do with such mat-

ters than the head—that as everybody else had been unexpectedly rendered miserable, it was her business to make them all as happy as possible, and to lighten everybody else's burden, without thinking of her own,—“who knows but what this is merely the end of the first game? I always say life is like whist. I will draw up the parallel in detail for you some day, Mr Clareville. After the next rubber, we shall perhaps have to cut for partners again. Meanwhile you and I are to play together. You look so tired, dear Amina; go up to your room and rest, darling, and remember that whatever tricks people may play with our tongues, they can't control our hearts, and you have knit yours to mine for ever. As you could not make that last remark for yourself,” she whispered to Reginald, as they left the room together, “I thought I would make it for you, more especially as they are my sentiments as well; and tell Sebastian when you see him that I was too angry this morning to talk sense, and that I am sorry for what I said about his having been such a fool as to make that promise.”

“Thank you,” interrupted Reginald with a laugh. “I, you may remember, am a partner in that act of folly.”

“Yes, I forgot ; besides, I didn’t quite put it into such strong language as that ; but say all manner of nice things to him for me, dear Mr Clareville. These horrid people may prevent our talking to each other ; but they can’t prevent one sending messages of comfort and consolation, can they ?”

CHAPTER XVI.

EVOLUTION IN AN EARLY STAGE.

It required the exercise of all the philosophy of which Reginald and Florence were capable, to enable them to bear the trials of the days which followed what the latter had termed "the change of partners."

"It does not seem to me so very like whist, Miss Hartwright, this game that we are playing," said Reginald one day. "At whist you usually quarrel with your partner; now you and I are very good friends, but we are more disposed to quarrel with our adversaries."

"Oh, you do that at whist too, when they don't play fairly. And I must say I did not expect, when Sebastian and Amina were told to give up talking to us, that they were going to be so awfully attentive to each other."

“ Perhaps they were told to be that as well.”

“ Then they take to their orders very kindly. They seem to enjoy each other’s society. Don’t you think so ? ”

“ Perhaps they say the same of us.”

“ It is not the same thing at all.”

Florence did not say why it was not the same thing ; but Reginald understood the full significance of her remark. He knew that she loved Sebastian, and was doubtful as to the extent to which that love was returned ; also that he loved Amina, and laboured under the same kind of uncertainty.

“ It seems to me,” pursued the young lady, “ that though I have never promised to accept any tests, they have managed to apply one to me which is just as severe as yours, and a good deal harder than Sebastian’s. I cannot get rid of the suspicion, which has haunted me from the first, that we are all the victims of a deep-laid plot on the part of the old Masollams. I am sure that if Amina were told by her parents to marry Sebastian, she would do so as an act of obedience.”

“ But that implies that your cousin is a consenting party.”

“Oh, Mr Clareville, who could resist An^{negat}
And Reginald thought bitterly, “Who^{hem},
deed?” of

“I asked him whether anything was said about it, when they were both summoned to that solemn interview, but he would not tell me,” pursued Florence.

“And I have done my best to extract some explanation from Santalba, but with an equal want of success.” As Reginald spoke, the Count himself entered the room.

“I happened to overhear your last words,” he said, “and I think the time has come when I may explain my reticence. Pray don’t go, Miss Hartwright; you are as much interested as Mr Clareville in what I am going to say.” Neither Reginald nor Florence, who were slightly embarrassed by this sudden appearance of the subject of their conversation, spoke—and a long pause ensued. It continued beyond the limits of conventional usage; but the relations in which these three persons stood towards each other had ceased to be conventional. Santalba, leaning back in an arm-chair, rested his forehead on his hand, and seemed buried in thought. Flor-

“ P unused to such sensations, was conscious
“t feeling of awe creeping into her breast,
Th: which she could not account, and which,
yeing naturally an irreverent sort of person,
she resented. Reginald, with an organism
more sensitive to influences, made no effort
to resist the sensation of languor which was
stealing over him, and which apparently had
the effect of rendering his senses more acutely
alive to impressions which were conveyed to
them “telepathically,” to use the term which
has been invented to describe a process as in-
herent to the law of our being as our digestion,
though it is too subtle in its operation to com-
mend itself for investigation by the crude
methods employed by science. In fact, in
rashly attempting to put his experiences on
this and many subsequent similar occasions
into words, in a mixed company, Reginald
only succeeded in making himself appear
supremely ridiculous. . “There are persons,”
he had once said, and he was thinking of the
Masollams and Santalba, “who seem to have
the power of drawing from me certain positive
vital elements, and of reinforcing their own
with them, thus producing in me a curious

sensation of lassitude, and rendering me negative to them, and easily influenced by them, while I become conscious of an increase of faculty which enables me to receive impressions, more or less accurate, of what is passing in their minds, and in the minds of others, and of events which are taking place at a long distance. Sometimes this effect is produced upon me irrespective of the personal presence of any one. Sometimes I am conscious of having produced it upon others, without any act of volition on my part; in fact I feel convinced that we all, to a more or less degree, act upon each other in this way."

Of course everybody laughed. On the occasion of this interview with Santalba, however, he was only becoming conscious of this in a very vague and imperfect manner, for he was still in the benighted condition of the friends by whom he was subsequently ridiculed, and nearly as full of narrow prejudices. At last Santalba spoke.

"It would have been useless," he said, addressing himself more especially to Clareville, "for me to have attempted to give you any explanation of the reasons which have ren-

dered necessary the experiences to which you have been subjected, and which have involved, I am aware, no inconsiderable amount of moral suffering. The parable of the sower teaches not merely the same lesson now as it did the day when it was delivered, but it suggests another. The wise sower prepares the ground for the reception of the seed, and the only way by which the ground can be prepared is through moral suffering, which, as we read elsewhere, afterwards ‘bears the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.’”

“Excuse me, Count,” interrupted Reginald ; “but I have not yet got to where I can recognise the authority to which you appeal as an infallible guide in matters of moral discipline.”

“It is not necessary that you should. The truth is one which has been confirmed by universal experience, and if you doubt that, since it rests only on the Bible and on my assertion, it is one which every one can test for himself. You admitted this much in your conversations with Amina, and even went so far as to express your willingness to enter upon the experiment. Those who believe in

a Divine Providence do not need this self-torture, for they find in the suffering which He imposes, that it leads them to a deeper knowledge of Himself, and unfolds to them 'those mysteries of the kingdom of God,' alluded to in the parable to which I have already referred ; but for those who, like yourself, are pure materialists, there is no way by which the value of your philosophy can be tested but by severe moral analysis—in other words, by a course of what I may term moral vivisection, which reveals latent potencies and occult forces in the organism, absolutely incompatible with any theory except one, which recognises a source of vital force which I call 'God,' and a continuation in man of that force beyond the grave, which I call "immortality.' I have the less hesitation in asserting that this must be the result of any such moral processes as I propose, because in my own case, as in that of others who were also materialists, the result has been identical. Materialism may be held as an intellectual hypothesis, but it never can be demonstrated as a fact to the inmost consciousness. On the other hand, when the existence of a Deity has

d⁵ become as positive a fact to the inner consciousness as one's own existence, it is not on that account susceptible of proof to the outer consciousness or mere mentality of another. Hence it is, when such a one demands proof, he must find it for himself. All that another can do for him is to put him on the certain road for finding it, and it is this which, with your consent, I am doing for you. Nay, more—having become aware some time since that I should occupy the relation to you which I now do, I tell you frankly that I have been engaged in inventing the necessary implements of moral torture.”

“And you found them in the Masollam family?” said Reginald, with a shudder nearly allied to terror, which he could not repress.

“And may I inquire,” broke in Florence with trembling lips, before Santalba could reply, “whether you knew, before you saw me, that I was to be tortured without my consent being asked; and if so, how you knew it?”

“I knew, Miss Hartwright, before I saw you, on my arrival here, what you had then no suspicion of, that you possessed a noble and

magnanimous nature and high aspirations, which were completely buried under a superficial layer of selfishness, vanity, and frivolity; that this could only be removed by an extremely painful process of moral surgery, and that it would fall to me to perform the operation. As to how I knew it, it is not necessary to enter upon that now; perhaps I was helped to the knowledge by my lifelong intimacy with your cousin, and by my acquaintance with your father and yourself in earlier years."

"But if it is going to be so very painful, I think I would rather not have this superficial layer removed," urged Florence.

"My child," said Santalba, suddenly rising and seating himself on the couch by Florence, while he gently took her hand in his, and gazed into her large grey eyes, "you must trust me absolutely in this matter, and I can say to you what I cannot say to Mr Clareville until he has acquired a belief in Him, you must trust God. We cannot disentangle our interests from those of others in this web of human life, and we may often render those we love the highest service by making the

most complete sacrifice of our own affections. It is this sacrifice you are now called upon to make, not for their sakes alone, but for the sake of the great principle of altruism, upon the ultimate triumph of which the whole fate of humanity depends. It is through individual effort that the foundation is laid. Believe me, I do not call upon either of you to make a sacrifice which I have not made myself."

At this point the Count was interrupted by a violent burst of weeping, which Florence was utterly unable longer to control. She felt that she had never known how deeply attached she was to her cousin as at this moment when he was so rudely snatched from her arms. It seemed as though the effect of the last fortnight's intercourse had been to elevate what had hitherto been a sentiment into a passion, and that with a cruel ingenuity she had been allowed to nurse an illusion which had become part of her life, when it was thus violently wrenched from it.

Reginald was so overcome with a sympathy which was the more keen because he was suffering in precisely like manner, that it was

some moments before he could command his feelings sufficiently to find utterance.

"You are aware," he said, "Count, of the mercenary motives which may seem to attach to such a marriage as Mr Masollam appears to propose, and you to abet, between his daughter and Sebastian Hartwright. This altruistic theory, to be worth anything, ought, it seems to me, to hold good all round."

"In answer to the charge of a mercenary motive underlying Mr Masollam's action, I am not now in a position to enter," said the Count, perfectly unmoved by Reginald's insinuation. "You have been allowed a fortnight's unrestricted intercourse with Miss Masollam, on purpose to enable you to judge for yourself whether she is a person likely to be influenced in the way you have suggested; and as for myself, I have long ceased to regard the opinion of any human being as having the smallest weight or value as affecting my conduct. There is only one force which is powerful enough to enable you to arrive at this point of absolute and complete indifference to public or private opinion, and this is a faith in the commanding power of

pure motive. It enables me to remain unaffected by your suspicions. It should enable you to triumph over a selfish passion. If your one and only motive is to find God, and God's truth in regard to man and your duty to Him, and if you have reason to suspect that you cherish a love for a single human being which is more potent in its influence upon your life than the desire for that truth, what alternative remains to you but to crush it out of existence? How do you know of what the affectional and emotional part of your nature is capable, if you confine it to the grovelling desires of the flesh? If you root these out, with a determination to substitute for them a love as intense for the world at large as for one single unit in it, you will enter upon a class of experiences unknown to you."

"Monks and saints have done this in all ages, but I don't know that the world has been very much the better for them," said Reginald.

"But you are neither a monk nor a saint, and your motives would be far purer than any by which they have been influenced. I do not ask you to withdraw from the world, with

a view to secure eternal happiness and to escape eternal misery ; but to increase the moral forces of your nature by substituting for its lower desires, the potencies of the Divine love for humanity, so that, as a man in the world and of it, you may be the better able to grapple with its ills, irrespective altogether of what may or may not happen to you hereafter. Believe me," pursued Santalba, and his face seemed illuminated by the glow of the enthusiasm with which he spoke, "I have evidence in my own experiences, and it is open to you to have them, if you have the faith and the courage necessary to bear the trials they involve, which assures me that man's organism is undergoing a change ; and the vulgar evidences of it are to be found in the phenomena which have so far forced themselves upon public attention, in the forms of spiritualism, mesmerism, occultism, and so forth, that societies have been formed to investigate them, and journals to chronicle them. This change means a quickening of organic sensibility and an increase of faculty, whereby man's receptivity to forces, too subtle to invade his hitherto dense personality, has

become augmented. So far these forces have found expression in phenomena more or less frivolous and valueless, because their nature and the laws by which they are governed have never been examined, nor could they be, excepting by those who, divesting themselves of every base or personal motive, devoted themselves exclusively to their investigation ; and this could only be done by such acts of entire self-surrender as the one from which you are now shrinking."

"Then," said Clareville, "and you will forgive me if I speak plainly,—although I barely know Mr Masollam at all, and although my acquaintance with you is limited to a few days, while my suspicion of the sincerity of his motives is almost overpowering, and is borne out by appearances against you both, which seem convincing,—you would have me violate my natural affections, and risk the loss of my life's happiness on what must be to me a bare chance—for you admit that it is unsusceptible of other proof than my own experience—that the affection which is thus violently expelled, if expelled it can be, will be replaced by another so much higher and

holier that it will more than compensate for the one I have lost ; while the presence of that new affection will have the effect of rendering me personally conscious of a divine source of vitality, to which, in the degree in which I respond to it by further acts of self-sacrifice, I shall become more and more receptive, until I awake to new faculties of a deeper and more interior degree than any I have yet experienced ; and you further assert that with this increase of faculty will come a corresponding increase of my power for usefulness in the world."

"I go further, and I say that no great result can possibly be achieved without great risk ; because if you were not met at the threshold of your endeavour by doubts and uncertainties of all kinds, the effort would be comparatively slight, and the faith principle, which is one of the most powerful levers of human action, would not be invoked. The strength of your sincerity of purpose, and the value you set upon the discovery of truth, can only be tested by the amount of risk you are prepared to take for it. Once admit the possibility that the secrets of nature conceal

forces yet undeveloped, which may contain a cure for the evils by which it is now afflicted, and it is culpable timidity to shrink from risking all to discover that cure ; and if the nature of that new potency is affectional, as was hinted by the great Teacher when He said, ‘ A *new* commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another,’ it is only by the expulsion of such loves as you now cling to, that room can be made for it. Listen !” and as the Count stopped suddenly, the sound of the piano was heard in the next room ; “ it is Amina, and I know from the accompaniment that she is going to try the English version of a little song of mine which Sebastian has translated for Miss Hartwright from the French,” and the Count gently rose and opened the door, so that the notes of her rich voice could reach them without impediment, and Reginald could distinctly catch, in spite of the foreign accent of the lovely singer, the following words :—

“ Arise, in the light of day that is breaking,
O muse of the future ! its birth to acclaim ;
In the vaults of the past new echoes awaking,
With songs of rejoicing to herald its fame.

'Tis not in the dirge of the night that is dying,
We hear the sweet note of the love that is born ;
The storm that is spent bears not on its sighing
The freshness of hope that has burst with the morn.

No longer the lays of the hearts that are broken,
With music of sadness the strain will inspire ;
'Tis more than the bliss of which poets have spoken,
That wakes to their triumph the chords of the lyre.

'Tis the song of the soul, whose fetters are riven,
Who dares for the earth its Renewal to plan ;
Who hymns in her ecstasy, liberty given,
By loving alone to win freedom for man."

The conflict of emotion which this song excited in the breast of Clareville was almost more than he could bear. While it seemed totally out of harmony with one set of feelings by which he was agitated, there was another chord in his being—and he was conscious that this was a deeper one than the jarred heart-strings—which vibrated to it with a profound response. This was no love-sick ditty, framed to accord with the sentiments by which, as he listened to the voice of her he loved best in the world, he felt his nature stirred ; but a melody in which the singer herself seemed carried away by the swelling volume of its notes of triumph, until at last they overcame his own complaint,

and bore him along with her who gave them such glorious utterance in a tempest of sympathy.

"I have made up my mind," he said to himself, as with a final crash the music died away and the singer quickly rose and withdrew; and as he thus gave inward utterance to his determination, he heard what seemed a faint echo of it.

"I am going to give him up for ever, Mr Clareville," said Florence, and the tears gently overflowed their lids as she spoke.

Reginald turned with a bursting heart to where Santalba had been sitting, but the Count had silently disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

TIGRANUHE EXPLAINS "THE OCCULT" TO HER
BROTHER.

THE sounds of the music which had just ceased, had reached other ears besides those of Florence and Reginald; they had at intervals been faintly audible in Madame Masollam's private little sitting-room, where at that moment she was closeted with her brother.

"Your prediction has failed," he was saying, "and from all appearances I might have spared myself those preparations which you recommended me to make for a journey to Damascus."

"How could I suspect that smooth-tongued Santalba was going to succeed in a fight against me? Listen to that music; it seems to mock my efforts. And I can almost hear the

triumphant laugh of its composer ringing in my ears—but the victory is not to him yet.”

“The Master seemed entirely to feel with you, nevertheless, that he was not to be relied upon, when he warned Amina against him at the interview at which I was present.”

“Yes; but he has changed since then. The Count managed to be there the next time the Master sent for Amina, and their influences formed a combination which was so strongly supported from the other side, that I was completely overcome; since then I can barely hold my own with the Master. You know how completely he absorbs into himself the thoughts and desires and emotions of those with whom intimate internal relations have once been established. Were Santalba alone I could counteract his influence; but together they are more than a match for me. That was why I tried to get her away. Ah, these silent conflicts of wills and passions, in which never a word is spoken, how much fiercer they are than the war of words, or even the clash of swords!”

“Yes,” said Carabet with a short laugh; “talk of skill in debate, or military science,

or any other kind of science for the matter of that—ours is an art of war the world knows nothing about as yet. A contest in which men and women ordinarily are the unconscious puppets; but into which we, who are behind the scenes, can intelligently enter, and fight side by side with the invisibles in their own sphere, in the never-ending warfare of which our unhappy world is the arena. But you have never clearly explained to me, sister, how it is that you and Santalba, who I always thought were ranged on the same side in the great battle for the human race, should now have come into such sharp collision.”

“It is a matter of tactics, *qui veut la fin, veut les moyens*. If the end is holy, the means are always justified. There is no cant more absurd than that which denies the truth of this axiom. Yet those who deny it will illogically maintain its opposite; and under the pretext that self-preservation is the first law of nature, will not hesitate to commit a murder, while they maintain armies of assassins for the protection of their country, or even their commercial interests.”

“What has Santalba to say to that?”

“ Oh, he has absurd scruples as to the way in which money, which he admits is the great material leverage of the world, is to be acquired and used. Religious teachers and social reformers have hitherto failed, because they did not perceive the great truth, that in order to reconstruct humanity morally, you must begin by the reconstruction of it materially and economically—that fine ethics are of no avail, if you have a social system in which their practical application is not possible. How, for instance, can you apply the principle of altruism as a moral law to a society of which competition is the economic basis? In order to render your ethical system possible, you must begin by the industrial reconstruction of society upon a co-operative basis, and in order to that you must have a large capital in cash. And if you have not got it, as no true reform is possible without it, you must beg, borrow, or steal it. You see I don't shrink from my conclusions.”

“ But Santalba, it seems, does,” said Carabet. “ How is it that his scruples were not excited before? ”

“ There was nothing to arouse them, when,

thirty years ago, the Master put before him his great scheme of industrial co-operation, social reconstruction, and moral regeneration, and he became convinced,—by the experiences which, I will say, he underwent with an unflinching courage, and which led him at one time to consent to what seemed to involve certain physical death,—that the human race was entering upon new organic conditions, which would render possible the great endeavour for its salvation which the Master proposed; when, I say, he became convinced of all this, and perceived that everything was stopped because there was no money to begin with, he threw up the career in which he was engaged, and the political ambitions of his life, and, to the astonishment of his friends, entered upon commercial and financial pursuits, in which he soon developed great aptitude. His association with Richard Hartwright, Sebastian's father, proved in the highest degree profitable. The Master soon found thousands of pounds pouring in upon him, and was enabled to come to Europe, and to form an industrial establishment in France—to which Santalba has for many years

devoted himself and his resources—as well as to visit many countries, propagating his views, training new disciples, of whom, my dear brother, you are one of the most trusted ; and thereby increasing his resources.”

“ Yes,” remarked Carabet, drily ; “ although a good deal of what you have told me about Santalba is new to me, I naturally know about what concerns myself.”

“ Well, you have had the satisfaction of feeling that everything you gave went to a good cause.”

“ The Master must be a very wealthy man by this time,” pursued Carabet, reflectively.

“ Yes,” answered his sister ; “ and it is impossible for so much wealth to be in better hands.”

“ I hope Santalba is not in doubt upon that point.”

“ I have not asked him ; and he certainly has not ventured to say so if he is. The question upon which we have come into collision is not that.”

“ May I ask what it is ? ”

“ Yes, for I see I shall need your assistance ; and you know so much about the

person chiefly concerned already, that I can safely give you all my confidence."

"From which I gather," interrupted Carabet, "that the person concerned is Sebastian Hartwright, and that the question at issue is how to get hold of his million sterling. Well, we are specially provided with an instrument for that purpose."

"Yes; but we can scarcely make use of it if we are opposed by Santalba."

"Are you sure he is opposing us?"

"Quite sure."

"But Amina is devoting herself exclusively to Sebastian."

"It is a blind; that is why I should have preferred her at Damascus. At all events, she could not there be using her opportunities to fight covertly against me as she is now."

"She is a most unnatural daughter," said Carabet, with another of his dry laughs.

Madame glanced at him suspiciously.

"That is the second time, brother, I have heard a note ring false in you. Take care; you know by experience I don't spare my own flesh and blood."

Carabet turned pale; still he plucked up

courage to say, with an almost imperceptible sneer—

“I am aware that it is your opinion, and I thoroughly concur in it, that humanity at large has a claim prior to your own relations. I was only regretting, for your own sake, that you should have to include Amina in that category: on my fidelity you know you can rely.”

“I trust so,” replied his sister; “for it may be tested more severely than you think.”

“In that case I must understand the situation better than I do now, not because I should be an unfaithful, but an unintelligently if I did not. So far, I confess, I am completely mystified. It is nearly a year ago since the Master sent me to England, told me to begin business in Tongsley, and keep a special eye on the Hartwright family, obtaining all the information possible with regard to them. Then, a few months later, I am suddenly summoned to take charge of Sada, and no information is given me as to who she is, except what I can glean from herself. However, as you and the Master said you were coming after me at once, that did not matter,

until you delayed so long that my mysterious prisoner excited the gossip of all the tabbies in the town, which was certainly not desirable. Then, instead of all coming together, you and Santalba stay behind till you are telegraphed for; though I wrote you particularly to come with the Master if possible, to quiet Sada, who was getting unmanageable, and had let out to me who she was."

"Well, I have come now, and I have finally relieved you of her presence," interrupted Madame.

"Yes; but I want to understand more of the game. Why did you want the Hartwrights watched? They have got no millions."

"No; but they want Sebastian's. And the Master saw that they would get them by means of the girl, and they would have done so had he not been able, thanks to your telegram, to time his arrival at the moment he did: a day sooner would have been too soon, a day later would have been too late."

"Well, Santalba was an active agent in the affair; he too seemed to want the Master to get Sebastian's money, and to prevent the Hartwrights getting it."

“Yes; he has always been opposed to the marriage of Sebastian and his cousin, and anxious that the young man should join himself, with all that he possesses, to us; but I don’t care quite so much about the young man himself, as what he possesses. There is point of difference number one.”

“Then why don’t you marry him to Amina? Nothing could be easier.”

“On the contrary, there are spiritual combinations which render this impossible. They have both been most solemnly warned against falling in love with each other, though I don’t think the warning was necessary.”

“If you don’t want him to marry Florence, why do you keep her here under his eyes?”

“Because it was arranged by Clareville, who wants to make the match, that they were both to go and stay at Clareville Court, where it would certainly have been arranged. It was to stop that the Master telegraphed for us.”

“Why don’t you let that young sprig of nobility marry Amina? He is not a bad catch?”

“Yes; but he hates us. We should lose

them both if such a thing were to happen now."

"What do you think Santalba is really contriving now, that makes you call him a traitor?"

"I think he is beginning to distrust our motives, as he has already ventured to express disapproval of some of our methods—or rather, I should say my methods—for, if it were not for me, he might possibly get the Master to adopt his."

"Then, in fact, it is a struggle between you as to whose influence is to predominate with the Master?"

"That is what it is rapidly coming to. The internal fight began when we were left alone together in Paris. The jar became almost unbearable at last, though we allowed no sign of it to appear; and he, or rather those behind him, have been making combinations against me ever since. So far as I can see, there is only one course left to me by which I can defeat him; but it is a fearfully dangerous game to play, and one in which I risk all on a single throw."

"You are a clever woman and a brave one,

Tigranuhe. I should be inclined to back you, even if you were not my own flesh and blood, and I set more store by that than you do. I suspect the woman Sada goes for something in this new combination of yours."

Madame Masollam shot a glance of admiration at her brother.

"You are shrewd," she said; "but I cannot gratify your curiosity just yet. To do so I should have to divulge my whole plans, and they are not sufficiently matured. How still everything has become!" she added, after a pause; "it feels like the lull that precedes the storm. I am certain that Santalba is brewing mischief at this moment. I can tell it by the sudden twinge I felt in my side. If I could but divine what it was."

"Ah," remarked Carabet, who appeared to be in a philosophic vein, "what a weapon that speech would put into my hands if I were of a sceptical turn!"

"How so?"

"I should say I don't believe you have any more highly developed faculties than any one else. I disbelieve altogether in this sensitiveness which you claim to possess to the moral

conditions of other persons, and sympathy, often takes the form of physical; but with should say, if a twinge in your right or Mr you Santalba is up to mischief, how hold their another twinge somewhere else does not convey to your mind what the nature of that mischief is?"

"It is not necessary for you to tell me that, if you were of a sceptical turn of mind, you would talk like an ass, brother, as in fact you often do; but it is generally from an excess of credulity—as, for instance, when you bother me with interpretations to your absurd dreams. Because, under the operation of a certain given law, impressions can be produced upon the sensorium when the subject is in a condition nearly allied in appearance to ordinary sleep, but in reality widely differing from it; and because those impressions sometimes, but by no means always, turn out to be an accurate representation of events which are actually at that moment occurring or about to occur; and because the subject on awaking from this condition is unable to distinguish it from ordinary sleep, and is duly impressed when it turns out to be a true

Tigranuhe. or prophecy,—some persons—even if you, of them—never dream without and I set 'pose as seers, but they do not suspect t^h account the number of times their ~~this~~ presentiments and their prophecies turn out inaccurate. I really don't know which talk the greatest nonsense, the people who believe too much, or those who believe too little: those who take every phenomenon which is new and striking to them, as evidence of a direct invisible agency which is to be relied upon infallibly; or those who deny the existence of all invisible agencies whatever, because they are so often inaccurate, are always capricious in their manifestations, and refuse to be controlled by the conditions which prejudiced investigators insist upon imposing. How can I tell why certain physical sensations are accompanied with a certain moral consciousness, and certain other physical sensations are not? All I know is the fact, which has been the result of long experience. I cannot often know which to trust and which not to trust, especially in the first openings of sensitiveness to new organisms. I do not even need to see either Amina or Santalba,

to know when they are in secret sympathy, or when in secret antagonism to me ; but with such strangers as Miss Hartwright or Mr Clareville, I should need at least to hold their hands, and even then I might be mistaken."

"Is that," asked Carabet, "the way in which you account for the mistakes that the Master sometimes makes?"

"Not altogether;" and a peculiar smile flitted like a ray of cold moonlight across Madame Masollam's severe features.

Carabet's curiosity was piqued by it.

"You are concealing something from me," he said ; "would it not help me to know it?"

"I think it might ; you would work with me more intelligently if you did, and I think I can trust you, but it is something that even Amina does not suspect." Madame paused for a moment, and then continued : "Credulous people are in their way as exacting as sceptical. They do not make allowance for the irregularity and uncertainty of those phenomena which they term spiritual, of our ignorance of the laws by which they are governed, and for the conflicting, and therefore utterly confusing, influences to which we, whose nervous systems

have become highly sensitised, are exposed. They look to us as infallible guides. If they knew how little we really know, they would shrink from the risk which following our guidance involves; but yet they should not, for we still know so much more, and feel so much more than others, and are so often making discoveries and obtaining new light, that they should risk the danger of great mistakes in the search after higher moral and psychical powers, and the truths they lead us to, in the hope of great results. But as I said before, we have mostly to deal with credulous people, and credulous people are generally timid; but there is this advantage about them, that they are easily imposed upon. And the Master is compelled, in order to retain their confidence, to supplement the peculiar gifts which he really possesses, with subterfuges and *coups de théâtre* carefully prepared, and likely to strike the imagination, based often upon information which he has acquired by ordinary means. I will give you an illustration from his own lips. He told me he surprised Charles Hartwright the other day by drawing from his pocket a cheque with the

exact amount of his most pressing pecuniary needs ready written out upon it. You had already furnished him with the amount, which you had obtained from inquiries here; but he would never have made that hit had he not, when in a trance, seen himself giving a cheque to some one—he did not know to whom. The sceptic would say, .Why, when he saw the cheque, did he not see the amount, and the person it was to be given to? One might go on asking such questions from nature for ever. The fact was, he saw nothing but the cheque. But with it there came the impression, which, as it flashed upon his mind, amounted to a moral certainty, that the sum to be inscribed was the sum you had mentioned, which could apply to no other person than Mr Hartwright.”

“To tell you the truth,” said Carabet, who was listening with great interest, “I have suspected something of this kind before. Tell me, sister, as we are so confidential, does he really see and converse with beings in the invisible world, or is that all humbug too?”

“It is not *all* humbug, more than the other was all humbug, as you call it. Sometimes he

does, and sometimes he does not, and when he does not, if there is an important end to be gained, he is often obliged to pretend that he does. As I said before, *qui veut la fin, veut les moyens*. It is all for the accomplishment of a grand purpose."

"Does Santalba know all about this, and agree in trying to accomplish it this way?"

"I think he is beginning to suspect, and this is why it was necessary for me to say so much, for you must help me to fight him, and you cannot fight a man internally unless you know where the treachery is beginning to creep in. The reason he has not done so before is partly because when he first knew the Master it was not necessary for the accomplishment of his end, as it is now that his wealth and his sphere of action have so much increased, to resort to these methods of supplementing his gifts; and partly because Santalba has, during these last years, become almost as sensitive to the hidden influences in nature as the Master himself,—and one is apt to be less critical under these circumstances of the same gifts in others, provided the trust in the individual is absolute.

At the same time," pursued Madame, with a vicious emphasis, "if his own faculties had not developed with such extraordinary rapidity, he would never have discovered the joint in the Master's armour."

As she spoke thus, her hands clenched themselves nervously, and her face became so transformed by an expression of concentrated rage, that her brother stared at her in horror-stricken silence. "I have been telling you a lie," she burst forth in an uncontrollable fit of passion. "I said I told you all this about my husband, because I want you to help me to overcome Santalba. I do want you to help me to overcome him; but that is only the preliminary skirmish in the great fight. I have a more dangerous enemy still, unless I can make him my slave, and that was why it was necessary to tell you all these secrets."

"A more dangerous enemy still!" exclaimed Carabet, amazed. "Who can he be?"

"The Master himself!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARENTHETICAL AND APOLOGETIC.

I THINK it highly probable that many of my readers, who have followed my narrative thus far with considerable effort, and a sense of growing weariness, will at this point close the book in despair. "We are tired," they will say, "of this perfectly impossible group of people, with their quickened organic sensitiveness, their highly developed inner faculties, their new moral and immoral consciousness, their invisible influences and spiritual combinations, their charlatanism, their aspirations, and so forth. We prefer lifelike descriptions of people that we know and see every day; and if any such mystics or phenomenal beings exist—which we doubt—their phantasies and their vagaries possess but little interest for

us." Knowing how likely this is to be the case, I have far more sympathy with myself than with such critics: they have only had the trouble of reading half the book, if as much; I have had the labour of writing the whole,—a far greater labour than it would have been, if it had been more amusing and generally adapted to the public taste. If I have reconciled myself to a task from which I look for small profits, and still smaller praise, it is because the group of people I have presented to the reader is by no means so impossible as he may suppose, and because, in consequence of a growing tendency in society to dabble in the mystical and occult, it has seemed to me desirable that something should be written to illustrate one form, at all events, of the development this tendency is liable to take; not that I mean to insinuate thereby that any special individuals are necessarily to be assumed to be the originals of any of the characters with whom I have made the reader acquainted, but because the effect of the extraordinary increase of acute nervous sensibility, which is characteristic of the present generation, has already produced several such

persons, and must inevitably produce many more. At present such exceptionally developed types are still comparatively rare, and, by reason of the nature of their experiences, shrink from contact with the world, and above all from contact with those whose prejudices jar painfully upon the raw surfaces of their natures. They feel as if they had lost an outer covering of some sort—had been, so to speak, peeled; and naturally the people who hurt them most, are those who ridicule the notion that everybody's hide is not of equal thickness, and who, having themselves the thickest of all, brush rudely against them.

At present there is no vocabulary invented which can describe the experiences of these more highly sensitised persons; and even if there were, it would be incomprehensible to any except to those who had attained the same degree of susceptibility. Just as there is no equivalent in the language of a tribe of African negroes for the word "hysteria," and it would be extremely difficult to convey to the mind of a Hottentot the idea which it represents, so there is no term by which those who are conscious of a new condition of sen-

sibility, can describe their sensations to those who still remain in the old condition of denseness. But inasmuch as facts are stronger than theories, no amount of ignorance or prejudice can in the long-run prevail against them. And as the new conditions increase, the fact that they exist will come to be generally recognised.

So long, however, as a person refuses to admit the possibility of their existing, so long will he probably be unconscious of any new experiences in himself, the essential condition of their manifestation being, that the will should be a consenting party; for, as the forces operating are will-forces, or at all events can only operate through the will, if there is an obstruction there, they are absolutely paralysed. This does not, however, imply that many do not become invaded by them without conscious will-co-operation. It only implies that any such invasion would be rendered difficult, if not impossible, where there was conscious will-resistance. Nor does it imply that they can invariably be invited by any amount of will-co-operation, as organic conditions of surface denseness may exist which will defy the most

earnest effort. Again, it is by no means desirable, in the majority of cases, that any such effort should be made, as, if it is done ignorantly, incautiously, or from unworthy motives, it exposes the experimenter on his own organism to the danger of serious mental malady. The effort of the present day should rather be to resist the fascination which spiritualism, occultism, mysticism, and kindred investigations exercises over a certain class of minds, as having a tendency to induce these new conditions prematurely, and under influences in the highest degree prejudicial to physical and moral health. What is important is, that their existence should not be denied; because those who deny them,—and this is especially true of medical and scientific men,—render themselves, by the very fact of their denial, incapable of treating the maladies which result from them—maladies which can in many cases be easily controlled by those who understand their cause, without recourse to a lunatic asylum, where they are liable to be aggravated. Hallucination, delusion, hysteria, monomania, and so forth, are all words coined to express phenomena, the origin of which those who

use these terms are absolutely unable to account for or explain, and with which, therefore, they can only deal empirically. If the study of them involves a departure from the region of what is called "positive science," into another region called "mystical," the sooner a distinction so false and so pernicious in its effects is removed the better. There is nothing mystical whatever in an investigation into any of those moral, psychical, and physical phenomena upon which the happiness and well-being of the human race depends; and positive science, which limits itself to the investigation of facts which can only be dealt with by the aid of chemical appliances and the most external senses, and which leaves out of account all those forces upon which emotions depend, is so shallow, that it might well be called "negative" instead of "positive," in so far as its results are concerned.

My apology, then, for dragging the reader into company which is new to him, and for making him listen to conversations which must occasionally sound very like gibberish, is not because I am mystical myself, or wish to present to him a fantastic picture of human

nature and its workings which does not actually exist ; but in order to illustrate thereby one mode of manifestation of that more intense degree of human faculty which is developing in the present day, of which all history from the earliest times contains scattered evidences, but which, owing to the entirely altered conditions that have resulted from the tendencies and appliances of modern civilisation, is developing more universally than it ever could before, and which, while I believe it can be most wisely and judiciously ordered and applied for the benefit of the human family, will, if allowed to run riot, be productive to it of serious disaster.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

EVER since the departure of the Hartwright family, Masollam had confined himself almost exclusively to the privacy of his own chamber. At times his bent form might be seen, either alone or in company with his wife, in a retired part of the grounds, which he had made a formal request through Santalba might be reserved to his own exclusive use ; for it was one of the peculiarities of his nature that the sphere of its operations, excepting on rare occasions, seemed in no way to depend upon any direct personal contact with those whom he desired to influence. Even Clareville, though he resented the idea in his own mind that he was in any way awed or controlled by it, was conscious that he was under the same spell by

which all the other members of the household were to a greater or less degree affected, and made up his mind to break it if possible by intruding upon the sanctity of the Master's seclusion, and, in spite of all prohibitions to the contrary, forcing an interview. His remembrance of the only occasion when he had held any conversation with Masollam was so unsatisfactory, that he desired to renew the experience, with the hope of arriving at some more definite conclusion with regard to his mysterious host, than he had hitherto been able to do. He had found himself compelled to dismiss from his mind his first impression that he was a mere shallow impostor. He had that remarkable analysis of his own character in his pocket to prove the contrary; he could never forget that he was Amina's father; and he had now seen enough of Santalba to desire to know more of a man who appeared to have acted through so many years of the Count's life, as his guide, philosopher, and friend. Other motives contributed to urge him to take a decided measure of this kind. He was beginning to find that, so far as Amina was concerned, though the spirit might be willing, the

flesh was weak ; and her apparently exclusive devotion to Sebastian had become so keen a torture to him, that he had more than once nearly arrived at the determination not merely to leave the house but the country, and seek in some retired spot abroad, a refuge from the conflict of emotions by which his soul seemed torn, and in which fidelity to his pledged word, loyalty to his friend, an aspiration after an ideal love, and a passion he vainly strove to vanquish, were all struggling for the mastery. On the other hand, he felt that to desert the field of battle would lower him in the estimation of her with whom he most wished to stand high ; while he sometimes doubted whether his present suffering would not rather be enhanced than otherwise by an absence which would remove him from the beloved presence, only to render keener the pangs of memory. As he never could forget his love, would it not be easier for him to subordinate it to a higher one in Amina's very presence, where the tension was greatest and the stimulus most intense, than in solitude ? And was not the best person to consult in his stress of soul the father of her he loved, to whose positive instructions

all the pain of his present position was due? He would approach him in a very different spirit now from that which he had manifested on the memorable night when he had so brusquely expressed his indifference to the whole family. So far he admitted himself conquered, and he wondered at his own humility. But if he had ceased to be rebellious, he was not yet resigned, and in this respect he differed from Florence.

"I can't bear this any longer," he had said to her one day. "I shall go away."

"I can't bear it much longer either; but I shall stay," she replied.

"Why? You promised to give him up for ever. You are not going to break your word, are you?"

"No; but I did not promise not to die, and I would rather do that here, where I shall be near him."

"You don't mean that you will commit suicide?"

"No, I shall not require to do that; but I feel this is killing me. I might live, possibly, if I went away; but I don't want to. If the people who try to rise into these new condi-

tions the Count talks about, suffer as much as I do, I don't think many live to reach them."

"That depends on their constitutions, I suppose," said Clareville, practically. "I think I suffer as much as it is possible for a human being with passions to suffer; but I don't the least feel as if I should die. I'm tougher than you, perhaps. And now I come to think of it, Miss Hartwright, you have changed terribly this last week. God—I am assuming there is one, you know—can't mean people to go through such tortures as this to find Him."

"I *have* found Him, Mr Clareville."

"Oh yes. You always believed in Him. With me it is different."

"I may have believed in Him; I don't know. I think I only said I did; but that is different from finding Him—from actually feeling Him. Now I know Him; before I had only heard of Him. It is all the difference between believing in a country you have heard of, and going to that country yourself. Now I have been there," and as Florence lifted her eyes, Reginald fancied he perceived in them an expression he had never observed before. "That

is why I am so ready to die," she added, after a pause.

"Yes; but that will be dying for love of Sebastian, and not for love of God. That is not winning the victory."

"Oh yes, it is. I won it when I gave him up for ever; that is past and done with. If the effort caused a wound which was fatal, that is no business of mine; the victory is none the less won. I have a new and higher love now. That is why I want to go to God; but that does not prevent my wishing to stay near Sebastian till I go."

It was this conversation which confirmed Reginald in his resolution to seek an interview with Masollam. There must be something in a man, he thought, who could produce such results. No doubt much was due to the influence of Santalba; but the latter admitted that he owed all in the first instance to him, whom he called the Master; and Reginald wished to feel this direct influence, and to judge of its effect upon himself, and its bearing upon the problem that lay nearest to his heart.

It was on the afternoon of the day after the conversation which has been narrated between

Madame Masollam and her brother that this interchange of sentiments took place between Florence and Reginald; and it was no sooner concluded than the latter, upon the impulse of the moment, stepped out into the garden, to see if perchance he could find Masollam alone. He had, however, scarcely taken two steps in the direction of the old man's accustomed haunt, when, to his surprise, he was met by Amina.

"I come," she said, "with a message from father. He says that he has been conscious for some days past of the strong desire you feel to unburden yourself to him, and of your determination to seek an interview with him at the first opportunity. He bids me tell you that he is unable to resist this wish on your part any longer, though he says that it would have been far better for all concerned if you could have controlled it, as it will probably precipitate a crisis which you may have reason to regret. If, after hearing this, you still wish to see him, you are to follow me."

"Better a crisis, whatever it may be, than this protracted suffering. I follow you," replied Reginald.

Masollam was seated on a rustic bench, with his eyes closed, as the pair approached, but showed no sign of consciousness of their presence.

"Sit down by his side, and don't speak," Amina whispered; and Reginald obeyed, while she remained standing.

"This friend," began the old man, after a long pause, in his far-off voice, and with eyes still closed, "has undertaken a task beyond his power. He is bearing a burden which is too heavy for him. The spiritual influences which are concentrated upon him, by reason of our presence here, have become too potent for him. He is like an object which has been placed under a burning-glass, and the heat of the rays that are focussed upon him have become intolerable. His instinct to seek a solitary retreat was the right one. He must withdraw himself. His longer presence here would cause unnecessary pain to others besides himself."

Amina held up a warning finger to Reginald, who was about to speak.

"Do you know where he should go?" she inquired in a soft voice.

“No.”

“Do you know how long he must remain away?”

“No.”

“Do you know whether he will ever be united to us again?”

“No”—a spasm, as of acute pain, passed over Masollam’s face, and he added, as if unable to control the utterance—“and yes.”

“I don’t quite understand, father. No or yes?”

“Both.”

“When ought he to go?”

“At once. That is all. I can’t bear him so near me any longer. Send him away, but stay with me yourself.”

Reginald slowly rose, and was about to resent this summary dismissal in the strong language which rose to his lips, when he felt a touch on his arm. As he turned, and met Amina’s eyes, he read in them all, and more than all, that his soul had longed for. Their yearning expression of ineffable tenderness seemed to melt his whole being. There was no room for him to doubt that he was loved now, and loved with a passion equal to his

own. Had it been less, she might have needed words to give it expression. As it was, she had but to open some invisible flood-gates of her nature to allow the currents they had dammed to overflow into his. And in the exquisite sense of that commingling of deepest and holiest feeling, he knew more than speech could have conveyed. So carried away was he by the overwhelming tide of his emotion, that he not only forgot his indignation but the cause of it, until Masollam's uplifted voice burst upon the silence like a thunder-clap, and, on looking at him, he saw his eyes gleaming upon him with apparent fury.

"Go ! I say," he shouted ; and this time Reginald, too full of bliss to be conscious of insult, with one last look at Amina, who had sunk on the seat by her father's side, glided swiftly and silently away.

"My child," said Masollam, after a long pause, during which he was conscious that Amina's frame was trembling with fear and emotion, "I do not blame you. What has just happened has proved to me that the moment I have so long and ardently desired has arrived ; the moment which will ensure

to me the consummation, I will not say of my happiness alone, but of what is far more important, of my power; the moment when you will be called upon to give the supreme proof of your devotion to the great cause we both have at heart. Listen, child, to your history, which it has never before been permitted to me to communicate to you. Though accustomed to call us your parents, you are not our daughter. It is now nearly twenty-five years since Santalba, then my most cherished pupil and disciple, arrived at our door at Damascus with a baby scarce a year old in his arms. It was during the time of the troubles of the Druses and Maronites in the Lebanon. He happened to be present at one of those murderous onslaughts which the contending parties made on each other's villages, and he was the means of saving you, a little Druse infant, from massacre. Your mother was not to be found in the *mêlée*; and supposing that she had fallen a victim to a fanaticism which spared neither age nor sex, he brought you away and consigned you to us, to be brought up as a child of the new era which is dawning on the

world, and to be prepared from your infancy for the great work which he then felt was in store for you, and which I, with the aid of some old astrological lore to which I then clung, but which has since been superseded by higher knowledge, was able to confirm. You know the rest: you know how, when you were about ten years old, I took you to France, and how, for the subsequent seven or eight years, you were a ward of Santalba's, and treated like a daughter by that angelic woman, his wife; how no trouble or expense was spared on your instruction, while he himself educated you in those deeper knowledges of which he is a master, and filled you with those nobler aspirations which have guided his life. Then, when I felt that you were sufficiently prepared, I returned for you. We travelled through many countries, in order that your mind might be still more enlarged; and finally we went back to Damascus, where it was my greatest delight to develop, by close and constant intercourse, those remarkable internal gifts, which, joined with your exceptional faculties of brain, proved the correctness of those previsions which in your infancy invested your future

with such high promise. The time for their still more ample fulfilment has arrived. It has been long looked forward to, both by Tigranuhe and myself, and it was one of the reasons which, anticipating a long stay in this country, induced me to bring Sada with me. You remember a journey I made a few months before we left home, and my return with her, after an absence of a few weeks. The object of that journey was to verify the intelligence I had received from a Druse, that your mother still lived. And in Sada, my dear child, I found her."

Masollam paused, for Amina, overcome by the suddenness of this revelation, and invaded by an unaccountable dread of some unknown catastrophe, had burst into a violent fit of weeping, which she was unable to control.

"Does she know I am her daughter?" she sobbed out at length.

"No; I wished you to be the first to tell her that. All she knows is that she has come to England to find you, and she has been waiting here so long, that her impatience has become almost unmanageable. That was why I was obliged to move her from Carabet's quietly

to this house ; besides, she had already begun to excite too much gossip and curiosity. The circumstances of our own journey, and the duties which delayed me on the way, compelled me to send for Carabet to bring her on before us, otherwise she would have remained with us."

"Does she suspect nothing?"

"No ; because she found you at Damascus with us, and was told that her daughter was in England. That was why she consented to come."

Amina was too full of her own thoughts to be able to say more. She had always felt a coldness in Madame Masollam that repelled her, and she was surprised herself at her indifference to the extinction of the tie which she had hitherto supposed existed between them. But this sudden introduction of another, so new and unexpected, produced a shock which seemed to stun all her natural affections.

"You will remember, Amina, I always warned you against a love which was based upon no higher sentiment than that of blood. We cannot do our duty to the human family if we cling exclusively to our own ; and this

was the more important, as I knew the day must come when this revelation would have to be made, and you would be called upon to substitute a new relationship for that which has hitherto bound you to us."

"A new relationship," murmured Amina, and she felt a sensation of tightening round her throat, as though she was being strangled by an invisible grip.

"I have told you," pursued Masollam, "that she whom you have called mother was not your mother; but that is not all. I must add to it, that she whom I call wife has never been, legally speaking, my wife. We acknowledged no allegiance to any existing form of religious faith when she, then a young girl, in obedience to the mandate of an unseen power, resolved to unite her efforts and link her fate with mine, in the endeavour to turn to account the gifts of which we found ourselves both possessed. You have the evidences of your own senses and experience to testify to the extraordinary clearness of her insight, the correctness of her intuitions, the magic of her touch in cases of disease, the whole-souledness of her devotion. You know

of what heroic acts of self-sacrifice she is capable, under that stern and somewhat cold exterior. You know how dauntless her courage, how inflexible her will. There was no other woman who could have carried me through the suffering I was called upon to endure, upon whose wise counsel I could so thoroughly rely, upon whose enduring fortitude I could so absolutely depend. We have been all in all to each other for forty years—co-labourers and co-sufferers. You know also that alone I am powerless; that it is only a woman who can feed me with the elements which are essential to the ultimation of my forces, which need this conjunction to render them operative. Hence, when she whom I called my wife could not be with me, I needed you, whom I called my daughter. It is this nominal relation that must now be changed to one which will be real. Hitherto it is Tigranuhe who has reigned. For the rule of the man is naught without the woman. And in this lies the most delicate of all her functions, that she alone can judge when her own reign must cease. I have long been waiting for her to tell me that the time had come. And it

needed a woman of Tigranuhe's heroic temperament for me to trust her so far—nor, as the result has proved, have I done so in vain; though she has since confessed that even her courage gave way at the prospect of the sacrifice it involved, and that she made an effort to separate us a few days ago, when, under her influence and inspiration, I charged you with being false to your trust, and had nearly sent you to Damascus. Then, in a magnificent reaction against her infidelity to her own higher instincts, she announced her repentance to me this morning in these words, 'I am guilty. I have clung to my position, and to the power it conferred upon me, too long. Of my own free will I now come to abdicate it. And I do more; I tell you there is only one who can give you the fresh elements you need for the new work upon which you are entering—and that one is Amina. Let her, who has been hitherto my daughter, henceforth become my mistress and my queen.' And these words I, as your master and your king, now in my own name repeat."

But Amina heard them not; she had fainted.

CHAPTER XX.

COUNT SANTALBA DECLARES WAR, AND TAKES
THE COMMAND.

CLAREVILLE'S first instinct on leaving Masolam was to hurry off in search of Santalba. He felt that it was due to the Count to tell him to what extent he was conscious of having failed to fulfil his pledge. He would tell him that, though he had not succeeded in conquering his love, he was still resolved that he would not be conquered by it; and he was amazed at the strange fact that this resolution had only asserted itself as a force in his nature since he had become certain that his love was returned. This he could in no way account for. Until Amina's passionate gaze had penetrated to the very recesses of his soul, he had felt all the weakness and vacillation of a love-

sick swain battling against an unrequited affection, which he was unable to control. Now the very quality of the sentiment was changed. It remained as strong as ever, but it made him stronger. He seemed to derive from it the very force which was required to make him its master. He could wait now, for he knew that she could wait—could wait, if need be, beyond the space of mortal life ; for he knew now that they were bound to each other by a stronger chain than that which any law or church could forge, for it was one which no law or church could tamper with or break. As his whole being became flooded with this new conviction, he turned aside, under its influence, from the hurried quest of Santalba, which had been his first impulse, and sought the solitude of his chamber, there to commune awhile with his own soul. As he entered it, he became aware of a sense of exultation that was new to him. It seemed as though a separation had taken place between his natural form, which was treading the floor, and what appeared to him his real self, which had cast off a burden, and was treading the air. But sensations of this sort

are as impossible to describe to those who have never felt them, as colour to the blind. I have merely made the attempt, because the effect of it was to force Reginald to alter his original purpose, which had been to throw himself at full length on the couch, and, much to his own surprise, to fall on his knees beside it. He had been in this posture but a few seconds, when he became further aware of an inner glow, as if that part of him which I have described as having become light, was also becoming warm ; but he perceived that this warmth in no degree affected the normal temperature of his external body, and he was the more surprised by this, because this internal heat increased until it would have been unbearable, had it not been accompanied by an extraordinary influx of vital energy, under the pressure of which an outer shell or husk, which seemed to enclose this inner part of him, felt as though it had burst and given way. If one can imagine the sensations of a seed, which, under the influence of the sun's rays, bursts its surface preparatory to sending forth a shoot, some idea may be formed of the process which Reginald now appeared to his

own consciousness to be undergoing. But there was a new experience still in store for him, and this was a revelation which can only be very imperfectly described. He now seemed encompassed by a great luminousness, and he knew, in that light and glow, Divinity had manifested itself to him, for he was invaded by a sense of awe which almost deprived him of consciousness; and in the awe which he felt he was further aware that it was not merely a vague force which had produced it in him, but a Great and Incomprehensible Personality, and when he dared, he lifted his soul to commune therewith, for he felt irresistibly impelled to do so. And there entered into him a love as overpowering as the awe had been, and after the love there entered into him a joy as overpowering as the love had been. And he rose from his knees, and, feeling exhausted, stretched himself on the couch, and fell into a deep sleep. He knew not how long he slept; but when he woke he found Santalba standing by his side.

“I have come,” he said, “because you called me.”

“I did not call you,” answered Reginald.

"Yes, you did, as Amina once called you ; but I knew you needed me, even if I had not heard you."

"I do, indeed ; I was on my way to you when I felt I required a few minutes' solitude first."

"And they have brought you all you looked for."

"More, 'far more than my most sanguine expectations could have conceived. Indeed I looked for nothing when I came in here ; I but followed blindly some instinct, but now I know it was God-given. I seem to have undergone such a wonderful transformation that I can scarcely realise that I am the same man."

"You are not the same man, my dear friend ;" and Santalba bowed his head, and Reginald felt that he must keep silence.

"May I tell you," he said at length, when Santalba once more looked up, "what has happened ?"

"I think I know ; but speak."

Reginald then narrated the circumstances of his interview with Masollam. The Count listened intently.

"More has happened since then; the time for action has arrived. I have been preparing for this; my plans are all laid. It needed this to open her eyes," he murmured, partly to himself. "I had to wait for it. Do you mean to obey Masollam's orders, and go at once?"

Reginald looked up, amazed at the question. "How can you doubt it?" he said; "did you yourself not extract from me, as the first test of my sincerity, the promise that I would render unquestioning obedience to Mr Masollam and his wife?"

"I did; and as I took then the great responsibility of that act, I now assume the responsibility of releasing you from the promise you then made. So far as the Masollams are concerned, you are free. Ask me no more now, for I have no time to explain the sudden change in my attitude towards them, which thus involves yours, and which, in fact, is not so sudden as it seems, though the moment for its disclosure had not before arrived. Your speedy release from their thralldom is your reward for the faith and courage you manifested in placing your neck under their yoke. Still, without

doing so in obedience to Masollam, it will be well for you to leave this without delay ; but under very different conditions from those which he would suggest. Had you formed any plans as to where you would go ? ”

“ That was just the subject in regard to which I wished to consult you. I thought of first going home to say good-bye to my people, and then abroad. ”

“ If you could dispense with your visit home, I will give you the address of a place to which I should like you to go at once, and take some one with you. ”

“ Take some one with me ! ” repeated Clareville, with some surprise.

“ Yes ; I don’t think, when you know who it is, you will object very strongly, ” returned Santalba, with a smile. “ I shall want you to go by the night-mail, which passes Tongsley at one A.M. ”

“ I remember that is the one by which the mysterious female, formerly in Carabet’s keeping, was supposed to have been spirited off ; but we never could find any trace of her. ”

Santalba started. “ Carabet ! the mysterious female ! ” he exclaimed ; “ you never told

me you knew anything about Carabet or any female."

"Oh, I forgot—I meant to; but so many things have happened to put her out of my head since her disappearance. I wonder Sebastian never told you."

"There have been reasons why my intercourse with Sebastian has been limited to topics which would exclude references of this sort. How did he come to know?"

Reginald now very frankly gave Santalba an account of Sebastian's preliminary investigations and of his own suspicions. "As these died away, my interest in the matter faded," he added; "and Sebastian never showed any when once he became convinced that you must be cognisant of the whole affair."

"She was not spirited away on the occasion you mention, but, on the contrary, brought to this house, where she has since been concealed; but I want her to be spirited away to-night by that very train, and I want you to do it."

Reginald made a decidedly wry face. "That kind of thing is not at all in my line," he said.

“I have never practised the art of secretly running away in the dark, especially with single women. I think I must decline the commission.”

“I don’t think you will, for three reasons. The first and most important is, that if your experiences lead you to trust me, that trust must be as absolute as it was when you gave it to Masollam; and if it is absolute, as I know a good deal better than you what this crisis demands, you must consider me your commanding officer, and obey me implicitly. I have too high an opinion of your loyalty to wait while you balance the *pros* and *cons* of this proposition, because I know the conclusion at which you would arrive. I take for granted, then, that one reason why you will take charge of this single woman, as you call her,—but there you are wrong, for she is a widow,—is because I tell you. The second reason is, because this widow is Amina’s own mother; and the third reason,” pursued Santalba, unheeding Reginald’s exclamation of surprise, “is that I intend that Amina herself shall accompany you. Now, am I right? or do you still insist upon disobeying my

orders, and decline to run away secretly with these two single women in the dark?"

"Oh, I obey; you have taken away my breath, and my scruples vanished with it," said Reginald, with a laugh. "But may I ask, what is the objection to my conveying these two ladies away openly?"

"The very simple one that you could not do it. We are playing—or, I ought rather to say of some of us, playing—with edged tools, my dear Reginald,—you must let yourself be Reginald to me henceforth,—and we could no more extract those two women from the grasp of the Masollams openly and in the light of day, than you could take them out of any other prison in which you knew them to be confined. They are as much shackled by the wills of the Masollams as if they were chained to the walls of their rooms with rivets of iron. Amina, because it has been the habit of a lifetime to subject her own strong will to theirs; her mother, because she has scarcely any will of her own at all. Still, it would be easy to get away Amina alone, owing to a circumstance which, I feel strongly impressed, has just happened—which I have had reason for

some days to expect as probable—and which Madame Masollam planned in order to get rid of her under a very different escort from yours ; but it is of vital importance to both of them, for reasons which you will see the force of later, not to lose their hold on the mother,—and Amina, who, if I am not much mistaken, now knows that her mother is here, would not leave without her. Besides, Masollam, who in certain aspects opposes his wife in this matter, will fix his will to hold her. I have had to calculate all the forces at work very nicely to be at all sure of success—even secretly and in the dark, as you call it. If we attempted it when they were all awake and active, a most serious injury might be inflicted upon her we both love and desire to save, which might result in her physical death. I see you are astonished ; but I make use of no empty formula when I say that such struggles as the one upon which we are now engaged, are often literally struggles of life or death. At this moment the one longing cry of Amina's heart is that I should come to her, for she dare not come to me. She is lying spellbound, I think," added the Count, speaking as though under a

heavy strain, "in her own room; but that I cannot make out." At this moment Clareville's servant entered the room. "Will you allow me to send for my man?" asked the Count, turning to Reginald; and on receiving an affirmative nod, despatched a summons to him. "Is your man thoroughly to be relied on, Reginald?"

"He has been with me for ten years, and I think I can answer for him."

"Then tell him, when he comes back, to go into town and make arrangements for a fly to be here at midnight. It must not come into the grounds, but stop in the road near the lodge-gate; and let him give the servants to understand that you are not going to leave till to-morrow."

Reginald made another wry face. "I never ordered my servant to tell a lie before; he will think I have gone mad."

"It is no lie, for it will be after midnight; besides, *À la guerre comme à la guerre*. You might as well say that it was a lie to make a feint to deceive the enemy in time of war. When he sees who your companions are, he will understand. Are you quite sure you

never told him to tell a lie for you during all these ten years, when there was a lady in the case? Come, refresh your memory."

Reginald blushed consciously, but was saved a reply by the entrance of Santalba's servant, with whom his master exchanged a few words in Spanish. "He has been with me thirty years," he said, as the man went out, "and I have sent him as a spy into the enemies' country. In ten minutes he will come with an accurate report of the situation, derived chiefly from the woman who acts as Madame Masollam's maid, but who is heart and soul devoted to Amina."

"It seems strange to hear you talk of people as your enemies for whom a short time ago you expressed a most unbounded devotion, and in whom you had such entire confidence."

"They are not my enemies; but I have had evidence within this last week that they have ceased to be the friends of God or man. Once my eyes were opened, I perceived, on looking back, that this was no new thing; and that it has now become my duty, in the interests of the cause to which I have dedicated my life, and to which I believed they had

dedicated theirs, to destroy an influence which is all the more pernicious, because it still can wear so fair a mask. But enough of this now. The developments which must occur will illustrate my reasons better than any words of mine. But none can ever know the agony that the discovery has caused me—how reluctantly I made it, and how still more reluctantly I enter upon the conflict which it involves.”

Reginald now rang for his servant, gave him the necessary instructions, and had scarcely sent him upon his errand, before the Count's returned and made his report. “Beg Mr Hartwright to come here,” he said to him, after he had heard it. “We must take Sebastian into our confidence, Reginald, and probably Florence too, before we have done; but we can hardly invite her to come to your bedroom. She has a brave and loyal heart. If any one of you three had failed in meeting your tests—and you very nearly did, my friend—this battle had gone against us.”

“Sebastian had not a very severe one. In fact, I don't know that he had any test at all.”

"Oh yes, he had," replied Santalba, "perhaps the most difficult of all. You will know it later,—here he comes. Wait outside the door till I want you, Juan," he added to his servant. "Sit down, Sebastian; we have sent for you on a serious matter. Now, Reginald, tell your story."

"The loss of Clareville means the loss of so much spiritual power on our side, that is why Masollam wants to get rid of him," continued Santalba, when Reginald had finished; "but he has another and a worse motive, which can only be thwarted by immediate action." The Count then explained to Sebastian that the woman whom the latter had caused to be watched at Carabet's, was now under the same roof with himself, as well as her relationship to Amina; and the determination he had arrived at that both the women should leave The Turrets that night under the escort of Reginald.

"And as," he pursued, "it is essential to the success of a well-conducted retreat that it be covered with as much noise and smoke as possible, in order to distract the enemy's attention, I have sent for you, Sebastian, to

help to make it. Take pens and paper, both of you. You, Reginald, write a note in French to Madame Masollam—she understands that enough to make it out—and tell her that you are going to leave to-morrow morning, and earnestly request a private interview as soon as possible, not merely in order to take leave of her, but because you have a subject of great importance to discuss with her, and are unable to leave until you learn what her sentiments may be in the matter.”

“But I haven’t,” interrupted Reginald.

“Oh yes, you have; you must implore her first to give her own consent, and then to plead with Masollam to consent to your marriage with her daughter. You can do it in bad French—the worse it is, the better she will understand; and it doesn’t in the least matter whether you understand her reply. All that is necessary is to distract her attention from other subjects, and force her to concentrate it as much as possible on the one you have suggested. And you, Sebastian, write to Masollam, and say that your friend Clareville has informed you that he is going to leave to-morrow, and that you have made up

your mind to leave with him, and that you will probably be accompanied by your cousin Florence, and that you both wish to see him to say good-bye. You must prolong this interview as long as possible. You can end it by acceding to his desire, which he will press upon you, that you should both stay. What I want is to divert the attention of the Masollams from Amina and her mother, until I have had time to talk to them without fear of interruption. To add to the confusion, the servants will be allowed to give vent to their indignation while you are thus engaged, in regard to certain domestic grievances, and what they term 'the natur of the carryins-on in this 'ere 'ouse,' one of which is the discovery, which they made a few days ago, of the presence in it of Amina's mother. I have bribed their silence hitherto through Juan. Meantime," continued the Count, also providing himself with a sheet of paper, "I will write a line to Amina, telling her, on a summons which I will send her in the midst of this confusion, to meet me in the garden. At this moment she is lying prostrate with grief in

her own room. She needs all the comfort and strength a letter can carry her."

After a few minutes' more conversation, in the course of which Sebastian was more fully instructed in regard to certain points upon which he desired information, the three letters were written, and Juan intrusted with the mission of seeing that they reached their respective destinations.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MASTER-STROKE OF STRATEGY.

MASOLLAM had been obliged at last to call Madame to his assistance when Amina fainted. He had made one or two attempts to restore her; but each time he touched her for that purpose he was himself seized by such violent cramping pains, that he was compelled to desist. The effect of Tigranuhe's touch, on the other hand, seemed magical; the girl recovered, not slowly and with effort, as is usual in such cases, but instantaneously, and with a start. Then silently the three walked to the house, and Amina went straight to her own room to render some account to herself of the nature of the fearful blow she had received, and seek for light. Her habit of unquestioning faith in him, whom she had always re-

garded not merely as a natural father, but as the most highly gifted and divinely inspired of human beings, had become so confirmed, that, in spite of the terrible revelation of a love, and the proposal of a union which violated all her pure and maidenly instincts, she still shrank from doubting him. Had not the experience of a lifetime convinced her that he was the instrument chosen by God for the accomplishment of the divine purpose on earth? And if that purpose could not be accomplished except at the sacrifice of all that a woman holds most dear, what better evidence could she give of her supreme devotion to a cause which, as she believed, involved the future development and wellbeing of the race, than offer herself, a willing victim, on the altar of humanity? One before who had died for it had said, "Greater love hath no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends." But a woman had something dearer to lay down than her life. And as by woman sin had entered into the world, so now it was through woman's sacrifice that it was to be redeemed. She had been accustomed to this theory from her youth, for it was a favourite

one of Tigranuhe's, but had never till now anticipated its realisation in her own person. The instinct of sacrifice, she remembered, had underlain the theologies of almost all ages and peoples, until it had culminated in Christianity, in the sacrifice of the Deity Himself; but even in this case it had still remained a sacrifice of blood. Was not this principle of sacrifice still to hold good in the coming era, in which she had been taught woman was to enter upon new and higher functions, though the sacrifice was to be of a different kind? Was not she, perhaps, the one chosen of God to inaugurate it? And when could that sacrifice be more complete than at the moment when, for the first time in her life, she had felt the emotion of love for one of her fellow-creatures transcend that for all others? when she felt her heart, as it were, taken by storm and carried out of her own keeping, with all its wealth of love, to be treasured in the breast of another, as she was now treasuring his love in hers? She must not only slay that love, but she must cause to be slain within herself the very principle which gave it birth. As she thought thus, and nerved

herself to form a resolution, her whole nature became the arena of a conflict of doubt and contending emotions, which caused her an agony so acute, that she seemed again to be losing consciousness, and a gross darkness fell upon her spirit, which, as it were, shut out from her all sense of God. While she felt thus utterly desolate and abandoned, one seemed to come to comfort her: but his words of tenderness were as the points of daggers, each one a stab that pierced her heart; and his twining caresses were like venomous serpents twisting themselves round her form; and the glances that shot from his eyes were not those of love, but darting flames that scorched and withered what they touched. But she failed at first to see the form of him from whom these influences emanated, until it became illumined by a faintly lurid glow, and in the distorted human figure which for a second seemed to take shape within it, she recognised Masollam, and she started with a cry and opened her eyes, and saw standing by the bed—on which she had thrown herself—her whose throne she was to take.

It was exactly at this moment that Clare-

ville woke from the sleep into which he had fallen, to find Santalba near him.

"I touched you," said Madame Masollam, "to bring you back; you were seeing too much."

"Too much, indeed," murmured Amina, who now sent forth that mental cry for help, and coupled with it the name of Santalba, which conveyed to the Count, not merely the expression of her suffering, but a vague consciousness of her actual position.

Madame Masollam now entered upon a series of ministrations of a nature known to herself, with the view of calming her patient and her rival, and rendering her more negative to the influences which, with a view to the accomplishment of her own ends, she desired to bring to bear upon her. It was while thus engaged that her waiting-woman, an Oriental who had been with her from youth, entered with Clareville's note. Amina was in too unobservant a mood to perceive the expression of perplexity, doubt, and surprise which passed over Tigranuhe's face as she read it; then, taking the maid aside, Madame whispered, "Tell him I will meet him at once

in my sitting-room. You can show him the way to it."

There was an expression of triumph in her eye as she returned to Amina's side, which indicated that she saw her way to turning this meeting to good account. After a silence of a few minutes, she stooped down and kissed her, saying as she did so, "Rest quietly now, and do not think, because you are in trouble, that you are abandoned either by Providence or by us who love you so much."

At the last words Amina shuddered, and Tigranuhe glided from the room. In less than ten minutes the same maid reappeared.

"Here is a letter for you this time," she said. "I know what is in it. I am to tell you the moment when you can slip out and meet the Count in the garden without being observed. You had better get ready at once; it may be very soon," and she tripped away again to reconnoitre.

Amina rose from her bed, still trembling with the emotions by which she had been agitated, but steadied and strengthened by the restoratives which Madame Masollam had applied, and above all by the assur-

ances of help which the Count's missive conveyed. After a short interval the girl reappeared.

"Who was the letter from you gave to mother?" asked Amina, pronouncing the last word with an effort.

"From Mr Clareville; and she is now seeing him alone in her room; and the Master has just sent for Mr Sebastian Hartwright, in answer to a letter from him. Is it not strange?" All this was spoken in Arabic. "Now I will go first; I don't know why the Count is anxious you should see him so secretly."

"If he is anxious, it is because there is some good reason. I know I can trust you, Zarifa. You must not let father or mother or any one know."

"On my head be it. Am I not yours in life or death? But this is the first time you ever wanted to conceal anything from the Master or the lady."

"I will explain it all later—only be silent and secret. Now you can go back to my room, and wait for my return, and if father or mother send for me, make any excuse you

like for my absence, only don't say I'm with the Count."

Amina found Santalba on the same rustic seat on which she had listened to Masollam's revelations so short a time previously. As soon as he observed her approach he rose, and advancing a few steps, extended his arms towards her. In a moment she had fluttered into them like a hunted bird.

"My poor child!" said Santalba, gently stroking her head. "Why, my love, you have been enduring agonies. Tell me everything, and never doubt my power to protect you, even from him you have called father—but who can never more be either Master or father to you or me."

Amina looked up at him with a startled expression.

"Do you speak thus of him?" she said. And then she told him all, and the doubt she had felt whether it was not her duty to compel herself to obedience to what might be in fact a divine command, and the vision by which it was followed, and her fear to attach any importance to it, lest it might prove nothing but a temptation from the opposing influences

to divert her from the path of duty, because it seemed so hard.

“The opposing influences to the divine will,” answered Santalba, “are those which have taken possession of one who once, I believe, honestly tried to be its instrument; but who has allowed a base and selfish pas-sional force to burst through the barriers which should have been opposed to it, and so to pollute the divine love-currents, the purity of which it was the effort of his former life to protect, that his whole moral conscious-ness has become perverted, and his powerful organism has been taken possession of by the enemy. He is like a fortress which was the key of the position, and which has changed hands. It behoves us, who have formed part of its garrison, to escape without delay, and seek some point of attack upon, and of defence against, the influences which have received such a powerful reinforcement. When the general of an army turns traitor, it is long before such of the rank and file as have remained true, can recover from the shock, and reorganise sufficiently for the purposes of a campaign. You are a long way from

that yet. But this, Amina, I tell you solemnly. Your duty is to escape at once; delay may make it impossible. Mine is to linger yet a little, to cover the retreat. Reginald Clareville leaves to-night by the mail. I have arranged with him to wait for me in London, whence I will take you straight to the home that is prepared for you. You will be accompanied by your mother, whom you tell me you have not yet seen, but whom it is essential that I should see. It was I who saved your life when you were an infant—it will be my task now to restore you to her arms. See, here comes Juan, with news probably that the coast is clear.”

It was thus that Santalba, scarcely allowing Amina time to think or speak, carried her along with him in his plans for her safety.

“The servants have all gone in a deputation to make known their complaints to Madame Masollam,” said Juan, with the suspicion of a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

“This is the propitious moment, then, for my visit to Sada. Follow me in ten minutes; I will prepare her to receive you.” And Santalba hurried to the house, towards which Amina pensively strolled. Ten minutes after-

wards she gently opened the door of the room which she knew had been appropriated to her mother's use.

"This is not the first time you see her," said Santalba, as she entered, and the woman rose with trembling eagerness to embrace her daughter, "but the knowledge was hitherto kept both from you and from her."

"Mother!" exclaimed Amina, opening wide her arms.

"My child! my cherished one!" and Sada threw herself into them, overcome with the torrent of her emotion, "my heart! my eyes! Why did these cruel people keep us apart, when we were so near? Why did they torture me with useless longings? How could they listen to you, when you tried to stay my grief with promises that if I would have patience I should see my daughter, and not say, Behold her! she who vainly tries to comfort you is in herself the comfort you yearn after? Ah, how was it, that at those moments nothing cried out within me, She is bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh? Oh, my loved one! my loved one! thought of so long, sought for so vainly!"

“Not vainly,” said Amina, smiling through her tears, “since now you have found me, and nothing but death shall part us.”

“I will leave it to you now,” interrupted the Count, “to explain more fully than I have been able to do, that, if this hope which you have just expressed is to be realised, your mother must make preparations to leave with you to-night. She must not travel in that costume. Perhaps you will be able to fit her with one of Zarifa’s dresses. Explain to her that the Masollams must be kept in ignorance of the discovery she has made, in case either of them visit her to-night, which I don’t think likely; and you, my child, will need all your self-possession and strength of nerve, to enable you so far to dissemble your feelings as to prevent any detection of the revolution which your sentiments have undergone. Had Masollam been what he once was, he would have been conscious of that change ere now; but since he has allowed his breast to become invaded by an unholy passion, his insight has become dimmed. He is, in fact, though he would not admit it, enveloped in a cloud of thick darkness, which conceals us

both from his inner vision ; and Tigranuhe, who in old days was to him only a sister, would have been the first to tear away the scales from his eyes, and help him to see clearly. But since she too has fallen, she is herself so entangled in the web of her own personal ambitions and morbid jealousies, that she only sees the pictures which are presented to her mental vision by the malign influences which surround and control her, which are fantastic and phantasmagorial representations of the unreal. And these are the pictures which he, whom she calls her husband, now sees, and which have taken the place of the true ones he once saw ; but he knows it not. Thus are we protected from discovery by the fumes which their own evil passions have created, and which hide us from them. But, though their inner sight is blinded, and their inner touch deadened, and their inner hearing confused and dull, their external senses are still acute, and their natural intelligence is quickened by suspicion ; hence it is desirable that, as speedily as may be, you go and see both, and lull them with the soothing spell of your sweet and gentle influence, which they

crave for after all the agitation and turmoil to which for the last hour or two they have been subjected, and so you will secure yourself a more certain chance of being undisturbed later."

"Shall I put them both to sleep?" asked Amina, simply. "No one knows the art of calming their pain and giving them rest from suffering as I do; for have they not trained me in it all my life? Each needs a different touch, and an act of will adapted to their separate conditions. "Ah me!" and a sigh escaped her involuntarily. "When I am gone, what will become of them at such times? who will then fulfil my functions?"

"Amina!" interrupted the Count, with more sharpness than was his wont, and with an expression of marked anxiety on his features, "another such sign of weakness, and we are ruined. Unless you would have the fate of all others you dread, to close in upon you, barricade, as with iron, the gateways of your sympathy. There must not be a lingering regret; there should not be a trace left of an affection that must, for the present at all events, be obliterated. Open but the smallest

crevice of tenderness, and the enemy will rush in at it, and will bind you hand and foot before you are aware. The day may come when you will feel a love for your jailers greater than you have ever felt, for it will be based upon a divine compassion ; but you must not admit it until you have escaped from their clutches. Harden your heart, then, and arm yourself with such weapons as you feel you need, with which to burst open the doors of this moral prison-house. I also have my duties to perform, and must not linger longer here. Clareville, Juan, and Zarifa have full instructions ; you have only to follow them."

"Stay," he added, interrupting himself ; "there is one thing which I had almost forgotten. Be careful to take your diamonds with you."

"But they are not mine ; they belong to Madame Masollam ; only the Master always insisted that I should wear them, because, he said, they possessed a peculiar virtue. The necklace, which contains the largest, attracts so much attention, that I dare not wear it."

"They are all mine," replied Santalba, "and

I do indeed attach a value to them beyond what they are intrinsically worth. Do not hesitate, therefore, to obey me in this matter. And now, dear child, be brave and strong. It will not be long before we meet again; till then, God have you in His keeping."

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRELIMINARY SKIRMISH.

THE Count's precautions had been so well taken, that the delicate operation of a midnight flitting of three of the inmates of The Turrets was accomplished with all the secrecy necessary for its complete success. Amina abandoned the greater part of her wearing apparel, thus reducing her luggage to the smallest possible dimensions. Neither she nor the Masollams had appeared at dinner, after which meal the Count took the opportunity of explaining to Miss Hartwright the changes which had occurred in the moral relations which had hitherto held the party together, and the necessity of the step which three of them were about to take. He begged both Sebastian and Florence to retire early to their

own rooms, but not to rest. It was important, he said, that they should remain awake until the dawn of day, and he expressed his intention of keeping a like vigil. Florence asked why this was necessary, but failed to understand his explanations; and certainly, if I attempted to give them here, the reader would find himself in the same case.

“I do not wonder,” said the Count, “at my inability to make you understand this necessity. Its comprehension can only be acquired by experience, and by the realisation which experience alone gives of the very actual, and, I may almost say, tangible nature of the struggle in which we are engaged. For we literally do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but with powers that need a spiritual alertness which it is impossible to exercise during sleep. You may not be conscious while you are awake to-night that you are really helping our friends to escape safely, but you will be.”

“May I read?” asked Florence, somewhat alarmed at the dulness of the prospect.

“Yes; provided you do not become too much absorbed with what you are reading.”

“Shall you read?” she asked again.

“No; I shall be hard at work the whole time.”

“Hard at work at what?”

“Hard at work at hard blows, Miss Hartwright,” continued the Count, with sudden emphasis. “There will be an unexpected arrival to-morrow, and we shall have to meet an entirely new set of complications, and I am going to spend this night preparing for them. I should not have found that out had it not been for a hard blow or two given and returned this afternoon. So now, go to your rooms, both of you, and see that you don’t go to sleep on your posts.”

“Mayn’t I slip up and say good-bye to Amina?”

“Certainly not,” and the Count stalked off.

“How stern he is!” she remarked to her cousin. “I never saw him in that mood.”

“He has got heavier work on hand, I take it, than he ever had before, and so have we, so don’t let us begin by disobeying orders,” and off went Sebastian.

“Dear me!” mused Florence, thus abruptly left to her own meditations, “I suppose I shall

understand it all some day ; but how on earth humanity is to be benefited by these midnight elopings, and midnight watchings, and imaginary fightings, I can't make out. I wonder whether it is the devil himself the Count hits with his blows, and whether he ever throws his inkstand at his head, as Luther did. Of one thing I am certain," pursued Florence, as she pensively lighted her bedroom candle, "there is a ghost lately come into the house. I have heard his footsteps twice distinctly. And he is a very cold ghost, for there comes a rush of icy air past me at the same moment, so he can't be the devil,"—with which consolatory reflection she locked herself into her room for the night. Her window overlooked the avenue, and there was just glimmer enough of moonlight for her to see flitting along it the forms of Juan and Clareville's servant and Zarifa, carrying baggage, followed by Reginald himself, with a woman, whose figure was strange to her, on his arm, and Amina by her side. They were all walking on the turf by the side of the road, to avoid crunching on the gravel, and so silently glided into the darkness.

"They seem rather ghost-like," she murmured to herself, and then sat down to read Tupper's 'Proverbial Philosophy.' Now, to read a book to keep you awake, which you have expressly chosen in order not to be absorbed by it, is to expect from it a quality unknown in literature. At all events it was not possessed by the work under Florence's perusal. First her lids dropped, then the hand that was holding the book, then the book itself, and finally her head drooped over on one shoulder, her breathing became longer and deeper—in fact she fell fast asleep.

For about half an hour her respiration was tolerably regular, then became uneasy and oppressed, and at last gasping and spasmodic. Then with a violent effort, during which she clutched wildly in the air with her hands, she awoke. She rubbed her throat, as though unable to realise fully that the grip by which she thought she had been almost strangled was loosened. "I certainly distinctly felt the clasp of five fingers," she murmured to herself. The candle was still burning; and trembling, partly with alarm and partly with the vehemence of her recent effort, she looked round the

room, half expecting to see the assailant whose clutch she had just experienced, visible in some part of it. She was still conscious of a violent palpitation of the heart and a feeling of suffocation, and struggled to the window, and threw it up to let in the fresh night air. She leant out of it for some time, and with a gradual sense of relief she recovered her calm. Suddenly she was startled on looking down to perceive the figure of a man immediately beneath her. He looked up quickly and caught her intent gaze, and she saw it was the Count. He waved his hand to her as a sign of recognition, then fell on his knees, raised his hands in an attitude of prayer, remained in that posture for a few seconds, then rose and disappeared. She seized instinctively the meaning that the gesture was intended to convey. "Now I understand why he told me not to sleep," she thought, as she retreated to her bedside; "he must have felt I was in danger, and come there to guard me. This is what he meant by hard blows. How my heart still beats! I wonder whether some of the people who die so suddenly and mysteriously in the night,

of what is commonly called heart disease, might have lived if they had watched ;” and Florence dropped on her knees by the side of her bed, and did not rise from them till the first grey streak of dawn warned her that her vigil was at an end.

Those early rays streamed into other windows besides Florence’s. They awoke from an uneasy slumber Amina’s mother, with her feet tucked beneath her on the seat of a first-class carriage, and enabled Clareville to see clearly, for the first time, the features of her whom, if his aspirations were ever fulfilled, he must some day call mother-in-law. He was angry with himself for the shock this reflection seemed to produce upon his system. He had never before distinctly realised that he wanted to marry a Druse. Removed in her infancy from the debased and half-barbarous surroundings of the race to which she belonged, Amina had, under the influence of a Parisian training and Santalba’s enlightened guidance and tuition, developed into a product of the most advanced state of civilisation. Indeed her natural intelligence was so great, her power of observation so quick, and her op-

portunities for exercising them had been so varied, that she far excelled in mental development the average young lady of the period; while the strange and altogether exceptional experiences of her life had called into play a class of faculty which, in the mood in which Clareville then found himself, exercised a peculiar fascination over him. But the contemplation of her mother, fresh caught from the wilds of the Syrian mountains, excited in him another and counter-current of emotion, which jarred painfully on his more refined susceptibilities. He tried to picture to himself the likeness of the father, and found himself wondering whether this exterior of mind and person, which had so charmed him, might not, after all, be a veneer which time or surroundings would wear off, and expose the savage within. If, when you scratch the Russian you find the Tartar, what might not be the result of a similar process on his lovely *vis-à-vis*? How much of the Druse, pure and unmixed, would be revealed? and what was the Druse, pure and unmixed, when you got at it? He looked at the middle-aged specimen in the corner, and though her expression

was soft and amiable, and her features by no means uncomely, the inspection was not reassuring. There was an utter absence of that mind, or rather soul, which gave life and animation to Amina's features, and constituted their principal charm. Her father must have been a remarkable man, he thought ; and his meditations diverged into speculations on the laws of heredity and the influences of environment, and the nature and extent of the change of which human nature might be rendered susceptible by it. As he thus pondered, he stole a glance at Amina, and found her large soft eyes fixed upon him with an expression of intense anxiety and melancholy. He felt conscious that the sympathy which had been established between them enabled her to probe, as it were, into the very inmost recesses of his thoughts, and his blood rose to his cheek as the consciousness rushed in upon him that they were unworthy of her. Instinctively he sought to read hers, and the turmoil in his breast increased as he became aware that the effort had, as it were, opened the door by which he became a sharer of the turmoil to which she was a prey. What was his

conflict of emotion, what his suffering, compared to hers? He had thought a moment before that it might cost him an effort to retain the full force of his love for her; but what was that effort compared to the one in which she was engaged, in realising that a wide gulf had been fixed between her and the woman she was henceforth to call mother—whom she was henceforth to cherish with a daughter's love, and nourish with a filial tenderness—to whom she was henceforth to be bound by closest ties of duty, and with whom she was to create new bonds of sympathy? He found she was wondering why there should be so much effort in all this—how it was that the knowledge of the relationship did not create spontaneously a deeper love for her whom she now knew to be her mother; and he also perceived that the pain of this reflection was intensified and overshadowed by a great fear which had invaded her soul, and so crushed her spirit that her physical frame seemed to quiver beneath the pressure—and this was, that the discovery of her race and origin might cost her his love. He saw as with illumined sight that her natu-

ral life depended on elements which she derived from that love. The sudden rupture of the tie which had bound her to the Masollams, the shock of the attendant circumstances which had produced that rupture, left her now so stripped and bare of human sympathy and support, that he knew he had become essential to her life. He saw more than this : for a moment he imagined that she had sunk in the struggle, and that she had passed away from his existence, leaving him desolate and alone, because he had refused to sustain her with all the force of his affection ; and he, too, felt that with her his own vital energies had sped, and that his own hold on life had thus become dependent on hers. And the cloud which had overshadowed him passed away, as the formula in words suggested themselves to his mind, "One in life, and one in death." And when he looked up at Amina again a faint colour had risen to her cheeks ; but her eyes were cast down, and tears trembled on the lashes, and he knew that the flush was the current of returning life, and that the tears were tears of joy.

"Do you remember," he said softly to her,

with a smile, "when I once asked you to tell me something of your former history, your saying that you would choose your own time and method for gratifying my curiosity?"

"Yes," she replied. "I should have said that God would choose it. I have erred in many things, and in none more than in trying to use the little knowledge that I do possess, in order unduly to impress the imaginations of those I desired to influence."

"To assume that they have imaginations which it is easy to impose upon," returned Reginald; "and in some cases you run the risk—as I am now free to confess you did with me the first time we met in the House of Commons—of creating the exactly opposite impression to that which you desired to produce."

"I see it now,—it is the trick of the charlatan and the impostor. Looking back, I observe that it has been unconsciously growing upon me under the influence of constant contact with Masollam, who, of late especially, lost no opportunity of thus playing upon the credulity of those whom he made his dupes. Now that my eyes are opened, I am amazed

at the extent to which I myself was one of them, and at the insidious process by which the personal conceits engendered by such exceptional faculties as he possessed, are able at last to dominate the whole moral nature, blinding alike those who have attained to, and those who are struggling to enter upon, this higher development of human faculty. Considering the fearful dangers which attend both the achievement and the endeavour, it is no wonder that God has so jealously guarded it with tests and ordeals, that few are prepared to make the attempt. The experience," she added, after a pause, "of the last twenty-four hours, has been one of such deep humiliation and discouragement, that, had it not been for that best and truest of earthly friends, Santalba, I think my reason would have given way under the strain."

"As it is," interrupted Reginald, "they have removed my doubts, dissipated my fears, established my hopes, confirmed my resolutions, and united me for ever in aspiration, and in daily effort and practice, with those whom henceforth I love best in the world." He would have said more, when he felt him-

self suddenly checked by a force even more powerful than the passion to which he was about to give utterance. "Do you know," he added, "whether you have any brother alive?"

Amina looked up, a little surprised at his sudden change of tone. "I will ask my mother," she said.

"You had one," Sada answered; "but he was killed that dreadful night when you were saved."

"Will you tell her," pursued Clareville, "that I hope she will let me take the place of the son that she has lost; and that I look forward some day to going to her native mountains, and having a home there as well as in my own country?"

"I think I had better not tell her that," said Amina, blushing and looking slightly embarrassed, for Reginald had never before expressed himself so clearly as under cover of this ingenious remark. "I will tell her, if you like, that you hope some day to visit her in her own country." And for the remainder of the journey Amina was fully engaged in answering her mother's questions and satisfy-

ing her curiosity in regard to the events of her own past life.

Santalba had furnished Clareville with an address in London to which he was to proceed with his charges, and where he was to await his arrival. As they drove out of the station, they met a stream of cabs carrying passengers to the early Northern express ; and, in a hansom which shot past, Reginald thought he recognised the face of Charles Hartwright. Nor was he mistaken. The three weeks which had elapsed since the proprietor of The Turrets had taken his hurried departure from Tongsley, had sufficed for him to place his family in lodgings in France, and to enter into negotiations with some foreign capitalists, with regard to an enterprise which involved his own immediate return to London on a short business visit, during which he determined to run down to his old home from Saturday to Monday, with a view to examining the situation with more calmness than he had been able to do when he left it, and, if expedient, to carry off his daughter. There had been a tone of mystery and reserve in her letters to her mother and sister, so foreign to the usual style

of her correspondence, that the curiosity and suspicion of both her parents had in different degrees become aroused; and the sight of Reginald Clareville and Miss Masollam together in a cab with an unknown lady, which had flashed suddenly upon Mr Hartwright's vision as he passed them, was eminently calculated to stimulate the sentiments by which he was at the moment animated. In order, however, that the reader may appreciate the position of matters as he found them on his arrival at The Turrets the same afternoon, it is necessary for us to make a more rapid journey than Hartwright to that interesting centre of operations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE OPENS.

It had become, for some days previous to the flight which we have described in the last chapter, the habit of Mr Carabet to pay a matutinal visit to his sister. Now that he had been so fully taken into the singular confidences of that lady, these interviews became more necessary than ever—and, in fact, he was closeted with her at the very moment that Charles Hartwright was taking his ticket for Tongsley.

“Shall you see Clareville again before he leaves?” he asked, after listening to Madame Masollam’s account of the interview she had had with Reginald on the previous day.

“It is not necessary; he is satisfied with the assurances which I gave him of my sym-

pathy, and my promise that I would use my influence to forward his wishes with regard to Amina. I strongly impressed upon him at the same time the necessity of patience. It only remains now for me to see the girl herself."

"It was a bold game," said Carabet. "Supposing she had taken a different view of the Master's proposal?"

"I should have been vanquished—irretrievably vanquished. I have felt the Master for months past struggling to free himself from my influence. His tyranny, had he escaped from it, would have been insupportable. He might have driven me to desperate measures. As it is, he has hanged himself with the rope I gave him, and my supremacy is assured. These foolish Western sisters of mine, who are struggling for what they call 'woman's rights,' little imagine that their battle is being fought and won. They don't yet understand that every victory which is won in the region of external nature, is only the re-enactment of a victory which has been already gained in the sphere of internal nature—that, in fact, all human events here are but the representations of events which have already transpired else-

where ; and that hosts innumerable may be engaged in a warfare, the scene of which is limited to the organisms of half-a-dozen human beings, who thus become the force-transmitting mediums into the outer world, of the results which have been achieved in the inner. But I must stop preaching, and go and give Amina her instructions. The perceptions of the Master have become so blunted and confused, that he positively imagines that she was so overcome with the honour of his proposal, that she fainted from joy and triumph. I have kept him in that delusion, which I wish to dispel in my own way. Do not go till I come back."

Carabet had not long to wait. In less than five minutes his sister returned, with her usual aspect of severe imperturbability considerably ruffled.

"Amina has fled," she cried, "with her mother and Zarifa, under the charge of Mr Clareville !"

"Impossible !" exclaimed Carabet. "How have you found it out?"

"Oh, there is no mystery about it now. After looking in vain for Amina in her own

room and Sada's, which I also found empty, I went in search of Zarifa, and stumbled upon Juan, the Count's servant, who had the impertinence to say that he assisted in carrying their luggage and helping them off, a little after midnight. Was I not right when I told you the Count was brewing mischief?"

"Well," said Carabet, "the Master is just the man to call him to account for it."

"Not now—not now. O cunning Count! you waited till that Delilah had shorn his locks, and then you spirited her away!" apostrophised Madame Masollam, evidently not without a certain admiration for the tactics which had been displayed by Santalba. "And you are lingering now," she went on, "to give him his *coup de grâce*; but if the man is fallen, the woman has risen: it is me you must meet! *à nous deux*—to us two now!"

"Then it would seem you have another man to vanquish before the woman's rights victory can be said to be assured?" said Carabet, with one of those sly glances in which his sister always read a doubt that aggravated her. She gave a little click with her tongue,

and threw her head back with a gesture of contempt.

“I will go and break the news to the Master,” she said; “he will be more rudely undeceived than I intended. Meantime you had better have your breakfast here: we shall be sure to want you;” and she left the room.

There was a peculiar wildness in Masollam’s eye, altogether foreign to its usual expression, as he listened to Madame’s revelation of what had occurred. For the first time that astute woman observed that his mind had lost its balance, and observed it possibly not without a secret sense of satisfaction.

“How are the mighty fallen!” was her first thought. “What use can be made of the mighty after they have fallen, if their fall can only be concealed from those who still believe in and trust them?” was her second.

“Santalba must be sent for at once, and crushed,” was what she said.

“Crushed!—crushed!—ah, yes,” and Masollam ground his teeth; “but how?”

“With his own money. If he ceases to obey us, he is a beggar. Amina and Sada must instantly be restored to us—above all, Sada.”

“Why above all Sada? I say above all Amina!”

“Because with Sada we can always hold Amina.”

“And with Amina can we not always hold Sada?”

“No. She would never put herself in our power again, but would seek help to steal her daughter from us, and would find it. Besides, she is worth more to us, for other reasons, than the other; but we will insist on both. I will bring my brother, who is here, to you, and you must send him instantly for Santalba.”

The old man bowed his head in acquiescence. “Go,” he said to Carabet, when that worthy appeared, “and tell Count Santalba that I desire to see him here immediately.” And then he mumbled, as if to himself, “The diamonds!—the diamonds!”

Madame Masollam’s sharp ears caught the words. “Ah,” she exclaimed, with a start, “that he should be the first to think of them!” and jumping from her chair, she hurried from the room. “Stolen!” she said, when, after an interval of a few moments, she returned. “She has gone without leaving a

trace. Had she not taken them, she would have left a line to say so."

"I did not think it of her," murmured the old man. "It is not possible, Tigranuhe."

"I tell you it is possible. Everything is possible when Santalba inspires."

"Well, we must arrest her for theft. They are mine. Santalba gave them to me."

"Yes ; for a certain purpose. Did you apply them to it ?"

Masollam did not answer, and his wife remained buried in thought, her countenance meanwhile assuming a peculiarly vicious expression.

Meantime Carabet, who had sped on his mission, found the Count in Hartwright's private den, which he had appropriated to his own uses since he had virtually taken charge of the domestic concerns of the establishment.

"Tell the Master," said Santalba, after he had heard the message, "that, if he wishes to see me, I shall be happy to receive him here, but that I refuse to go to him."

"Do you venture," replied Carabet, "to send him such a message ? Are you not aware

that the consequences may be terrible to you ? ”

“ To him, you mean. But you came, I think, to give me a message, not advice. Be good enough to return at once with mine, or I also may be tempted to advise.”

The sternness of the Count's manner was so different from anything that Carabet had ever observed in it before, that he judged it most prudent to withdraw without further remark.

He had no sooner done so than the Count hastily rose and proceeded to the door of Florence Hartwright's room. Knocking at it, he called out, in reply to the query from within, “ Come without delay to your father's smoking-room.” He found Sebastian already dressed and writing. “ Come with me at once,” he said ; and Sebastian, leaving his MS. on his table, instantly complied.

“ I wish both you and your cousin Florence to be present at an important interview which I am about to have with Masollam.”

“ But this is not the way to his room.”

“ No ; but it is to mine. Understand that I win a point in the fight if I force him on to my ground, instead of meeting him on his.”

“ Why, what on earth can it matter whose room you see him in ? ”

“ You would need to understand more than I can explain now to appreciate the importance of this consideration. You must get rid of the idea that the influences which surround us, and whose help is invoked in the struggle, for the right, or the wrong, as the case may be, are independent of all material considerations, because the matter of which they are composed differs from ours. They have still too much in common with us for that. I have summoned Florence, because numbers are important as well as place.”

They had scarcely entered the room when Carabet reappeared.

“ The Master,” he said, “ declines absolutely to come to you, and desires me to say that if you refuse to go to him, the consequences be on your own head.”

“ Return,” said Santalba, “ and tell the Master that I leave this afternoon for France, with Mr and Miss Hartwright, on important legal affairs which nearly concern him, and in regard to which I shall be prevented from conferring with him amicably, unless he is in this

room within ten minutes from this time." And the Count drew out his watch. "It is now ten minutes to nine."

When Carabet duly delivered this message, Madame Masollam trembled—not for herself, for she was a woman of undaunted courage, but for him, through whom, to outward seeming at all events, the battle was to be mainly fought; for she knew her husband's true nature, and that the leonine aspect, the flashing eye, the sonorous voice, the imposing and often menacing gesture, all contributed to form a mask, behind which there cowered a most craven spirit—a spirit which, even in the days when it was animated by high and lofty motives, needed encouragement and support, but which, now that it was paralysed by a selfish passion, and a sense of conscious apostasy to the faith which had made it strong, was a feeble, quivering thing, that could only be galvanised into audacity at moments when danger was remote.

"I wish you had never sent for him," he murmured pettishly; "he might have remained here quietly, and with time and opportunity I could have regained his allegiance. Now you have precipitated a rupture,

and it is we who are forced to render an account to him, not he who is summoned to answer for his conduct to us. I don't want to see him or call him to account for anything. Suppose we send him a friendly message of adieu, and let him go. He will not carry out his threat. His old affection for me will prevent that. Indeed I cannot understand the reason of this sudden change of feeling about me."

"I can," remarked Madame, grimly. Masollam looked up and tried to read her meaning, but failed. "Don't you see," she pursued, "what you will lose by shrinking from this struggle? Not only do you allow the diamonds, which are a fortune in themselves, to be taken from you; but," she added with vicious emphasis, striking the one string which she knew would vibrate, "you lose the girl who stole them. And, what I think of far more importance, you will lose, unless you take immediate measures to prevent it, Sebastian Hartwright, at the moment when his capture, with all his great wealth, was almost assured; while Santalba will win him, and perhaps invoke the law to attack your interests in France, where you are most vulnerable, and

the whole fabric, which it has taken us years of effort and of suffering to rear, will be crumbled to the dust. Do you not see that defeat means that hundreds who now believe in and trust you, all through Europe and the East, will lose confidence in you? that the loss of that confidence means the loss of the material benefits which it confers, and may involve large pecuniary claims against you? Pluck up your courage, and since he seems to fear to face us, let us go and face him. Carabet, you accompany us. We shall be three to one."

"Three to two," interrupted Carabet. "Mr Sebastian Hartwright is with him. It only wants four minutes to the time specified; you have not a moment to lose."

"Hasten on before, then, and tell them we are coming." Madame Masollam laid her hand on her husband's head. He sighed heavily several times, and then, with what seemed an almost superhuman effort of will, he started to his feet. His attitude became erect and commanding, his eyes sparkled, his wrinkles seemed to vanish as if by magic.

"Come!" he exclaimed, as he crossed the room with a light springy step, "I cannot

bear myself thus long. We must win at the first onslaught or not at all. I shall not have strength for a second."

On entering Santalba's room, Masollam approached the Count, who gravely rose to meet him, with a jaunty and cordial manner. If he was surprised at finding Florence there as well as her cousin, he did not show it. After greeting his three guests with an air of paternal affection, he threw himself into one easy-chair, while his wife appropriated that from which the Count had just risen. "Sit down, my son," he said to the latter. "Carabet! put a chair for Miss Hartwright near me. Now, let us make ourselves comfortable and have a good chat. We are not going to discuss secrets, I imagine."

"That is as you wish," replied Santalba.

"How as I wish?" Then turning suddenly towards Florence, he exclaimed, "What's this? You are in great suffering, my daughter. You should be in bed, child. Mr Sebastian, help your cousin to her room."

Florence trembled. She struggled to rise, in obedience to the old man, but a still stronger influence seemed to nail her to her chair; at

the same moment she was conscious of a sharp spasm of pain in her side.

"Miss Hartwright, you are ill. I know it; take my arm," said Madame Masollam, rising.

But the Count quickly interposed, "Let me help you," he said; and seizing Florence's outstretched hand more abruptly than strict politeness warranted, he placed her on a couch, and seated himself beside her.

Madame Masollam bit her lip.

"Sebastian," continued the Count in a low but concentrated tone, "this is no moment for conventionalities. Come here and sit on the other side of your cousin, and hold her hand. Do not let it go without my permission."

"That cuts two ways," said Masollam, with a sneer. "Remember, Miss Hartwright, it was the Count, not I, who told you to give your hand to your cousin. Mr Sebastian, I congratulate you. I have striven for this. The Count has been the only obstacle. As he has just said, this is no moment for conventionalities; at the same time it is I, and not he, who am responsible to Mr Hartwright for his daughter and her future. I think the Count had some idea of leaving to-day, and asking

you both to accompany him. I am afraid, under the circumstances, I must request you to adhere to the promise you made me yesterday, and remain until Mr Hartwright, whom I expect shortly, arrives ; and I am sure Miss Hartwright will also see the impropriety of quitting my roof without a chaperon, although, as we are to ignore conventionalities, there may be none in her sitting with her hand locked in that of her betrothed for an indefinite time."

Florence blushed, and hastily withdrew the offending member. In fact both the young people were so utterly paralysed at finding the act so unexpectedly construed into a public announcement of their betrothal, that their first and natural impulse was to repudiate it by unclasping their hands.

"I consider your remarks insulting, both to Miss Hartwright and myself, Mr Masollam," said Sebastian, flushing angrily. "My cousin is of age ; I am her near relative, and am perfectly ready to bear the whole responsibility with her father of taking her to him, if she is willing to accompany me."

"I pass over your heated and disrespectful

language, young man," retorted Masollam, "in consideration of your youth and inexperience. I cannot interfere with your decision to leave to-day ; but," he added, after a pause, during which he remained with his hands shading his eyes, "I can with your leaving ; and," he continued, turning sharply on Santalba, "I shall do so, unless you at once write a telegram to Amina and her mother to return here at once. Give me that, and I release you."

"Release me !" exclaimed the Count.

"Yes ; for you at least know, if this young man does not, that it rests with me now whether Miss Hartwright will be able to travel to-day or not. And you also know that you will not leave without her."

"I know more than that," exclaimed the Count, suddenly springing to his feet, and advancing towards Masollam with a gesture so menacing, that the old man seemed to shrivel in his chair from terror lest personal violence should be offered to him. The alarm by which for a moment he was invaded was, like all his other emotions, far more intense than can be realised by those whose dense

natures close them to nervous and unreasoning fear, though a panic is a phenomenon which, as we all know, when it affects a mass of people, overcomes, by its magnetic impulse, the densest among them. In a hyper-sensitised nature like Masollam's, unable to oppose any resistance to the overpowering rush of forces projected into it by one to whose influence it had been rendered susceptible by the habit of years, the sensation of vague apprehension became almost intolerable. After a desperate effort to encounter with his rapidly dimming eyes, Santalba's flashing gaze, Masollam allowed the lids to drop over them, while the tremor of his lip, and the growing pallor of his complexion, betrayed the moral anguish he was suffering. Like a man groping in the dark, he extended both hands, one of which was promptly seized by Madame Masollam, who made a sign to her brother, which he instantly obeyed, to take the other. Both at the same time approached their chairs on either side of the old man, and slightly lifted his arms, until, obeying the direction thus given, Masollam rose from his seat, and as he did so his cheeks slowly coloured, his eyes

opened, his countenance regained its serenity, and his tall imposing figure, venerable aspect, and flowing beard, reminded Sebastian of Moses presiding over the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites ; and he remembered on that occasion how it is recorded that —“When Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed ;” for which reason it is further stated that “Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side ;” and he wondered whether similar influences were now at work, and whether Carabet and his sister, by performing the functions of Aaron and Hur, were securing a victory for him whom they were thus supporting. This reflection impressed itself upon him so forcibly, that he instinctively felt that he and his cousin should range themselves by the side of the Count ; and as he rose, Florence followed his example, apparently under the same impulse. While all this was taking place, which takes some time to narrate, Santalba had never faltered in his speech.

“I know more than that,” he continued,

and the outstretched arm with which he emphasised each point of his denunciation needed no extraneous support ; every motion was instinct with nervous vigour, and his tones vibrated under the force of his concentrated energy. "I know that you, chosen for a great work, have been false to the divine commission ; that you have sold the divine gifts for gold ; that you have polluted the divine love with lust ; that, to attain your own personal and unholy ends, you have violated the divine instinct within you, and have outraged and defiled the principle you were charged to hold sacred. As the devil's flunky you retain the divine livery, and in that holy garb have deceived me into lending you that aid, moral and financial, which enabled you to obtain a footing in this house, by means of which you hoped to accomplish your vile and selfish purposes. To substitute her whom you call your daughter, for this woman whom you call your wife ; to obtain, by a fraudulent profession of high and lofty aims, possession of this young man's wealth. Silence ! I command you," for at this point Masollam had so far regained courage and composure, that

he made a very decided effort to interrupt the Count, which the latter could only check by clenching his outstretched hand, thus again making appeal to his physical cowardice. "Once sunk from your high estate, the *descensus Averni* was easy. The step from traitor to impostor was then a necessary one, and hypocrisy, lying, and swindling became your trade. That the scales have been so long in falling from my eyes, is due to the fact that for some years past you have avoided coming into close contact with me. How far I consent to leave you now in peace will depend upon the manner in which you conduct yourself after this warning. You have in your own sensations at this moment the best evidence that you are the mere wreck of what you once were. And I defy alike your malice and your vengeance. Now, do you still dare to resist me, and require the télégram you have demanded from me?"

Masollam, raising himself to his full height, and extending his arms above his head, exclaimed in a loud hollow voice, "I do!" and as he spoke he sank in a heap on the floor, nearly bearing with him his two supporters,

who made a vigorous attempt to check the suddenness of the collapse. Florence impulsively rushed to his assistance, and before the Count could interpose, Madame Masollam, apparently overcome by the violence of her feelings, had thrown herself into the girl's arms. To Sebastian's astonishment, instead of supporting the fainting form, his cousin no sooner found herself thus encumbered, than she made a violent effort to disentangle herself, in which she was energetically assisted by Santalba, who led her staggering to the couch ; while Madame Masollam, making what seemed a miraculously rapid recovery, leant over to her brother and whispered, " I have struck the last blow. You chafe his hands, while I rub his temples," and under these united ministrations, Masollam was gradually restored to consciousness. Meantime the Count had rung the bell, and on the appearance of Juan, directed him at once to assist Mr Masollam to his room.

" This poor child's generous impulse," said Santalba to Sebastian when the three were alone, " will, I am afraid, enable Masollam to carry out his threat of detaining her. She

will be quite unable to leave to-day, at all events."

"I had been feeling a pain in my side ever since I came into the room," murmured Florence in a low voice; "but when Madame Masollam threw herself upon me, I had to exert myself suddenly to prevent her falling, and it became so sharp that I nearly fainted."

"Thus, you see," remarked the Count, "this attack may be accounted for on grounds which would quite satisfy the medical profession. The action of Miss Hartwright's heart is organically weak. She is often conscious of pain there, and a sudden violent emotion or effort is very apt to increase it. Mr Masollam's nervous attack could be equally rationally explained as the effect of intense cerebral excitement; yet deliberately to produce these results, under the conditions you have witnessed, with a view to a specific purpose, required some knowledge of the method of operation of the forces to which they are primarily due. Hence it is that the consequences of the struggle which has just taken place, are more far-reaching than if they had not been intelligently brought about. And

now," continued the Count, addressing Florence, "you must allow me, Miss Hartwright, to apply a little of that knowledge remedially, and I trust I shall be able in a great measure to neutralise the injury which has been inflicted upon you." But as the Count's treatment differs from any which has yet been recognised by science, I will spare the reader any attempt to describe it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ENEMY RECEIVES A REINFORCEMENT.

THE same afternoon, while Florence Hartwright was lying with closed eyes on the couch in the drawing-room, still somewhat languid and exhausted from the morning's experiences, but nevertheless refreshed by a peaceful slumber, from which she had just awoke, she became aware that her solitude had been invaded, and, looking up, saw to her surprise that the intruder was none other than her own father. The apparition was so sudden and unexpected, that she could scarcely at first realise that she was not dreaming; then, springing to her feet, she found herself in a moment folded in his arms.

"My dear Florence," was Charles Hart-

wright's first exclamation, "how pale and ill you look! What is the matter?"

"Only a slight attack of my old heart weakness," she replied; "but I am much better now, and shall be all right to-morrow. And after all, it was providential; for had I been well enough to travel, I should have been on my way to London by this time, and should have just missed you. Was it not fortunate?"

"On your way to London! Why, your last letter said nothing about any intention of leaving."

"Oh, a great deal has happened since then; things change with such extraordinary rapidity in this house. Mr Clareville and Miss Masollam have both left it, and the Count, Sebastian, and I were to follow to-day. And then I think we were all going on at once to France, where I should have joined you."

"It is lucky, indeed, that I arrived in time to put a stop to such mad plans. I am not surprised at you, for you never think of such things; but I am at the Count. He, at least, is man of the world enough to have some regard to the ordinary decencies and pro-

prieties of life. If Miss Masollam has so little respect as to go off alone with Mr Clareville, it is *raison de plus* why you should not think of joining them."

"But she did not go off alone, papa; she went with her mother."

"You said Mr Clareville and Miss Masollam had left: you did not mention Madame Masollam."

"But Madame Masollam is not her mother," pursued Florence; and observing her father's amazed and bewildered expression, she continued, "it is a most extraordinary story. I don't yet know all the ins and outs of it; but it seems that the first thing Sebastian discovered on his arrival here was that Carabet, the curiosity-dealer, had an Eastern lady imprisoned in his house, where she had been for some months, exciting great curiosity in the minds of the servants and neighbours: that the first thing the Masollams did on reaching Tongsley, even before they came here, was to visit her; and that shortly after you had all left, they secretly removed her here in the middle of the night, where they have kept her concealed. They could do this,

you know, because all their own servants were in their confidence. It seems that both the Count and Amina knew it, and that the latter used often to visit her, without having the least idea it was her own mother, until, owing to a great rupture between the Masollams and the Count—the exact cause and nature of which it would be too long and complicated to explain, indeed I don't know that I understand it thoroughly myself—the whole truth came out, and the Count managed the escape of Amina and her mother and Mr Clareville secretly the night before last, for the Masollams would never have consented to it. Indeed Sebastian hinted something about old Masollam wanting to marry Amina. She is no relation to him, it seems ; but wouldn't it have been quite too horrid ? I am sure I don't wonder that she ran away, especially as she is in love with Mr Clareville, who of course was only too glad to be her escort. I looked out of my window, and saw them tramp off down the approach to where the carriage was waiting for them outside the gate. I was awfully anxious, you know, to see what Amina's

mother was like, but it was too dark. So, you see, my going away would not have been the least improper after all, for the Count and Sebastian would have been quite protection enough up to London, and, after that, Amina's mother would have been my chaperon."

The rapidity with which this strange narrative was poured by Florence into her father's ears, so completely bewildered that gentleman, that it was some moments before he could seize the new situation thus presented to him sufficiently to reply. At last he said—

"So that was the woman I saw in the cab this morning with Clareville and Miss Masollam; is that the only name you know her by? Is she anything else besides Amina's mother? Mrs Anybody, for instance?"

Florence had never thought of this, and hesitated. "No," she said at last, "I don't know whether she is Mrs Anybody or not. I haven't the least idea who she is, or where she comes from. At least I know she comes from somewhere in the East; but I forgot to ask Sebastian anything more, and I never saw Amina after she had made the discovery."

"Humph!" grunted Charles Hartwright;

“but yet you feel certain that she would make a perfectly satisfactory chaperon. It seems to me that an unknown female from the East is not just the kind of person that I should wish you to go travelling about Europe with ; at all events, until I know something more about her.”

“The Count is sure to know, and he would never have consented to it had he not been satisfied that it was all right. Does he know that you have arrived, papa ?”

“I don’t suppose he does. I told Sharp, who let me in, to tell Mr Masollam I had come.”

At this moment the door opened, and the domestic in question appeared.

“Mr Masollam is extremely sorry, sir, that he is too unwell to leave his room. He bids me say that he hopes you will excuse him from trying to make the effort to come downstairs, and do him the favour to step up and see him.”

“Shamming, as usual, I suppose, and trying to lord it over every one,” grumbled Hartwright, apparently hesitating whether he should accept the invitation.

"No, indeed, papa ; this time, I can assure you, he really is ill. I saw him this morning, when he was seized with a sudden attack, and fell to the ground almost unconscious."

"Well, child, stay here quietly till I come back ; trust me for probing the strange proceedings of these people to the bottom."

But Florence did not think it incumbent on her to display the virtue of filial obedience in this instance ; and no sooner was her father's back turned than she slipped off to the sanctum of the Count. She found him closeted with Sebastian.

"Papa has come," she said ; and she rapidly narrated what had passed between them.

"In this event," said the Count, turning to Sebastian ; and apparently continuing the conversation which Florence's appearance had interrupted, "you observe an illustration of what I was just saying. We poor finite human beings think we are playing the game of life ourselves ; but we are nothing but the pawns on the terrestrial chessboard, and even the invisible hands that move us are but the instruments of intelligence where the force is

generated, under the impulsion of which hands and pawns alike are moved."

"And yet the analogy is not complete," returned Sebastian ; "for we, whom you call the pawns, and the invisible beings which act upon us, whom you call the hands, differ in this respect from actual pawns and hands, that we are thinking and feeling matter, with minds and wills of our own, while they are inert matter."

"With minds and wills, yes ; of our own, in the sense of absolute freedom, no. We cannot resist obedience to impulse, even though we are permitted the sense of directing our choice as between conflicting impulses. And in proportion as the intelligence of the human pieces, who are thus controlled and played with, are developed, do they begin to understand the rules of the game, and the meaning of the players, and thus become able to co-operate intelligently with them. Of course all analogies are imperfect, and can only be used to convey an illustration of an idea that is not susceptible of any definite analysis in words ; but it would be more perfect if we suppose the game played, as it sometimes is,

on a lawn, with men and women for pieces. And imagine that, on the one side, the pieces made moves of their own, or resisted the will of the player, hesitating and discussing its merits in the hearing of the other side ; who, perfectly trained and intelligent, instantly responded to the slightest touch."

"From which I suppose you mean," said Sebastian, "that, in bringing Mr Hartwright here at this exact juncture, the adversary has made a new move."

"That is exactly what I mean ; and you observe how intensely interesting life becomes, when it resolves itself into one long and fierce combat between the intelligences and their forces that make for the right, and those which are ranged to resist it. The man who is absorbed in his own personal interests and ambitions knows nothing of it ; for he does not recognise any forces opposed to him outside the sphere of his own mundane hopes and fears. He struggles blindly with events, as the sailor does with the elements, caring only for his own cargo, and making only for his port of destination. But he who, divested of all personal inclination, enrolls

himself in this mortal life in the host of those who, from unseen realms, are combating for the universal good, begins soon to be conscious that there are rival influences at work, who use the base passions of earthly men with which to frustrate that grand endeavour; and they finally get to perceive a certain method in the operations of both sides, and to recognise the fact that the success of the side on which they are fighting, must depend upon the strength of the altruistic sentiment which animates the combatants; for in proportion to that depends, in its turn, their receptivity to the divine impulse under which they combat. Hence it often happens that we who are engaged intelligently in this strange warfare, find ourselves impelled to adopt a course of action, the ultimate bearing of which is concealed from us. Often it is even difficult for us to justify our acts to ourselves on any principle of common-sense; often we really believe we are struggling to accomplish a purpose, which, after we have failed, we find did in fact achieve another and altogether different result, the meaning of which now becomes clear, though it would have been im-

possible of achievement, except under the mask of another design,—in other words, we are constantly making feints to deceive the enemy, and are ourselves kept in ignorance at the time that they are feints; but as we come in the course of a long experience to be more familiar with the divine tactics, and to recognise the marvellous operation of the laws which govern the forces at work on both sides, we become overwhelmed at the magnitude of the struggle; and as our lives become wholly devoted to it, we recognise in every minute detail which affects them, its bearing upon the vast issues at stake, and are at once crushed by a sense of our own insignificance, and uplifted by the stupendous consideration that no one is too insignificant to affect, by his own personal effort, the destiny of that whole human race of which he forms a minute fractional part.” After a pause, during which the Count seemed buried in thought, and his listeners remained silent, he resumed: “And now to apply these considerations to the matter in hand. This human battle-field that I have been describing is like a kaleidoscope; each moment its aspect changes, and we have

an entirely new set of combinations to deal with. We can only meet them by watching narrowly the indications presented by events as they transpire ; by a rigid exclusion of personal desire and inclination ; and by excessive promptitude in action, when we become aware what the divine will in regard to that action is to be."

"It is just that point," said Sebastian, "that puzzles me. Of course, so long as you are with me to direct me, I can follow your guidance ; but when I am alone, how am I to know when I am to trust my own?"

"This is a knowledge," replied Santalba, "which can only be gained by experience. You will constantly, at first, imagine you are following the divine guidance, only to discover that you have been mistaken, that you acted under an impulse, which you imagined at the time to be pure, but which a more rigid analysis will prove to you was mixed ; but you must not be discouraged by such mistakes, which can, by some new and unexpected turn of the kaleidoscope, be overruled for good. Better too great recklessness in the effort to do God's will, than too much caution in trying

to be quite sure first that you know what it is. Purity of motive is the essential condition. Courage, coolness, and confidence come with it. By degrees you will discover that when you are on a wrong track in action, you will be conscious of a vague sense of uneasiness and discomfort; instantly take note of it. You may have to hark back, or you may be on the brink of a danger of which this is the warning. Never neglect a moral or physical sensation of any kind. Every emotion, every pain, has its lesson, if you but knew how to learn it. They are so many sign-posts to point the way. Remember, when a man becomes wholly God's, nothing can happen to him in which, if he listens attentively, he cannot hear the divine voice. He will soon find that the perpetual habit of instant obedience to it will give him plenty to do. There is no fear in the case of such an one that time will hang heavy on his hands. In proportion as he piles the work on himself, will it be piled upon him by Him who was the greatest burden-bearer that ever lived, and who still presides over the great work for which He died; but the strength given for each additional burden

is only another word for love ; for what is love but potency, and what is that but joy ? This is, for the present, what you must do, my children, to get the divine guidance you desire. You must not expect in yourselves infallibility. You will often stumble and fall. Your training must needs be long and painful, but ‘covet earnestly the best gifts,’ and take courage from this promise, which I am now permitted to make. When you have approved yourselves faithful and valiant soldiers, and passed through the ordeals which are necessary to test your fortitude and fidelity, ‘yet I will show unto you a more excellent way.’ And now leave me, for the light I am now about to invoke can only shine upon me in solitude.”

CHAPTER XXV.

MASOLLAM UNMASKS HIS BATTERIES.

WHEN Sharp entered Masollam's room with the tidings that Charles Hartwright had arrived, Madame, who had never left him since the catastrophe of the morning, uttered an exclamation of triumph. "Ha!" she ejaculated, "that was a providential blow I dealt his daughter at the last moment. Had it not been for that, they would have escaped us."

"And Santalba says my perceptions are blunted," added the old man. "Did I not foretell his coming; and see that, to save the situation, it was necessary, at all hazards, that Florence should be kept from leaving? Has Carabet gone home?"

"Yes; but he will return this evening."

"That is well; we shall need him."

“It is well we sent him before us into this country. He is intelligent, and has been reading the newspapers. He made a suggestion, after the struggle of this morning, which strikes me as important, and he is coming back to discuss it more fully. We shall be better able to judge of its value after we have seen Charles Hartwright. See, here he comes.” And as she spoke, Hartwright entered the room.

He bowed stiffly to the lady, and extended his hand coldly to Masollam, who lay extended on his couch, and responded to his salutation with an air of extreme suffering and weariness.

“You must take me as you find me, Mr Hartwright,” he said. “I am not good for much, but I rejoice all the more at your arrival, for I have been very uneasy of late about your daughter’s health, and had you not appeared, should have taken the liberty to summon you by telegraph. I have been deceived, Mr Hartwright—basely, foully deceived—by the man whom of all others I trusted; for to me he owes his life—ay, and more than his life—and he has repaid me by

the blackest ingratitude. He has stolen my money, he has attacked my honour, and, worse than all, he has betrayed the sacred cause to which he was pledged. You are doubtless surprised to hear me use such language about Santalba, for it is of him that I speak; and possibly in early days, when you and your brother knew him, he was still an honest man—he had not then become versed in those arts of hypocrisy and dissimulation to which I have fallen a victim. He may perchance then have had some regard for truth, some respect for feminine virtue, some generosity of disposition; but he has now, under the specious mask of disinterestedness, become lying, profligate, and avaricious. It was this discovery, when I made it, which caused me to tremble for your daughter—for my own ill health, and my wife's necessary attendance upon me, has made it impossible for us to afford her the necessary protection; and as there is no wickedness of which this man is not capable, I have been feeling keenly during the last few days the danger to which your daughter was exposed, and, in fact, my present suffering is due principally to that anxiety."

Masollam had begun this long tirade with an air of extreme languor, but as his vituperative faculties became excited, and his imagination inflamed, he warmed to his subject ; and so forgetful was he of his ailments, in the eloquence of his denunciation, that its effect was somewhat marred by the confirmation it gave to Hartwright's original suspicion, that his invalid airs were assumed. . He was agreeably surprised, however, to find Masollam in this indignant and expansive mood : he preferred it to the affectations of manner he assumed when posing as sage or seer, and thought he was more likely to arrive at the truth from Masollam the man, than Masollam the mystic. "Santalba must have trodden frightfully on the old man's corns to make him lie about him like that," was his inward comment ; from which it will appear that truth may be extracted from lies more easily than from the bottom of a well. In pursuance of his tactics to learn more, Hartwright changed his manner to one of pleasant cordiality. He drew his chair nearer the couch upon which Masollam was again extended. During his excitement the Oriental had forgotten himself

so far as not merely to sit up, but to take a stride or two across the room. He was now panting again from exhaustion, real or assumed.

“Having reason to change your opinions so absolutely in regard to the trustworthiness of our former friend, my dear sir,” said Hartwright, “I can well understand your anxiety in feeling that practically my daughter was left at his mercy. She informs me that Miss Masollam escaped at night from The Turrets, under the escort of Clareville, accompanied by a lady whom she calls her mother. May I ask for an explanation of these strange occurrences, and for information as to the reasons which have led you to form so bad an opinion of Count Santalba?” As he asked this question, the severe and usually imperturbable Madame Masollam, to Hartwright’s intense astonishment, burst into a violent fit of weeping.

“She feels what we are talking about,” said Masollam, casting a glance of profound compassion upon her whom, following his example, we shall, for the sake of convenience, still call his wife; “but as her knowledge of English

is too limited for her to follow me, I shall speak plainly. Her great suffering, the evidence of which you now see, at the prospect of having to part with her adopted daughter, whom she has regarded from infancy as her own child, to an unknown stranger whom I accidentally discovered to be her real mother only a few months ago, induced me to postpone the duty of making the relationship known. I felt it was a necessity, however, I could not avoid, and that as I was obliged to come to England, it would not be right to leave Amina's mother in the East for an indefinite time, more especially as I had—without making allowance for the terrible blow which it has since proved both to my wife and Amina—rashly promised to restore her daughter to the poor woman without delay. You can form no idea, Mr Hartwright, of the suffering I have endured in consequence. I had to tear up by the roots the lifelong belief that had created an ardent filial love in Amina for my wife; I had violently to wrench apart the natural tie which bound together the two women I loved best in the world, and cause them both the most acute anguish. I say

nothing of my own feelings of losing a daughter's love. For love for an adopted father, when the truth is revealed to her, can never be the same as the love which she, a daughter, has felt for him when she believed he was her real father. These were the reasons which induced me to keep Amina's mother here in seclusion, until I could bear to make the painful revelation. Had I been less conscientious, I should have left her at Damascus. Thus it is, Mr Hartwright, that over-scrupulousness of conscience sometimes leads us into the most painful dilemmas, and exposes us to the most distressing misconstructions. No doubt Santalba will tell you another story; and one of my complaints against him is the malicious way in which he has made use of this sad history to prejudice my daughter—I cannot bear to say my adopted daughter—against me, to such an extent that he actually induced her to fly from me; plotting the whole conspiracy by which she and her mother should be secretly conveyed away from the house in the dead of night, under the escort of his friend Mr Clareville, who, I have reason to believe, cherishes a vile design in regard to her. What

else could one expect from an unprincipled fashionable man about town? He it is whom the once pure Santalba has now chosen as an accomplice in his villany. And if it had not been for your opportune arrival, Mr Hartwright, he would at this moment have conducted your daughter to the den of infamy in which he has secreted—with her lover—her whom I once called mine.”

“But Sebastian?” interrupted Hartwright. “You are leaving him out of the question altogether. Do you think he would ever have consented to an arrangement which might have compromised his cousin’s reputation? Besides, Amina’s mother was with them.”

“Amina’s mother!” echoed Masollam with a voice of scorn. “Do you know who Amina’s mother is? A Druse woman, with no more idea of morality than the beasts of the field. Besides, even if she had, what does she know of the laws and manners and customs of England in regard to marriage? Practically she constitutes no protection of any kind; but you are mistaken in imagining that any sentiment continues to exist between your daughter and her cousin. Santalba has put

an end to all that. All my efforts to bring about the marriage, to accomplish which I kept them together under my roof, have been thwarted by his devilish devices. I positively believe he has made them hate one another."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Hartwright, at last beginning to feel seriously uneasy; for Masollam had only put into more vigorous language the doubts which he had already expressed to his daughter, when he had heard from her own lips the circumstances under which she had proposed to leave The Turrets. "I must see Santaſba and Sebastian in regard to this matter," he continued. "I confess my last interview with the former before my departure was very unsatisfactory. He admitted having been the means of preventing the proposed visit of my daughter and her cousin to Clareville Court, where I have no doubt the marriage might have been arranged."

"Yes," interrupted Masollam; "and then, when, to remedy matters, I persuade Miss Hartwright to stay here, he uses his influence in some unaccountable way to set her against Sebastian."

"That seems so utterly incredible that noth-

ing short of hearing it from Florence's own lips will satisfy me of its truth."

"That is precisely the evidence I should most wish you to have. Would you like to send for her? I parted with the dear child this morning under somewhat distressing circumstances, and fear that the agitation may have affected her health. I think a little visit to our room might be really beneficial to her. My wife has a wonderful power of healing in cases of such ailments."

"No," said Hartwright; "I would rather see her alone." And he rose to leave.

"You will let us see you again this evening to hear the result, I hope?"

"If you wish it."

"My dear Mr Hartwright, it is a matter of the deepest importance to us both. I do not want to trouble you with my own affairs; but in some respects our interests are common, and you will not, I am sure, refuse me your assistance in rescuing Amina and her mother from the trap into which they have fallen. At what hour may I expect you?"

"I will give you notice of my visit, when I hope I may find you in less suffering," replied

Hartwright, with an almost imperceptible sneer, as he took his departure.

“Provided always that Florence does not tell her father that her determination to give up her love for her cousin was in obedience to instructions received from us,” said Masollam, glancing uneasily at Madame, as the door closed behind their visitor.

“There is no fear of that. Whatever she may once have done, she does it now of her own free will. Besides, it was really done under the Count’s influence and Amina’s, as much as under ours.”

“You did well, Tigranuhe, to cry when you did. I was very much puzzled to know what story to tell, till you gave me that hint.”

Madame rose, and seating herself by his side took his hand.

“There was truth in my tears; I did not force them,” she said softly. “You will never think again of putting Amina in my place,” and she coaxingly stroked his long grey hair.

“No, darling; it was a dream. But why did you suggest your own abdication?”

“To wake you from it. It is madness to

think that we can ever be separated. You are mine—mine for ever.”

“Yes,” he repeated slowly ; “yours for ever.”

“It was a dream that gave rise to serious complications,” she went on. “You should never have dreamt it, and forced me to wake you so rudely.”

“No,” he echoed again ; “I should never have dreamt it.”

“It exposed you to great combat ; her instincts were so different from mine, and they jarred. And you were in constant suffering, and so was I. Now there is no one to come between us. It will be easier for us both.”

His lips seemed again mechanically to repeat her last words, but no sound issued from them. She passed her hand once more softly over the flowing locks, and then gently withdrew it. He had fallen asleep.

Hartwright found Florence where he had left her. She had returned but the moment before from her interview with Santalba, and was still under the impression of the glowing words to which she had listened. Never had her resolutions been more confirmed, her aspirations more stimulated, or the consciousness of

the change which a few short weeks had operated within her been more profound, than at the moment when her father again stood by her side. He had during the interval been subjected to a very different influence from that, the benign effects of which his daughter was then feeling.

While she had been assimilating into her moral system the life-giving essences of lofty and ennobling impulses, he had been absorbing into his, the venom that had gushed in such copious torrents from the lips of Masollam. His expression had become more sullen, his eye more suspicious, his voice more harsh.

"Where is Sebastian?" he asked. "He must have heard by this time that I was in the house. Keeping out of the way, I suppose, because he is afraid I shall call him to account."

"I don't think that is the reason, papa," replied Florence, gently. "He thinks you are with Mr Masollam. No doubt he will come presently. He has nothing to be afraid of."

"Nor you either, it seems, from the way you were prepared to risk your reputation with

him. I understand you have given up all hope of becoming his wife," and he significantly emphasised the last word.

There was such an absolute brutality in this insinuation, coming, as it did, from the lips of her own father, that Florence was too much shocked and distressed to speak. As she fixed her horror-stricken gaze upon him, he softened under it, and muttered something about not being quite himself.

"The fact is," he continued, with a sort of shambling attempt at an apology, "that old brute, Masollam, seems to have so muddled me with his lies and scandals that I say things I don't mean to. Don't mind me, child. I meant nothing; but I want to know how matters stand between yourself and your cousin."

"We shall always love each other as brother and sister. He will always be my dearest friend, but he can never be more than that. We have had an explanation, and thoroughly understand each other. He is now the last man in the world I would marry."

Hartwright's brow grew black, and his voice trembled with passion, as he exclaimed, in a loud tone—

"You never came to that resolution of your own free will, girl! This is that villain Santalba's doing!"

"Here he is to answer for himself, Mr Hartwright," said the Count, advancing with Sebastian; "vent as much of your fury as you like upon me, but spare your daughter, unless you desire to be her murderer. In her present state of health you have it in your power to be guilty of a great crime. Sebastian," he continued, with an air of calm authority, "will you take your cousin to her room?"

"Who are you, sir?" exclaimed Hartwright fiercely, exasperated beyond measure, "to order my daughter about in this way in my presence. Don't leave the room, child; I command you to stay," for Florence was already on her cousin's arm, and continued moving slowly away.

Charles Hartwright sprang forward to bar her farther progress; and, to do so more effectually, seized her with some violence. She withdrew her arm from her cousin, looked into her father's face with brimming eyes, murmured, "Oh, papa, I think you have

killed me," and Hartwright found himself supporting her fainting frame.

Sobered by the sudden consequence of his violence, and embarrassed by his burden, Hartwright glanced for help at the Count and his nephew, as he carried his daughter, now quite unconscious, back to the couch. "My God!" he ejaculated, appalled at her pallor, as he laid his hand on her heart, "what have I done?" Then, as neither the Count nor Sebastian spoke or stirred, he called out, "Help, gentlemen, help! Can you stand there and see her die without a movement?"

"Sebastian," said the Count, in the same calm authoritative tone in which he had before spoken, "will you carry Miss Hartwright to her room?—unless, indeed, her father again interferes violently to prevent you." Hartwright was too panic-stricken to offer any further opposition, and the Count continued: "And now, Mr Hartwright, the villain Santalba is still here to answer your questions; but I think it right to warn you that your daughter needs his immediate attention, and that if you detain him he cannot answer for her life. It may give you confidence to know that he has had

occasion to study medicine, and can produce his diploma if required."

"Go to her, then, in God's name. A curse seems to have rested on me and mine ever since these people entered my doors," he muttered to himself as the Count left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE AND A HOSTAGE.

HARTWRIGHT had too little confidence in the Count's medical skill to rest satisfied with leaving his daughter in his hands, and determined immediately to ride into Tongsley himself, in search of a doctor. It afforded him a good excuse to escape from his own reflections, and from a house towards the inmates of which he entertained such strong feelings of dislike and suspicion. On his way he met Carabet; but as he was riding fast, and his mind was completely absorbed by the tumult of emotion which had been excited by his recent interview with his daughter and Santalba, he passed him without notice. It was far otherwise with Carabet, who found ample matter for conjecture in the reflection that, since he

had left The Turrets a few hours before, its owner had arrived, and had already found occasion, owing to some unknown event which had occurred there, to hurry into town on horseback at a late hour in the day. He did not fail to communicate this piece of intelligence to Masollam and his sister, on entering the room in which they were seated together.

“Find out at once from Sharp what has happened,” said Masollam. “He can easily get at it from Miss Hartwright’s maid, if he does not know himself.”

It turned out, in fact, that Sharp did know ; for being an old family servant, Hartwright had no need for reticence, and indeed, while his horse was being saddled, had put several questions to the butler, with a view of eliciting information as to the habits of the household, and the course of events during his absence, and had incidentally remarked that his reason for hurrying into town was to summon the doctor, in consequence of Miss Hartwright’s sudden illness.

“She must have had a relapse, then,” said Madame, “or Hartwright would have mentioned it while he was here.”

“Hush! your brother wishes to say something, and his thought is a good one. Speak out, my son,” exclaimed Masollam, turning with sudden eagerness to Carabet.

“It is indeed marvellous how events seem working in favour of an idea which I have already discussed with Tigranuhe,” replied Carabet. “Did you tell the Master, sister?”

“No; but I approve of it; so you can do so.”

“From what she has told me,” pursued the curiosity-dealer, in obedience to this injunction, “things seem to have reached such a pass that, unless extreme measures are resorted to, the object of your mission to this country, owing to Count Santalba’s interference, will have failed, and he will obtain that complete control of Sebastian Hartwright and his money which, with his aid, you hoped to have gained. Fortunately methods exist in this country which still offer us a chance of success; and although we shall require as an indispensable ally Mr Charles Hartwright, there is no reason why, considering the exceptional position we occupy with regard to this family—of the secret of which he is ignorant—we should not

hold him completely in our power. My idea, then, simply is, that on his return with the doctor, you should suggest to him that, as the cousins refuse to marry each other, he should have Sebastian confined in a lunatic asylum. Indeed the occasion seems most providential. As the visit of the doctor will be to his cousin, there will be nothing to excite Sebastian's suspicion; and after the visit is over, his uncle can draw him out in the doctor's presence in a chat upon the topics upon which he can be specially eloquent, and get him to narrate some of his own experiences. For example, visions that he has seen; voices that he has heard; beliefs that he entertains—as, for instance, that the world has a soul, as well as every individual on it, which, of course, is an insane idea, as every doctor knows that it is quite impossible, on grounds of positive science, that it should have one. The thing won't be so difficult as you might suppose, because a good many people in Tongsley know that he has these extravagant notions, as they call them. It is fortunate they don't suspect what ours are," added Carabet parenthetically, "or we should all be clapped into a madhouse

together. The newspapers first put the idea into my head ; and I have been collecting scraps of evidence that might be useful. See here"—and Carabet drew from his pocket a scrap of paper. "I found these verses this morning, when you sent me to summon Sant-alba here, and he declined to come. He evidently went immediately to call Sebastian, who, in his haste to respond, rushed off, leaving this effusion on his table and the door open ; so, seeing it lying there as I passed, I took it, thinking it might come in useful."

Masollam took the paper, glanced over it, lay back for some time with his eyes closed, and then said, turning to Madame, "What do you think of your brother's suggestion, my dear ?"

"I have already said I approve, otherwise I would not have allowed him to mention it. And what is more, no time is to be lost. There is a second doctor required, is there not ?"

"I am not sure that it is absolutely necessary, but it is safer ; but Sebastian need not know he is a doctor. Miss Hartwright's ponies are to be sold. I can send a young medical friend of mine the first thing in the

morning to pretend to buy them ; and while he is looking them over, he can have a few words with Sebastian—ask him whether he does not think they sometimes shy at objects that are invisible to us,—anything will do. Then all that is required is a magistrate's warrant, and the thing is done."

" 'If it were well done, 'twere well it were done quickly,' " said Masollam, whose varied reading and excellent memory often suggested to him quotations that were thrown away upon his listeners.

It aggravated Madame, who said pettishly, "Please speak in a language I can understand. We have no time to lose."

"That was precisely what I did say. It must be done before ten o'clock to-morrow, or that accursed Santalba will scent mischief in the air. I suppose in the meantime we must allow Charles Hartwright to obtain control of the property."

"I don't exactly know how these things are managed in this country ; but it will not be under Santalba's influence, as it is now, and that is always a point gained. Moreover, you have Hartwright's receipt for £2000, which

will make him squeezable to a certain extent, to say nothing of a much more powerful lever which we can apply when it becomes necessary," remarked Madame Masollam, with a look of peculiar significance. "Meantime, as it is necessary that the doctor should not be allowed to leave the house before we have seen him, the Master had better write a note, which you can take, brother. Watch for Hartwright on the road, and give it to him. It will have a good effect in any case, as proving that we are well informed as to his movements."

Masollam signified approval, and in a few moments Carabet started, furnished with the necessary epistle.

"Humph!" growled Hartwright, as it was handed to him half-way between The Turrets and the town; "spied, I see, at every turn. What new move are they up to now?" and he glanced darkly at the retreating figure of Carabet, who had continued on his way without a word after performing his commission. "The doctor said he would follow me in half an hour. I have time to see these people first." After learning from the butler, whom he sent

to make inquiries, that his daughter was better, for he shrank from coming again into contact with Santalba, he repaired to the apartments of the Masollams. He was in a peculiarly susceptible mood to listen to the scheme which was there unfolded to him by the Master. It revenged him, at one stroke, on the Count for his interference, on Sebastian for his stubbornness, and on his daughter for her disobedience; while it had the far greater advantage of relieving him from all further anxiety in regard to his own pecuniary difficulties. For the first time in his intercourse with the Masollams, his suspicions vanished, and he was even conscious of a certain sense of gratitude towards them.

“You know enough, perhaps, of your nephew’s peculiar experiences, of which I understand he has made no secret, and of the visionary and fantastic views he holds in regard to them, to be able to draw him out before the doctor without exciting suspicion, I suppose?” asked Masollam.

Hartwright smiled significantly.

“I am not altogether disinterested,” continued the old man, still further to confirm

his listener's good opinion of him, and speaking with a certain air of frankness. "I really see a chance now of getting the money back you owe me."

"You have never yet explained why you ever lent it to me."

"Ah, you must ask Santalba that—I am pledged to secrecy. It was one of his infernal devices, into which he inveigled me by false representations, and of which at the time I did not understand the true drift, or I would never have been a party to them. I am not at liberty to say more; but that is the less important, as it has all taken an entirely different development now. All you have to do is to repay me your debt, re-enter your house, which I am ready to vacate in your favour, and thank Providence who sent me to your rescue, though I have achieved it in a very different fashion from the manner originally intended. And now, if I mistake not, you have to make a written request to the doctor to examine your nephew. Here is a scrap of what I suppose he would call his poetry, which may, perhaps, tend to confirm your views in regard to him, and be of some

use to the doctor. I think he will see at once that if it is meant to convey any idea of Sebastian's own experiences, the poor youth must be very mad indeed."

Hartwright took the paper and read as follows :—

" Murmurs of innocence, touches of charm,
Songs of sweet lullaby, lulling the calm,
Mystical movements, thrills of delight,
Spells of enchantment, perfumes of night ;

Tender imaginings, love the bright goal,
Whispers of angels stirring the soul,
Flashes of purity, white and intense,
Yearnings unearthly lifting the sense ;

Fainting pulsations, spasms of prayer,
Visions of loveliness floating in air,
Ardent aspirings, voices that ring,
Noble ambitions, hopes that upspring ;

Wellings of happiness, sobs of desire,
Altars of sacrifice, scorplings of fire,
Bursting of bondages, snapping of cords,
Cries of sharp agony, clashing of swords ;

Healing with ointments, soothing with balm,
Pants of prostration, wakings to calm,
Breathings celestial, solemn and deep,
On the All Mother's breast falling asleep."

" Oh, mad, mad, very mad indeed ! " exclaimed Hartwright. " That will do capitally.

Who the devil does he mean by the 'All Mother'? But I hear the doctor's gig," and putting the paper in his pocket, he hurried from the room.

"Ah," said Masollam, reflectively, looking after him with a smile of much meaning, "how truly the poet sings—

"'All the world is mad, insane most miserably,
And they are most insane who know it not.'"

"There you are again," cried Madame Masollam, impatiently, "pattering to me in an unknown tongue."

"I was just remarking, my dear," replied her husband, "that the most dangerous set of lunatics loose in England just now, are those who have the privilege of putting the harmless ones into asylums."

"Thank God," returned his wife, "we have not got any madhouses in our country yet; but I suppose they will be introduced with the other blessings of Western civilisation."

Notwithstanding the caution which Sebastian had laughingly given Clareville to be wary in narrating his experiences, or alluding to phenomena with which the public were unfamiliar, he was himself so completely off his

guard when, after discussing with his uncle and the doctor the malady of his cousin, they diverged into topics connected with psychical research, that he furnished the medical man with all the evidence he required, — more especially as the latter had reasons for wishing to oblige the owner of The Turrets. Perhaps the rashest thing poor Sebastian said, was that he did not see why, since Balaam's ass spoke, other asses should not. He was thinking of his examiner at the moment, but this, of course, the latter could not know; and the glance which he exchanged with Charles Hartwright informed that gentleman that further investigation was unnecessary.

Carabet's medical friend had even less scruple on the following morning in arriving at the desired conclusion, when, in the character of a would-be purchaser of Florence's ponies, he came to investigate those animals. Half an hour later Charles Hartwright, whose manner towards his nephew had changed to one of affectionate cordiality, invited him to accompany him to Tongsley to assist him with his judgment in the matter of a purchase of some antique coins for a friend. While

Sebastian was engaged in looking over them, Hartwright slipped out, so as to avoid being present at the capture, which was easily effected, under the proper warrant, in the shop of the curiosity-dealer; and an hour afterwards, the unhappy victim, who, seeing the trap into which he had fallen, was too wise to offer any resistance, found himself on his way to London, in charge of two keepers. Relying on the prominence of his position as a member of Parliament, which would attract public attention to the event—convinced of his own sanity, relatively, at all events, to that of his colleagues in the House of Commons, and confident in the skill and devotion of Santalba and Clareville—Sebastian made the journey without any of that perturbation of spirit which, under ordinary circumstances, has so strong a tendency to upset the mental balance of those who are so often victimised under less favourable conditions.

Meanwhile Hartwright, after paying a somewhat lengthy visit to his solicitor, with the view of informing himself as to the proper legal steps which should be taken under the circumstances, returned to The Turrets,

anxious to discover whether his daughter had so far improved in health as to be able to undertake the journey with him to London, where the change in his plans, necessitated by the incident which had just taken place, required his immediate presence. He had, however, been anticipated in his arrival by Carabet, who had lost no time in conveying to the Masollams news of the happy termination of the morning's operations, and the success of the conspiracy, of which he was justly proud; for it had originated in his own fertile brain.

"Now, cunning Count," exclaimed Madame, when she had attentively listened to her brother's recital, "I think we hold a hostage, for which you will gladly exchange Sada and Amina. I suppose," she added, after a pause, addressing her husband, "that when Sebastian's liberty suits us better than his captivity, there will be no difficulty in obtaining it?"

"That must depend largely on his uncle, I imagine," replied Masollam. "He will not willingly relax his hold on Sebastian's money. No doubt, with the weapon we have in our hands against him, of which he knows nothing,

he might ultimately be forced to consent to his nephew's release ; but it would cost us a struggle, and involve an alliance with Santalba and Clareville, who would probably prefer to take their own measures, but these we can defeat. In fact, we control the situation. Allied with Hartwright, we can keep Sebastian a prisoner in spite of Santalba ; but he must pay us for doing so out of Sebastian's money. Allied with Santalba and the forces at his disposal, we can effect Sebastian's release in spite of Charles Hartwright ; but here, again, we must make our terms first. The game is a delicate one, and will require much skill and care in playing. I scarcely feel as though I should be up to it," he added, wearily, and with an apparent effort against an increasing sense of exhaustion.

"It is strange," said Madame, musing, "that Santalba has allowed all this to take place without making a move. He must have given out so much of his own vital energy in trying to save that girl's life, that he has weakened his faculty of inner perception ; or else he is contemplating something that we have not foreseen. I confess," she pursued,

moving uneasily in her chair, "I don't like it. There is something going on, I am certain. There, again, I felt it. There is danger, I tell you!" and her voice became shrill. "How is it you cannot sense it?" she continued, turning to Masollam. "Oh, Master, Master, this used not to be so!"

"Give me your hand, and I will try if I can make out anything," responded her husband, feebly. He held her hand for some time, and remained with his eyes closed. "All dark, all dark," he said at length; "I can see nothing."

"Why do you ask him?" whispered Carabet into his sister's ear. "I thought the woman's function now was to lead." A glance of fury was the only reply the curiosity-dealer received to this indiscreet remark.

"What's that he says? what's that he says?" exclaimed Masollam, in a short hurried manner, very unusual to him. "Oh, he hurts me! he hurts me! Tell me what he said."

"Get out of the room, fool!" was Madame Masollam's only response to this; and her brother slunk away.

"Tell me what it was he said, that hurt me so," reiterated the old man, peevishly.

"We have other more important matters to attend to, dear, than the gibberings of that ape," said Madame, soothingly. "Try and collect yourself; you are tired."

"Yes," he echoed, "I am very tired. Oh, it's so hard to try, and try, and not to see; it wearies me so, struggling through this black cloud that gets ever thicker. Can you see nothing?"

"Yes," she said; "I see Santalba. His infernal face haunts me, with its sardonic smile. And I see more. I see that we should not lose a moment in sending for Hartwright, and making him feel that, if he dares to take a step without us, he is lost. The moments are very precious."

"Impossible; I could not see him now. What Carabet said hurt me so much that I could not face him. We should have a severe struggle to bend him to our wills, and I have not strength for it." And Masollam fell into contortions produced by spasms of suffering, about which there could be no possible mistake. Inwardly cursing her brother, Madame

Masollam set to work chafing and rubbing her patient—now his bare feet, now his hands, now his chest, now stroking his head—until she finally succeeded in inducing a restless slumber.

Then, apparently utterly exhausted herself, she poured a few drops of a liquid from a phial into water and drank it. “Oh the precious moments lost! the precious moments lost!” she murmured, as she swayed herself gently to and fro.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ENEMY'S FLANK TURNED AND THE
VICTORY WON.

MADAME MASOLLAM'S instincts were so far correct, that the precious moments, the loss of which she was bewailing, Count Santalba was gaining and turning to extremely profitable account. But she was in the wrong in supposing that his inaction in the earlier part of the day had arisen from any decrease in his faculty of intuitive or quickened inner perception. On the contrary, it was in obedience to a very strong impulse of inaction that he restrained his natural indignation and impatience, and allowed matters to take their course—keeping accurately informed in regard to them, however, by the aid of the intelligent Juan, who had followed Hartwright and Sebas-

tian into Tongsley, not disdaining to avail himself of the convenience of the footboard behind. He had been a witness, from an angle of the street which concealed him from observation, of Sebastian's capture; and he had jumped into a cab and returned with the news more than half an hour before Carabet, who was detained a short time longer in his shop, whence he took an omnibus half the way and walked the rest for the sake of economy. As soon as the Count received Juan's report, he went to see Florence, who was sufficiently restored to be reclining on her couch in a dressing-gown.

"I have something very important to tell you, my dear," said the Count, seating himself on a chair by her side, "and you must exert your whole will-force to preserve as absolute a calm as possible while you listen to what I have to say. It is vital to your health, I may even say to your life, as it is to your happiness, that you should consent to what I am about to propose. I promise you beforehand that I am not going to ask you to do anything that it will not give you heartfelt joy to agree to; but I shall have to preface it with

something very painful and distressing—nothing, however, that it is not in your power easily to remedy. God has dealt very lovingly with you, my child. He put a heavy trial upon you; but you bore it bravely. You never flinched from your test when once you understood its purport, and now your reward has come, and come in a manner most unexpected, though in some respects painful.” The Count then broke to her as tenderly as he could the news of the event which had befallen her cousin, explaining that her father was but in a limited degree responsible for his share in the matter, having fallen at a moment of irritation into the plot laid for him by the Masollams, who had brought influences to bear upon him which he was unable to resist. In doing so, he explained that they had exhausted all their strength, and he had expressly abstained from interference until they should be thus internally weakened. He had in the meantime been gathering his forces together, and his turn had come to concentrate them upon the father through the instrumentality of the daughter. “At this moment,” continued Santalba, “I am about to turn the flank

of the enemy, which I am the better able to do on account of his enfeebled condition; and you form—to speak in military parlance—the key of the new position. That you may appreciate the duty which will be imposed upon you, I must describe what, in so far as you personally are concerned, that new position is. I explained to you the other day why these spiritual battle-fields were kaleidoscopic, in the suddenness and rapidity of the changes which they involved. You will see the force of the simile now. Yesterday you informed your father that you had given up your cousin for ever—or, to use your own words, he was the last man in the world you would ever marry. I now want you to tell him,—and he may be here at any moment—Juan is watching in the front avenue to bring him here, before he has a chance of seeing any one else,—I now want you to tell him that you have since had reason to reconsider that determination, and that you are prepared to marry him, on condition that the ceremony takes place immediately. I will explain to him that, in your present state, a delay which involves uncertainty would be most disastrous. And I will also explain that,

should he not consent, he need not expect you to recover from your present illness. And this is true, my child—for you are dying, more literally than men think possible, of what they call a broken heart. But He who breaks can mend. And the fact that you voluntarily faced a trial for the love of God, which you were conscious was killing you, and never flinched, has opened you to such streams of healing strength, now that the trial is removed, that when once this struggle is over, you will feel stronger and be stronger than you have ever been in your life.

“See,” pursued Santalba, “how wonderfully the divine plan evolves for the happiness of those who trust in it sufficiently to act without thought of self! Had you married your cousin for your own sake, and under your own conditions, having made no sacrifice for him, but having, in fact, sacrificed him to your own inclinations, you would, each of you, have been victims through life—he to the tie which bound him to a woman whose selfishness would have repelled his love; and you to the pangs of unrequited affection, which would finally have altogether alienated you from the

man to whom you had been attached. This was what I foresaw, and determined to prevent; for, when you first thought of Sebastian for a husband, Florence, you did not even love him as he deserves to be loved. I always felt that, notwithstanding your disparity of taste and pursuits, which had been artificially induced by your opposite surroundings, you were destined for each other; and although Sebastian's father failed, almost to the end, to see this, his eyes were at the last opened, and his final injunction to me was to do what I thought best in regard to thwarting or promoting your marriage. In this case, as in all others, I could only follow what I felt to be the divine guidance in the matter. So long as I was impelled under that guidance to throw obstacles in the way, I did; at last I perceived that the moment was approaching when the crisis was about to culminate—which, as you know, it would have done, had I not most opportunely given the Masollams an introduction to your father. Following them almost immediately, under that guidance, I offered you the supreme test; and under it I now release you from the resolution you

then made, for the moral necessity which suggested it no longer exists. You now obey, not the impulse of selfish passion, but the call of duty ; and if God has left you no other alternative to save the man you love best in the world from incarceration, possibly for life, but that of marrying him, accept thankfully the bliss that He provides for those whose chief happiness it is to place their affections, as you have done, in His keeping."

Florence herself was surprised at the calmness with which she listened to the Count. She wondered that the news of her cousin's arrest, and the part her father had taken in it, should produce so little shock to her nervous system, while the joy that surged into her being at the prospect of so speedy a realisation of her heart's desire, seemed so weighted with a sensation of peace, that she was spared the turmoil and conflict of emotions, which she well knew in former days would have been excited by the events which had taken place, the complications to which they had given rise, and the solution proposed by the Count. She was spared it, because her heart was too full of gratitude to think so much either of herself

or of Sebastian at that moment, as of Him whose hand was thus dealing tenderly with her.

"It seems to me," she said, after a pause, "people don't trust God enough; they only half trust Him. They always want to help Him to arrange their affairs the way they want them arranged themselves."

"That is because they think they have affairs of their own, that are not His affairs. When once we realise that we are mere agents in this world to carry out His will, we cease to have private plans or property, or desires, or ambitions, or even affections. We act as He bids us act, and love as He bids us love. People may say it is not possible to do this, but how many have ever tried? We, who have, know better. We know that when we are filled with His will to the exclusion of our own, and with His love to the exclusion of all others, this thing becomes possible. We are no longer like ships without compasses, obeying the impulse of every varying breeze, and steering, we know not whither, but shape our course under the guidance of that needle of love and wisdom which ever points true to the pole of Deity. But there," said the

Count, rising and going to the window, "comes your father. Your own judgment will doubtless suggest that you make no allusion to your knowledge of the events of the morning, unless he obliges you to do so. Greet him with your new resolution, before he has time to enter upon other topics."

Charles Hartwright entered Florence's room with an air of sullen embarrassment, which was not diminished when he became aware of the presence of Santalba. He suspected, from his immediate summons by his daughter, that the news, the explanation of which he most dreaded, had possibly already reached her; and he came prepared to throw the responsibility upon the doctors, and to refuse to enter into any justification of the share he had taken in the matter. He was somewhat surprised, therefore, at the affectionate smile of greeting with which he was received by Florence, and relieved at the apparent absence in the Count's manner of all recollection of the unpleasant circumstances under which they had last met, or of any indication in it that he was conscious of the events which had since transpired.

“I am so sorry, dear papa, that I have not been able to see you before to-day; but the Count has insisted on my keeping very quiet—and even now he fears that what I am going to tell you may agitate me too much; but indeed it will not. Since I have come to my new determination, my strength seems to be returning in an extraordinary manner; so much so”—and she cast a sly glance at Santalba—“that I thought I would not take the medicine Dr Jones so kindly sent me from Tongsley, until after I had told you all about it; and if you agree, as I am sure you will, I feel convinced that I shall get quite well without having to take it at all.”

“I am glad of that, my dear,” replied Hartwright, his humour softening as he found things going so pleasantly. “I don’t think it will be difficult for me to agree to any proposal you may make which will get you well. I am sure I don’t want you to take Dr Jones’s medicine, if you can do without it. You gave me a serious fright yesterday, my little girl; and in the agitation of the moment, I fear, I made use of some expressions, Count Santalba, for which I owe you an apology.” The Count

bowed. "What I am particularly anxious to know is, how soon you will be able to travel to London ; to-morrow, do you think?"

"That entirely depends, papa. I might—of course it would be a good deal of a scramble—but still I think I might, under certain circumstances, supposing the Count agrees, even manage to get off to-night."

"To-night ! why, that is pushing matters with a vengeance ; but what makes you in such a hurry ? Of course it would suit me better."

"I am in a hurry, because I feel that unless I can get away from this house to-night"—Florence paused, and then concluded abruptly—"I shall die in it."

"Good God ! what does the girl mean ? What difference can one night make?"

"Impressions like this on the part of a patient are not to be trifled with," said Santalba ; "I think even Dr Jones would admit that. It is astonishing what a number of invalids commit a species of moral suicide by making up their minds that they are going to die—just as cholera may be induced by fear, you know."

"I thought that they had discovered that

cholera was produced by some small insect—bacilli, I think, they call them.”

“No doubt; but doesn’t it strike you that a man must be rather insane, Mr Hartwright, who can maintain that you can generate insects by being afraid of them? Just think what you would get to if you carried out this theory: love, hate, revenge, avarice, would all have their appropriate microbes; and every time you indulged in any of these passions, you might be producing a whole crop of them. As for madness itself, it must breed nothing but insects!”

Hartwright shuffled uneasily in his chair. He did not know whether the Count’s allusion to insanity was accidental or designed; and there was a covert irony in the tone of the remark which was distinctly unpleasant, as it suggested the disagreeable reflection that he was at that moment generating insects which might correspond to his desire to appropriate Sebastian’s money. He therefore hurriedly got back to the matter in hand.

“Well, Florence, of course if it is to save your life, I shall not hesitate to comply with your wish to start to-night.”

“Yes, papa ; but I can only do so on one condition, and that is the thing I sent for you to tell you about. I have been thinking very seriously over your disappointment at what I said yesterday about Sebastian. In fact, you remember my refusal to consent to your wishes in the matter was the indirect cause of the attack which, had it not been for our friend here”—and she looked at the Count—“would, I believe, have been fatal. I have come to the conclusion that I should be wrong to adhere to that resolution any longer ; and I am confirmed in it, because the Count assures me that my marriage to the only man in the world I ever loved with my whole heart, is the only chance left me for life. Since I heard you talking about insects killing people, I can understand this better. If a bacillus can kill, I can quite see how a Sebastian could cure. At any rate, that is the remedy the Count prescribes, and that is the only remedy I intend to try. Aren't you glad, papa ?”

The air of ingenuous simplicity with which Florence terminated her speech by this inno-

cent little remark, formed so strong a contrast with the dismay, almost amounting to terror, depicted on Hartwright's countenance, that the Count was compelled to turn to the window, to conceal the smile he was utterly unable to restrain.

"Really, Florence," her father at last stammered, "this change is so sudden, so unexpected,—so much has happened since yesterday—ahem—of a somewhat painful character; Sebastian, you know, was obliged suddenly to hurry off to London."

"Hurry off to London! and without saying good-bye to me!" interrupted Florence.

Santalba rose, and laying his hand on Hartwright's shoulder, who was too much embarrassed to know how to meet his daughter's ejaculation, he said: "Charles Hartwright, we were old friends, though events have estranged us lately. Let us talk over this matter together in private, and you will find that there is no reason why we should not remain old friends still. Let us leave Florence to take a little rest. She will need all she can get, if she is to travel to-night."

Hartwright, thankful for the diversion, silently rose, and followed the Count to his own old smoking-den.

“I am accurately informed,” said Santalba, when they were seated, “of everything that has occurred this morning, not because I desired to spy upon you, but because it was necessary in your own interests, and those of your daughter and nephew, that you should be rescued with as little delay as possible from the trap which had been so skilfully prepared for you by the Masollams. So far as the past is concerned, and my share in it, I must ask you to be satisfied with my assurance that, if I had known what I know now in regard to the entire change which a few short years have operated in the character and motives of Mr Masollam, I would sooner have cut off my right hand than have been the means of introducing him to you. For reasons which I now fully appreciate, but with which it is unnecessary to trouble you, that knowledge was withheld from me. When it was revealed, I found myself in the presence of dangers and complications, involving the lives and happiness of certain members of your family, which I could

only meet as I have done. Why I could not meet them otherwise, it is needless to ask. Suffice it to say that matters have now been brought to the point where it rests with you to free yourself from a yoke which you will find worse than slavery. Once allow Masollam to get you thoroughly into his power, and he will hold you and yours with a grip to which that of the Old Man of the Sea was mere child's play. By the marriage, which you have yourself so much desired, of Sebastian with your daughter, the way of escape lies open to you; but it must be accomplished with all possible rapidity, or new complications may arise, which may involve you in legal proceedings disastrous to your reputation. You know, considering the vast pecuniary interest at stake, the events of this morning would not bear publicity. Believe me, for your own sake, as well as for your daughter's, not a moment must be lost in securing Sebastian's release. Florence used no figure of speech when she said her life depended on her union with her cousin. She will simply pine to death now, if she is deprived of the vital elements her nature craves, and which one

organism only can supply. You have heard of the transfusion of blood from the veins of one to those of another, saving life ; think you there is no subtler substance, call it essence if you will, which can be interchanged with equal, ay, far greater advantage ? ”

“ Why did you let matters get to this point ? ” said Hartwright, bitterly. “ If she had only said yesterday what she said to-day, I should have been spared this—yes, I may as well admit it to you, for I admit it to myself—this crime.”

“ Thank God ! ” exclaimed Santalba, with a sigh of relief. “ If you see it in that light—which, indeed, is the only true one—the day is won. The reason why I let matters get to this point, and could not interfere to change Florence’s resolution yesterday, was because then the day would have been lost. I will tell you why, but it will sound mad enough for Dr Jones’s certificate, and be incomprehensible to you. It was only this morning that Florence’s internal, or spiritual, or essential, or subtler material conditions—call them what you will—completed the change which

will enable her to assimilate as a healing infusion those elements which she can derive as a remedial agent from her cousin. Had she altered her resolution before the change was completed, she would have arrested it, and those same elements would have operated in her as a slow poison. There! you wanted the reason, and I have given it to you. I regret that it is impossible for me to furnish you with faculties to understand it. And perhaps it is just as well that the world, and those who doctor it, should remain in ignorance a little longer; for if people had the least idea of the number of devoted wives who kill their husbands in blissful ignorance, and of exemplary husbands who prematurely send their wives into other, and, let us hope, higher conditions, they would be so horror-stricken and alarmed, that, unless the knowledge of the remedy for so unfortunate a condition of things was equally widespread, society would be convulsed, and possibly revolutionised to no purpose."

"All sounds very like bosh," said Hartwright, gloomily. "At any rate, I am not going to attempt to argue about assertions which admit

of no proof. I will accept this much, that the sooner my daughter is married to her cousin the better; and to that end not a moment must be lost in effecting his release. I am with you there. I shall not go near the Masollams again. I will take your word for his being an old scoundrel; I never thought otherwise, and should never have trusted him had it not been for you. You can go and tell Florence to make her preparations, while I make mine; and the first is to send a despatch to the doctor of the asylum, telling him it is a mistake, and that he must hold his hand till my arrival."

And all this time Masollam was lying on the couch in his room asleep, and his wife was swaying to and fro, watching him and crooning, "Oh the precious moments lost! the precious moments lost!"

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE MANSION OF A DRUSE CHIEFTAIN IN SYRIA.

THERE is no wilder or more romantic scenery to be found in Syria than in that highland region which formed the frontier districts of ancient Palestine on its northern borders. It was probably owing to the rugged and inaccessible nature of the country that the Jews failed to enter fully into their inheritance in this direction, and allowed themselves to be checked in the march of conquest by the precipitous gorges of the Leontes and the lofty range of the Lebanon. Modern investigation has failed to fix with absolute precision the exact boundary which divided the tribes of Asher and Naphtali from their Phœnician neighbours; but there can be no doubt that it included within its limits a tract of country

unsurpassed by any other part of Palestine in the grandeur of its scenic features, and, what was of more importance in those days, in its capabilities of defence. Evidences of this are to be found at the present day in the traces of fortresses on commanding hill-tops, where gigantic blocks of stone, of almost cyclopean dimensions, piled one above the other without cement, bear traces of the extreme antiquity of their origin, and contrast with the more modern remains of castles and forts erected by the Crusaders, some of which are still to be found in a relatively perfect state of preservation. Although the general aspect of the country is rugged and barren, there is a sufficient amount of water in some of the valleys to irrigate gardens, where orange, lemon, pomegranate, fig, almond, and apricot afford in summer their grateful shade, and an abundance of luscious fruit; while extensive olive-groves, with here and there a vineyard, furnish the inhabitants with that revenue, the greater portion of which finds its way into the pockets of rapacious tax-gatherers.

It was in this district that Durzi, the first missionary of the Druse religion in Syria,

established himself about 900 years ago, and began to preach the new faith. Although the mass of the Druse nation now are divided between the mountains of the Lebanon and those of the Jebel Druse, lying to the south-east of Damascus, the shrine on the western slope of Mount Hermon was venerated above all others, for it was the repository of the sacred books until 1838, when, on the conquest of the country by Ibrahim Pasha, they were carried off by the Egyptians. Since then the Druse population in this neighbourhood has diminished, as the special constitution which was granted to the Lebanon after the massacres of 1860, and which guaranteed certain privileges to the inhabitants of "the Mountain," whether Druse or Christian, attracted many of the leading Druse families thither; while others sought refuge from the immediate oppression of the Turkish Government, in the Jebel Druse, the remote position and inaccessible nature of which range has ever enabled its inhabitants successfully to resist by force of arms the direct imposition of Turkish authority. Neither in the Lebanon nor in the Jebel Druse are the Druses liable to military conscription, while

they levy their own taxes, thus escaping the extortion of the tax-gatherer.

The Druse villages not included in these two favoured districts are even in a worse position than their neighbours, whether Moslem or Christian, in so far as liability to military service and taxation are concerned ; and my apology for this digression is, that it is with one of these that our story now has to do.

Nestled in a secluded valley lay the village of Teraya, its houses clustering round a cliff about three hundred feet high, from the base of which gushed a copious fountain of sparkling water, that sufficed not merely to supply the domestic necessities of the inhabitants, but to irrigate a plain about a mile long and half a mile wide ; thus furnishing them with extensive fruit-gardens, the brilliant green and ample foliage of which formed a refreshing contrast to the rocky hillsides that rose abruptly from their margin. Their luxuriance was in fact suggestive of an amount of wealth which scarcely corresponded with the poverty-stricken aspect of the village itself, and its almost squalid-looking habitations. It consisted of some two

hundred stone huts with flat roofs, the walls daubed with yellow mud, each cottage standing in its own courtyard, which afforded accommodation for all the live stock of the proprietor, the more important animals sharing with his family the common living-room. These habitations were grouped without any regard to order or regularity upon the somewhat steep incline, which sloped from the foot of the cliff to the gardens below, and were dominated by a single mansion, which formed a striking contrast with the dwellings which it overlooked. It was a solid structure built of massive blocks of stone against the precipitous rock at a point where the latter receded, so that advantage had been taken of the ledge thus formed to construct a sort of terrace, upon which a second storey had been erected. Thus it presented the appearance of clambering up the side of the precipice, after a fashion which suggested picturesqueness rather than comfort. The lower storey consisted of spacious apartments, or rather vaults, for the roofs were constructed of stone supported by arches ; and here dwelt the family retainers, while accommodation was also found for the domestic animals

in the spacious courtyard by which the whole was enclosed, and which also included granaries and store-rooms and guest-chambers for the retainers of visitors of superior rank. Outside this courtyard there had been levelled, at what must have been a considerable expense, a broad terrace or *meidan*, large enough for those equestrian exercises or *fantasias* in which the Druses delight, and from the edge of which one looked down upon the flat roofs of the village houses. The upper storey, constructed partly upon the roof of the one beneath it, and partly on the ledge of rock in rear, was approached by a staircase of massive stone, which had been built into the walls of the lower storey, across the external face of which it ascended; so that a visitor, to reach the dwelling apartments of the family, is compelled to mount an outside staircase about twenty-five feet high, unprotected by balustrades, thus experiencing the sensation of a fly walking up the side of a house. He is, however, amply repaid for any little nervousness resulting from the effort, by the novelty and picturesqueness of the abode to which he is thus introduced. Stepping from the top of

the staircase into an open, square, paved court, he finds himself in face of a plashing fountain, near which are some orange-trees in tubs. A verandah, supported by light graceful stone columns, runs round three sides of the square, and into it open various apartments, the largest of which, called the Liwán, devoted to the reception of visitors, is surrounded by divans; in its centre is another fountain, while it is lighted by a huge window, ornamented with arabesque designs. Two or three guest-rooms open into this court, while the remaining two sides of the square are devoted to family use. The natural inequalities of the rock in rear are further taken advantage of for domestic purposes; stone cut steps lead up into caves used as store-rooms, while a little jet of cold clear water, gushing from a crevice in the overhanging cliff, is carefully led by stone channels into a hewn reservoir, from which it supplies the fountains, and the wants of the establishment generally. If we are accustomed to Alpine travel, we may push our explorations beyond this crystal spring; but it requires a steady head and sure foot to scale the side of the precipice, by means of

the insufficient and irregular steps which have been cut into the face of the cliff, and by which, after a climb from the fountain of over two hundred feet, we reach the top. Here we find piles of huge hewn stones, some of them heaped in wild confusion, others still standing one or two courses high, as they had been originally placed, thus indicating the walls of an ancient building, or the lines of defence of a former fortress. Here are the circular apertures of bell-shaped cisterns, partly concealed by overgrowth, and forming dangerous man-traps for the unwary explorer, excavated from the living rock, and capable of containing an abundant water-supply for the garrison. And in the neighbouring rocky ledges we observe the carefully hewn entrances into caves, indicating that within are to be found resting-places for the dead,—a conclusion which is confirmed if we crawl in to examine the method of sepulture of a bygone period, where, in some instances, tunnel-shaped repositories received the corpses; or in others, where the bodies were laid in sunken stone troughs, the sides of which, with the arches by which they were roofed, are as

well defined and sharply cut as though they had been the work of yesterday. Sometimes we find several of these subterranean chambers connected by passages, and approached by a mortuary chamber, the massive stone door of which, ornamented with carved devices, is lying in two or three fragments at the side of the entrance. In other cases, the bodies were laid on the bare hillside, in sarcophagi hewn from the living rock, the lids of which still remain *in situ*, to tempt the explorer to reveal, by their removal, the human remains which they have for so many centuries concealed.

It was on a part of the ruin which had evidently been the central keep of the old fortress, for here the stones were piled one above another to a considerable elevation, that two young Druses were seated, intently gazing over a landscape at that moment illumined with all the glory of the setting sun. They were probably too much accustomed to the prospect, and too little sensible of the wonders of nature, to appreciate the singular interest and beauty of its most striking characteristics; but it may be permitted

to us, to whom such sights are not familiar, to pause for an instant to examine it.

To the east, towering above the surrounding country to a height of over 9000 feet, Hermon reared its majestic crest, its furrows, although the summer was already far advanced, still streaked with snow, its noble outline sharply defined in the evening glow, which was already leaving the valley at its base, where the course of the upper Jordan could be traced with its fringe of green, and where groves of trees and rich tracts of cultivation, indicated in places the existence of a settled population. Away to the south lay the plain of the Huleh, where the waters of Merom gleam in the midst of a setting of richest emerald; while, in the distance beyond, the volcanic and copse-covered peaks of the Jebel Heish, with their weird irregular outline, rose high above the rich pasture-lands of Jaulan, the former home of Job. In the foreground a large encampment of Bedouins—their flocks and herds gravitating as evening closed in to their night quarters near the tents—gave life and animation to the scene; while the lofty walls, still standing, of the three crusad-

ing castles of Subeibeh, Hunin, and Belfort, were visible to the east, south, and north—the latter perched upon the edge of a precipice 1800 feet high, at the base of which foams the roaring Litâny. To the extreme north, the Lebanon range of the Jebel Rihan, with an elevation of 6000 feet above the sea, closed a prospect surpassed only in richness of contrast and variety of detail by the grandeur of its more prominent features, and the historical interest of its associations.

As the shadows settled upon the valleys, and the mountain-peaks seemed to glitter more brightly as the last rays of the sun were concentrated upon them, the elder of the two men perched upon the pinnacle of fallen blocks, shading his eyes as he looked westward, gazed, as it seemed for the last time, and then said to his companion—

“There is no use our waiting longer, brother, she cannot arrive to-night; let us hasten back and tell our father that he may dismiss the people.”

“When did the letter say that she would come?” asked the younger brother.

“It did not say exactly. It was written

from France, and said she would start at once; but last night father felt they were very near, therefore he sent us up here to look out; and you know, as he said that, she must be near. He is never wrong."

"See," exclaimed the younger man, in his turn peering intently sunwards into the yellow haze, "there is dust. Perhaps it may be our aunt. Let us lose no time waiting to make sure till she comes nearer, but go down and get our horses at once."

With an activity and ease which showed how familiar was every step of the descent to the two young men, they rapidly descended the face of the cliff to the mansion we have already described, where they were received by a venerable-looking old man of unusually dark complexion, with a thoughtful brow, a large gazelle-like eye—as soft and tender as that of a girl—a straight nose, and flexible and almost transparent nostril, and a well-cut mouth, the mild and attractive expression of which was not concealed by a grey moustache and beard, the latter falling almost to his waist.

The dignified repose of his manner, and

absolute serenity of his expression, were well calculated to impose a respect, to which it was evident he was accustomed; for it indicated a will so conscious of its own strength that it feared no opposition, and an intelligence so keen as to relieve its owner from anxiety in respect of its operation. Thus it happened that in the whole Druse nation there was no man more beloved for his personal qualities, more highly considered in council, or more generally venerated than Sheikh Mohanna, who had, ever since the massacre of his brother-in-law and his children, been recognised as the head of the family, and who exercised an influence which extended far beyond the limits of the village in which his residence was situated. He was standing in the court as his two sons entered it.

“We have just been able to discern some dust in the extreme distance, father,” said the elder; “and as it was getting so late, we thought it better not to wait, but to ride out at once to see if it be them; and if it is, I will send Kassim back at once with the news.”

“You did well, my son; go at once. I will remain prepared, and await your report.”

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed before the youths returned, accompanied by a messenger who brought a letter.

"She will arrive to-morrow," said the old man, after reading it; "she is accompanied by my old friend Girius Bey."

"Who is Girius Bey, father?"

"Come into the Liwán, my sons, and I will tell you of some events which happened before you were born, from which you will learn who he is. You have often heard the history of the fatal occurrences in which your uncle Sheikh Sâleh lost his life nearly five-and-twenty years ago. You know how we held out against the Maronites for more than a day and a night in this house; how they rolled huge stones down the cliff upon it; how at last we made a sortie, and drove back our assailants, slaying many of them; how in the moment of our supposed victory we found that the enemy had seized the opportunity to make a descent upon the house by the cliff steps, and overpowered the few we had left to guard them; how, hearing the screams of the women and children who were being massacred, we rushed back to the rescue;

how the foe we had driven off then attacked us in rear, and I fell in the struggle, it was supposed mortally wounded, and was carried away by my friends Mahmoud and Nasr-ed-din to the house of Sheikh Hassoun at Has-beya, where, after a long illness, I recovered, only to hear that my wife and two children had been killed, that your uncle Sheikh Sâleh had fallen covered with wounds, after slaying six of the enemy with his own hands ; that his wife Sada, my sister, who it was supposed at first had also been killed, as she could not be found for three days, was alive, as she had been hidden in the secret cave that you know of, but that her two children were among the missing, of whom there were many that have never since been heard of, their little bodies having been thrown into the fields, and become food for the jackals. You have also heard that among the bravest defenders of our homes that day were two strangers who were on a visit, and who, when it was found that they were Christians and foreigners, were spared. One of these was Girius Bey. Five years before, when he was quite a young man, he had claimed our hospitality one stormy

night. When travelling through the country, he had got belated, and lost his way ; and on that occasion, a friendship sprang up between us, which has lasted till to day. His official duties at that time obliged him to live in Syria, and no year passed without his coming to spend a month or six weeks with us—visits which I was always glad to return, for we were both engaged in researches into the deep mysteries of nature, and his knowledge of our language and our religion,—which he had acquired by a study of the sacred books, stolen from the Khalwet el Biyad by the Egyptians,—was so profound, that he was probably the only man, not a Druse, who could work himself into a Khalweh without being discovered. We had therefore no secrets from each other, and indeed had come to regard each other as brothers. Upon the occasion of one of my visits to his house, I made the acquaintance of the most learned and remarkable man whom it was ever my fortune to meet. His name was Daoud Effendi Masollam. He was, I think, himself a Jew, but he had married an Armenian, and never alluded to his origin. He was deeply versed in occult science, having

resided in his early youth in India, where, I believe, he was born, and he was in correspondence with a brotherhood to which he belonged in that country, which possessed a deep interest both for Girius Bey and myself, for we detected in it a familiarity with branches of knowledge with which we were already conversant, though they had been perverted by human imagination to suit the conditions of those who sought to magnify their own learning and importance. It was not long before Daoud Effendi, who was a man of purest aspirations, perceived this, and he became the teacher of a system which had for its object rather the improvement of the material conditions which affect the terrestrial universe in which we live, than the preparation of separate personalities for another state of existence. With this effort my friend Girius associated himself enthusiastically. I, however, felt that, as a Druse Uwahid, I had different duties, and, while cordially sympathising in his attempt, confined myself to my own sphere of influence and operations. It was about this time that Girius Bey arrived one night at Teraya, with a friend, also a foreigner, whom I had never

seen before, and whose acquaintance I had scarcely time to make, before the attack to which I have alluded took place. From that day to this I have never seen my old friend ; but you remember that less than a year ago a venerable and learned man paid us a visit here, and told me that his reason for coming was to inform me that he had been able to discover, by the exercise of the occult gifts which he possessed, that my niece Amina, whom it was supposed had been murdered on the night of the attack, was still alive, and that if I would confide to him my sister Sada, he would take her to Amina. That man was my old acquaintance Daoud Effendi Masollam. I asked him whether it would not be possible to bring the girl here ; but he said that those who had adopted her as their daughter, refused to believe that her mother was living, and that to obtain possession of her, it was necessary that your aunt should go in person to claim her. I then asked him whether Girius Bey was living, and whether he knew of the existence of Amina. He replied that Girius was indeed alive, but having left Teraya on that fatal night under the firm conviction that both Sada and I had

fallen victims to the bullets of our enemies, he had never sought to communicate with me since. And he showed me a letter from Girius in answer to one from himself, expressing his pleasure at hearing of my being still alive, his approval of Daoud Effendi's project of taking Sada to Europe, and sending me brotherly greetings. This decided me; and the next morning Sada, who was eager to start, took her departure. Since then I have been a prey to the most acute anxiety, for although Sada promised to write she has never done so; nor could I, when I made a trip to Damascus the other day, for the express purpose of seeking information, obtain any at the former residence of Daoud Effendi. I was unable to write to Girius Bey, as unfortunately I did not think of getting his address from Daoud. Judge therefore of my delight at receiving, a fortnight ago, a letter from my sister saying that she was on the point of starting with her daughter on her return home; and of the still greater pleasure I feel now at learning that they are coming under the escort of my old and valued friend Girius Bey."

"Is our cousin married?" inquired Kassim,

“She must be three or four years older than I am.”

“You must restrain your curiosity, my son, till she is here to answer for herself; I know nothing beyond what I have told you.”

The old man placed a hand affectionately on the shoulder of each of his stalwart sons. “I should be ungrateful with such boys,” he continued, “to talk of a desolate old age; and yet, first to lose your dear mother, and then my cherished sister, seemed hard. She is coming back to me,” he murmured, “not in darkness as she went, but in the radiance of a bright light, and it emanates from one who walks by her side. Oh happiness more than I deserve, who have dared to doubt His promise.”

CHAPTER II.

SHEIKH MOHANNA CELEBRATES AN AUSPICIOUS
FAMILY EVENT.

AMONG the various offices and outhouses contained in the lower court of the Druse mansion, or rather castle, which I have already described, was one large vaulted chamber standing by itself, the floor of which was matted, while round its three sides were spread carpets; those at what appeared the seat of honour being also furnished with cushions. This was the Manzil or village council chamber, and here on the following day was seated the Sheikh Mohanna, with a son on each side of him, in the midst of a group of village notables, prominent among whom was the Khateeb,¹ or spiritual chief, a keen-eyed hawk-nosed

¹ Literally preacher.

man of middle age, with a short black beard and snow-white turban. Indeed this was the universal head-dress, for all these were Okâls, or men initiated into the mysteries of their religion, and distinguished, by the spiritual rank which this conferred upon them, from the common herd. They wore *abbayehs* or flowing cloaks, with black and white stripes, beneath which, as they squatted cross-legged on the carpet, their bare feet appeared. They were a remarkably striking group of men, with generally handsome features of a somewhat Semitic caste, reserved and almost deferential to each other in manner, and with that quiet dignity and repose which characterises their bearing, especially on such occasions as the one which now called them together. It had been announced the night before that Sheikh Mohanna had a communication to make to the village notables; that it was one of some importance was assumed from the fact that a messenger had been sent off to summon a certain Sheikh Shibley from a neighbouring village, who was a member of the family of the deceased Sheikh Sâleh of Teraya. They were now awaiting his arrival,

not having as yet ventured to inquire the cause of their gathering, and indeed only from time to time exchanging a few words with each other in a low tone. As the initiated Druses never touch tobacco, there was not even the distraction of smoking to disturb the solemnity of the meeting. Suddenly a loud monotonous chant, followed by the rapid discharge of firearms, burst upon the silence, and was the signal for Sheikh Mohanna slowly to rise, for it announced the approach of his guest; and, followed by the notables, he advanced to the outer *meidan*, from whence could be seen approaching a group of thirty or forty young men, some carrying heavy-knobbed sticks, and others guns, which they fired from time to time, accompanying the process with a loud discordant singing. In rear of this small procession rode Sheikh Shibley, accompanied by four or five cavaliers. Many of the notables of Teraya now advanced to receive him, kissing his hand with great demonstrations of cordiality — a ceremony which he in his turn endeavoured to go through with Sheikh Mohanna, but which the latter resisted, thus giving rise to a polite

struggle, which is part of Druse etiquette, but which presents a somewhat comical appearance to the spectator, as any two of my readers may discover for themselves, if, with locked hands, each tries to be the first to kiss that of his friend. Like many other pieces of politeness, however, it is little more than a form, the superior in rank always making it a point to be vanquished in the struggle. On this occasion Sheikh Mohanna gracefully yielded; but among the retainers of the two sheikhs, where the rank was equal, the delicate point involved a more protracted effort.

Finally they all trooped back to the council chamber, Sheikh Shibley, after some more formal resistance, taking the seat to the right of his host, while his people all made a polite rush for the lowest seats, and were with difficulty persuaded to move up higher. Excepting the Japanese, there are no people more full of polite ceremony among themselves than the Druses. When at last they were seated, they again all formally saluted first Sheikh Mohanna, and then their village hosts, and coffee was brought in, from which all the more strict observers of their religion, however, ab-

stained; and complimentary speeches were interchanged, which lasted for about ten minutes.

Sheikh Mohanna then announced the fact that he had received a letter, stating that the late Sheikh Sâleh's daughter, who had for so many years been mourned as a victim of the massacre, had in fact been discovered by her mother, who, as they all knew, had gone in search of her, and that they were both expected to arrive that afternoon under the escort of a distinguished foreigner, well known in former years to the Sheikh, and highly respected and esteemed by him; that the occasion was one, therefore, which called for a reception in a style befitting so joyful an event, in which he now invited Sheikh Shibley, as a near relation of the family, to take part, and to remain as his guest for a few days. The latter accepted this invitation with a prettily turned little speech, and a grace of manner which would have been attractive, had it not been for an air of self-complacency which betrayed the good opinion which the speaker had of himself. Nor, it must be admitted, was it altogether without cause. He was a blue-eyed young man of four or five

and twenty, with a complexion so fair and features so Saxon, that, dressed by a London tailor, there would have been nothing to mark him as an Oriental. He was tall, muscular, and handsome, and an object of great admiration to Sheikh Mohanna's two sons on account of his proficiency in all manly exercises. He was a champion *jereed* player, and his skill in all feats of horsemanship had secured him a notoriety which had extended even to the Jebel Druse. He was a no less accomplished marksman with his rifle ; and the fact that he had made several visits to Damascus, and had on one occasion spent some weeks at Beyrout, caused him to be regarded as a traveller and a man of the world, and to be much looked up to by the youth of the neighbouring villages. In addition to this, his family connection, as the son of the late Sheikh Sâleh's first cousin, was one which secured him a certain influence ; for Sheikh Sâleh himself had been a man of such a remarkable force of character, and enjoyed such prestige as the head of one of the most ancient, as it had been one of the most powerful Druse families, that Sheikh Shibley, who was its next representative in

the male line, naturally occupied a position of some importance in the nation. He had of late years felt himself much aggrieved by what he considered a certain usurpation on the part of Sheikh Mohanna of his own rights and dignities; but during the lifetime of Sheikh Sâleh's widow, who, as a female Okâl herself, enjoyed high consideration, he had not dared to allow this sentiment to appear, more especially as Sheikh Mohanna was a man whom he had been taught to venerate from childhood, and of whom, in spite of himself, he stood in great awe. He comforted himself by the reflection, therefore, that the old man's death could not be long delayed, and he had no fear of his power to brush away from his path the two sons of the Sheikh, if they attempted to stand in it. An entirely new set of considerations, however, were imported into the question by the resurrection from the dead, among whom he had always numbered her, of Amina. A thousand inquiries sprang to his lips while he was expressing the delight, which he was far from feeling, at the intelligence to which he was listening. But one of the earliest lessons which a Druse is taught is

not merely to conceal his thoughts, but to convey the impression that they are the opposite of what they really are ; and in this art Sheikh Shibley was an adept. A repast was now brought in upon a low round table standing about six inches from the ground, in the centre of which was a huge pile of rice, while round it were arranged dishes containing stews of mutton and of chicken, *leben* or sour goats' milk, eggs fried in oil, vegetable-marrow stuffed with spiced rice and mincemeat, sweet dishes made of flour and honey, and pistachio-nuts and other dainties. Round this gathered Sheikh Mohanna and his guest and sons, with the Khateeb and two or three others whose rank entitled them to the honour, while the others grouped round a second table, the remains of both being finally consumed by the retainers. Then all busied themselves with preparations for the start, for the hour was now drawing near when the travellers were approaching their destination. Sheikhs Mohanna and Shibley mounted pure-blooded Arabs, handsomely caparisoned with scarlet and gold, and rode out of the village accompanied by thirty or forty horsemen, some of whom carried spears,

and others guns, and preceded by a crowd of youths firing and singing, while the women screamed their applause in loud ululations, and having received news of the anticipated event, proceeded to deck themselves in their most gorgeous array. After a ride of an hour the party reached a high level plateau, the margin of which commanded an extensive view, and here they halted and dismounted. Young Kassim, who remained on the watch, shouted that he saw a cavalcade approaching. In a moment every saddle was filled, and as the travellers appeared above the crest of the hill, they were unexpectedly greeted by a *feu-de-joie*, in the midst of which Sheikh Mohanna, followed by his two sons and Sheikh Shibley, rode forward to meet them.

“Peace be upon you, oh friend of happy years gone by!” said Sheikh Mohanna, riding up to the leading horseman, and speaking in a voice trembling with emotion; “is it indeed you whom a merciful God has sent to lighten the gloom of my declining years with your valued presence? And has He indeed chosen you to be the saviour of our house by bringing back to us its most cherished members?”

“And upon you the peace, oh my ancient friend ; of a truth, the pleasure which it gives me once more to see one whom I had so long mourned as numbered among the dead, is indeed enhanced by the fact I am the means of restoring to him his sister and his niece,” replied Girius Bey, who, as the reader will doubtless have divined, was none other than Santalba. Meantime Sada, seated upon a mule astride a bundle of pillows, had ridden up, and after exchanging an affectionate greeting with her brother, presented to his wondering gaze a lovely girl, whose riding-habit was as strange a sight to Druse eyes as the side-saddle on which she was seated. Although the Druse women in this part of the country are less particular about concealing their faces than those in the Lebanon, Amina’s veil, through which her beautiful features were plainly visible, was too transparent to satisfy even these less rigid requirements, and Shibley fancied he perceived a shade of disappointment mingled with the warmth of her uncle’s salutation, as he welcomed to her ancestral home the female representative of the ancient house of Zedaan. As for the young sheikh

himself, while his greeting of his cousin was cold and reserved, as etiquette demanded, there was in her manner a quiet dignity and self-possession by which, while he was dazzled by her beauty, he felt somewhat overawed—a sensation which caused him some annoyance, as he had never been conscious of experiencing it in the presence of a woman before. He had no time, however, to analyse his feelings further; for, challenged by Kassim to a mock *jereed* combat, he was soon flying across the plateau in chase of the young horseman, his example being immediately followed by all the rest of the male members of the cavalcade, who sought to rival each other in the skill with which, when going at full speed, they could wheel their horses round on their haunches, and go off in the opposite direction, avoiding the blows aimed at them, and dexterously exchanging flight for pursuit as occasion offered.

As they approached the village the procession of footmen formed anew, the constant firing of guns was accompanied by loud chanting, with which mingled in the distance the shrill *zalhoot*, or joy-cry of the women, clus-

tered on the house-tops in gay holiday attire, their bright robes of scarlet, blue, and yellow gleaming amid the foliage of the orange and pomegranate groves. As the travellers entered the narrow streets the whole female population rushed into them with a loud chorus of welcome, scattering flowers, pouring on the ground libations of coffee, and pressing forward to kiss the hands, and even the dresses, of their long absent kinswomen ; for, as among the Highland clans, there were few, even of the poorest, who could not claim a blood relationship, however distant, with the family of their chief. All these sights and sounds were almost as strange to Amina as if she had really been—what to outward appearance she seemed—a foreign tourist. It is true she had spent many of the earlier years of her life in Damascus, but she had no recollection of her own people, nor of their manners and customs ; nor, though she had occasionally seen Druses in the streets of that great city, had she ever imagined that she herself belonged to the nation. The reflection was one which, amid her present surroundings, was calculated to give rise to a conflict of emotions. She

listened to the din of these noisy salutations as one in a dream, while her mind reverted to the sweet silence of those secluded walks at The Turrets, where, one short month since, with Reginald Clareville by her side, her imagination had pictured a possible future so unlike that which now seemed in store for her ; and she marvelled at the strange fate which had linked in so mysterious a manner the destinies of two persons thus widely severed by birth and association. Though, during those last few days in London, they had talked over the change which had thus entered into her life, she had never realised its full extent till now ; and though Reginald had repeatedly assured her that he felt that the tie which bound them together was too internal in its character for any outward circumstances to affect, she now perceived how much greater that change would be to him. Still she did not for a moment regret the decision at which they had both felt impelled to arrive. The strange experiences through which these two young people had passed, placed them outside the region of ordinary courtship. They knew too well what their natural inclinations were, even

to allude to them. It was not desire, but duty, which they had pledged themselves should ever remain uppermost. And they felt that to be false to their purest conception of God's will with regard to their mutual relation would be to be false to each other. To cherish even selfish hopes for the future would be to weaken their allegiance to the present. They refused, therefore, to indulge in anticipations of a union which it might not enter into His design should ever be consummated. And when Reginald, on the day before they parted, told Amina that he had become aware, after a severe struggle, that services were required of him which were paramount to all the claims of natural affection, it was then that he seemed to her most worthy of the love she had given him, and that she had felt the most irrevocably attached to him. Thus had he saved her the pain, which till then she feared she might cause him, of a similar confession ; for to her it was already clear that the immediate duty demanded of her was to her family and her race—a duty which she must accomplish alone.

The struggle of the decision had, if possible, been rendered more acute, from the fact that

the day before her departure from London, she had witnessed with Reginald the marriage of Sebastian and Florence; a ceremony which Charles Hartwright had expedited to avoid further mishaps, immediately on his obtaining the release of his nephew from the asylum. Indeed, during these last few days in England, events had crowded so thick and fast upon her, that she had scarcely even yet been able to render an account of them to herself. The revelation of Masollam's perfidy; the terrible disillusion which it entailed; the disclosure of her own birth and parentage; the bursting upon her consciousness, in the midst of this pressure, of a love so passionate that it threatened to sweep all other considerations away before it; her first meeting with her mother, and her midnight flight with two beings of whose existence a few short weeks before she had been ignorant, but who had now become more to her than all else beside. All this had been followed by the sudden appearance of Santalba, Charles Hartwright, and Florence in the little family hotel in London where she and her mother had been deposited by Clareville, with the strange story

of that crisis conflict between Santalba and Masollam, which resulted in Sebastian's incarceration in a lunatic asylum, and in Florence's illness. She had then been called upon to co-operate in its *dénouement*, to forget herself in her ministrations to Florence, and to recognise that the divine call was equally obeyed in that union she was assisting, as in the separation which she was now painfully anticipating—from him she loved. In the conflict of emotion induced by these events, there were times when the strain seemed more than she could bear; but as those who never refuse to bear the burdens which are laid upon them are never allowed to be borne down under them, she was conscious that a divine support was granted to her through a human instrumentality, and at such moments she leant, with a trust that never wavered, on the ever-ready arm of Santalba, whose tender strength seemed charged with an inspiration that imparted new vigour to her fainting frame.

Thus had she been able at last to nerve herself for her parting with those friends whose trials and whose fortunes she had shared, and above all, with him who was now to enter

alone on the tests and ordeals which should prove him worthy of his high calling, and of her own devotion; and, under the escort of the Count, to undertake that journey with her mother, which, as we have seen, was to terminate in the secluded Druse village of Teraya. But even now, as her ears were stunned with acclamations of welcome, and her eyes ranged over the motley and excited crowd, until they finally rested on the majestic countenance of her uncle and the handsome figure of her cousin, she felt the dread stealing over her of the isolation amid such strange surroundings as were in store for her, when he who had been her guardian and protector should leave her to meet alone the new problems of her life, with its rude and unfamiliar conditions. There was a dread ever present with her, moreover, which appalled her even more than the life of a Druse woman in a Druse village—the spectre, which seemed to haunt her dreams whether waking or sleeping, of a venerable man, beneath whose wise and saintly exterior there lurked the passions and the power of a demon. The Masollams had made no outward sign, since

her flight; but their very silence was terrifying, the more especially taken in conjunction with the extreme sensibility which her organism yet retained to the contact of those influences, which her close and protracted internal association with them enabled them still to project upon its finer surfaces. Thus there were times when she was unable to banish the sight of the Masollams from her inner vision: she was as conscious of their presence with her, and of their occupations, as if they had been actually visible in the flesh; but as these images could not be relied on as conveying any real information, she combated representations of this description upon her mental retina by methods not known to the faculty when called upon to treat patients who are suffering from what they term hallucination. In like manner she was exposed to hearing protestations which revolted her, from the hoary hypocrite from whose clutches she had escaped, sounding like a far-off echo, and making hideous music in her ears, even calling her back to him; now with honeyed words, now with foul abuse, until, invoking a higher potency of sound—which, until men understand more of the subtler principles of acoustics than they do now, it is

impossible to define—she sent these echoes rolling back upon themselves, till they appeared to die away in the distance,—a phenomenon which some account for by what they call “telepathy,” and others by what they call the “astral current,” and others, again—a very credulous and easily satisfied class indeed—by what they call “a trick of the imagination.”

And so it happened that evening, when the maidens of Teraya in gay attire grouped themselves in circles on the *meidan*, by the light of the moon, and danced in stately measure round one of their number, who, holding a scarf in each of her hands, gracefully waved them overhead in time to the music, Amina saw them not; and when the men, forming in line, and clutching each other by their waistbands, lifted up their voices in uproarious and discordant chant, swaying their bodies and keeping time with their feet, while one flourished up and down the line, brandishing a drawn sword, and drums and reed pipes kept up a stunning accompaniment of noise, Amina heard them not.

“My child,” said Santalba, who was standing by her side, watching the pained and dis-

traught expression on her face, and who well knew its cause, "you fear to be left alone here, and dread these visitations when I am no longer near you to help you to drive them away; but I have brought you here that you might be delivered, and I perceive that your deliverance is at hand. Retire to rest now, for I have that to say to your uncle still this evening which is of the utmost importance, and, as you may be needed before the night is spent, and must be fatigued with your journey, do not lose the precious moments. And now, old friend," he said, turning to Sheikh Mohanna, after Amina had retired, "dismiss your merry-makers. I have things to say to you which can only be talked about in the silent watches, when disturbing causes are at rest. It will recall those old times when we discussed the deeper mysteries—since which, doubtless, you have progressed in knowledge, and I long to have the benefit of your wisdom and experience."

So saying, Santalba slipped his arm into that of the old sheikh, who, after giving the necessary orders, disappeared with his guest out of the bright moonlight into the privacy of his inner apartments.

CHAPTER III.

SHEIKH MOHANNA RELATES HIS EXPERIENCES
OF THE OCCULT.

THE devotion of Santalba during the early years of his life to oriental studies, and the opportunities afforded by his residence in the East, had enabled him to master the intricacies of the Arabic language to a degree rare among foreigners, and not common even among the Arabs themselves. He was thus able to converse on the most abstruse subjects of metaphysics with an ease and fluency which rendered his society peculiarly acceptable to a man of such broad and liberal views, and so highly gifted intellectually, as Sheikh Mohanna. As the old man sank down upon the cushions of his divan, motioning his guest into a comfortable corner, he heaved a long-drawn sigh,

which seemed to express a sense of relief and of contentment.

“I have indeed much to hear from you, O friend of my soul!” said the sheikh, lifting his hand with a solemn and impressive gesture, “and much to say to you; but it is right and fitting that, before beginning our conversation, we quicken within us the Divine Presence by a few moments of internal concentration.”

At the expiration of about ten minutes, during which the two men remained with closed eyes, and in an attitude so motionless that even respiration seemed for the time suspended, the sheikh resumed—

“I feel moved to acknowledge openly in your presence that, since we last met, now nearly twenty-five years ago, I have at times yielded to doubts of my own higher inspirations—in other words, I doubted God. I did so, not I trust from any desire to escape responsibility, but because my internal perceptions became confused, by reason of a conflict between the gifts and faculties which have been intrusted to me. You are aware that these gifts, and the remarkable power which

I exercised through them in the healing of disease, the foretelling of future events, and the influencing of individuals sympathetically or antipathetically towards each other, were being developed in me to a very marked degree when we parted, as they were frequently a subject of earnest discussion, and even of experiment between us. For many years my power continued to increase. I was finally introduced into the society of beings not visible to the natural human eye, and maintained a daily and almost hourly intercourse with them, and, as I had reason to believe, the power which they exercised through me was the means of enabling me to effect much good both physically and morally among those of my nation who applied to me for medical or spiritual advice.¹ Then arrived a period

¹ That the character of Sheikh Mohanna is not altogether an imaginary one, may be gathered from the following extract from the late Colonel Churchill's work on the Lebanon :—

"Sheikh Bechir is one of the best-informed Druse sheikhs, and has acquired a store of history and literature which makes his conversation in every way superior. He has for some years devoted his time, singular as it may appear, to the cultivation of magic ; and the stories he relates of his interviews with immaterial beings are novel and startling. At times he will place a jug between the hands of two persons sitting

during times of fasting and abstinence when a new and more powerful light seemed to burst in upon me, revealing, as it were, traps

opposite to each other, when, after the recital of certain passages taken indiscriminately from the Koran and the Psalms of David, it will move spontaneously round, to the astonishment of the holders. A stick at his bidding will proceed unaided from one end of a room to the other. A New Testament, suspended to a key by a piece of string, will in the same way turn violently round of itself. On two earthenware jars being placed in opposite corners of a room, one being empty, the other filled with water, the empty jar will, on the recital of certain passages, move across the room ; the jar full of water will rise of itself on the approach of its companion, and empty its contents into it, the latter returning to its place in the same manner that it came. An egg boiling in the saucepan will be seen to spring suddenly out of the water, and be carried to a considerable distance. A double-locked door will unlock itself. There cannot be a doubt that an unseen influence of some kind is called into operation, but of what nature those may conjecture who like to speculate upon such matters.

“But it is in the more serious cases of disease or lunacy that his supernaturally derived powers are called into play. Previous to undertaking a cure, he shuts himself up in a darkened room, and devotes his time to prayer and fasting. Fifteen and sometimes thirty days are passed in this state of abstinence and self-denial. At last one of the genii, described by him to be much of the same appearance as human beings, will suddenly appear before him and demand his bidding. He then states his position, and requires assistance in the case he is about to undertake. The genii replies at once that his request is granted, and encourages him to proceed.

“The wife of Sheikh Achmet Talhook had been for more than two years afflicted with a swelling, which had been long

and pitfalls, and the heat and radiance of it were so great that the invisible beings were unable to support it, for the light which suited them

mistaken for pregnancy. Sheikh Bechir, after the usual preparatory discipline, passed his hand over her person, and in five minutes she arose perfectly cured. Sheikh Yusuf Talhook was brought before him a confirmed lunatic ; in two days he returned to his home perfectly restored in health and reason.

“That the sheikh maintains his intercourse with spiritual agents to be real and effective is unquestionable ; and, indeed, the belief in magic, and in the interposition of an order of unseen creatures in worldly affairs, at the bidding of those who choose to devote themselves earnestly to such intercourse, is universal throughout the entire population of every religion and sect. There are Christian priests who affirm that the Psalms of David contain an extensive series of necromantic passages, which, if properly understood and properly treated, would place the world of spirits at man’s disposal, and invest them through their medium with miraculous powers. Instances could be multiplied in which the most extraordinary and unaccountable results have been brought about by the intervention of individuals, who make this communion the subject of their study and contemplation. But as the ears of Europeans could only be shocked by assertions and statements which they would not fail of holding to be utterly fabulous and ridiculous, the subject is merely alluded to in these pages to indicate the existence of a very prominent and prevalent belief in the Lebanon.”—Mount Lebanon : A Ten Years’ Residence, from 1842 to 1852, by Colonel Churchill, Staff Officer of the British Expedition to Syria ; vol. i. p. 164. Saunders and Otley : 1853.

It is worthy of notice that the experiences of Sheikh Bechir were prior to any manifestations in England of a more or less similar character.

best was a dim and uncertain twilight—and this I could ensure by resisting, with all my power of will, the ingress of this brighter effulgence. Nevertheless, whenever I obeyed the impulse to make this effort, for the sake of regaining the communion from which it debarred me, I became conscious of a certain sense of sacrilege, and of a voice scarcely audible to my internal sense of hearing, which warned me against certain dangers incidental to the exercise of power under these conditions. And now there took place within me a conflict of a most painful character. If I listened to this voice, which seemed to be the voice of God speaking to me from out of the depths of my own nature; if I invoked the light, which seemed to be the brightness of His glory illuminating my very being,—then farewell to my visitants from the unseen world, and with them farewell to those gifts which I owed to their presence and their potency. No more could I bend the wills of my fellow-creatures to mine, and attract them to, or repel them from, one another. No more did I receive those bright rays of inspiration in which, as in a mirror, I caught glimpses of

the future; no more could I bid the sick to rise, and restore the insane to reason. As I had no other desire in seeking these powers but to exercise them for divine ends, could it be possible that I was mistaken in thinking that deep internal voice, so faint and low as to be barely audible, was the voice of God? Might not the glow which banished the ministrant beings be in fact the fiery ray of a nether region, which simulated the divine effulgence for the purpose of deceiving me, by revealing dangers which did not exist, and thus paralyse my power for good? O foolish theologians of all religions!" burst out the sheikh, breaking suddenly into the thread of his confession with fervent apostrophe,—“ye who patter so glibly about the inspiration of your sacred books, if you had ever sought the highest inspiration yourselves, you would know how difficult it is to tell the true from the false. You who have no doubts, did it never occur to you that the inspired writers themselves had reason occasionally to doubt exceedingly? that the more sincere they were, the more devoted as receptacles of the divine afflatus, the more subtle were the temptations,

the more insidious the devices, of those infernal influences which seek to mislead and to confuse that poor human faculty which is the only channel through which all revelation, of whatsoever kind, can be conveyed to man? that each erring mortal has nothing but his own finite faculties wherewith to judge whether the inspiration he receives is divine or not? If he be honest, the first discovery he makes in the searching analysis upon which he enters with regard to the revelations that flood his soul, is that they are conditioned upon his own moral state,—that it is no more possible for an absolutely pure revelation to issue from a mortal in which a taint of impurity exists, than for clean water to stream through a dirty pipe; and as no human beings are untainted with impurity, and as all are finite, they can under no circumstances become the media for infinite truth in its infinite and unsullied purity. The next discovery that he makes is that, owing to his limited and imperfect faculty, he is unable at times to distinguish between the truth and the simulation of it, presented to him in specious guise by an agency which has been so active in the

propagation of error in all religions, that the rival inspirations thus given to man have been the cause of more wars, of more crime, and of more infidelity, than the passions, cupidities, and lusts of men themselves. Hence it happens that the amount of the divineness in the inspiration must ever be dependent on the amount of divineness in the inspired man. And it needs as much inspiration in the reader to judge what is divine in an inspiration as in the writer of it; for in one sense no man can either write, or speak, or think, except under inspiration of some sort. That inspiration may be true to the full extent that man, as at present constituted, can bear truth, and yet that it should differ in the mode of its presentation, is certain. That an inspiration may be so remarkable in its presentation as to create the impression that it is a divine revelation, and yet be in all essentials false, is also certain; and it is because I feel that I have yet much to learn in regard to the methods of discrimination and analysis, that I have felt impelled to narrate to you my own experiences and the struggles they involved, in the hope, my friend, that your own investi-

gations into this, the most important of all the questions which affect the moral condition and destiny of man, will enable me to arrive at more distinct conclusions than I have hitherto been able to do."

Santalba remained for some moments in deep and concentrated thought.

"I must know more," he said at length ; "you have not told me all. There is a darker cloud behind, about which you have been silent."

As he spoke, the frame of the sheikh became spasmodically convulsed ; the veins in his forehead and temples swelled, his jaws became fixed, his hands clenched themselves involuntarily, and all his muscles stiffened. Santalba sprang to his feet, and laid his hand on the old man's head, every fibre of his form quivering under the impulse of that intense concentration of volition, which, by means of physical touch, he was projecting in a current of vital energy into the organism of his friend. Gradually the tension relaxed, the locked teeth parted, the clenched fingers loosened, the glazed and staring eyes resumed their natural

expression, and a long deep breath announced the termination of the struggle.

“You see now why I dared not break the silence; I knew I was not strong enough to venture on that fearful ground alone, and I did not know your power. I thank God who sent you to release me, for unaided I could never have achieved deliverance. Yes; it is true that in the conflict of doubt and difficulty to which I have alluded, I came under the spell of other and more potent influences than that of those gross and superficial beings whose co-operation in my healing and other efforts I have just described. In a fatal moment I fell back upon the arcana of our own Druse religion—those more deeply hidden mysteries with which but few even among our own initiated are conversant, but which, thanks to the early training of our old friend Masollam in India, to his subsequent investigation of existing forms of Asiatic mysticism, to your researches into the occult records of the past, and to my familiarity with the esoteric side of my own religion, we were enabled to systematise; until at one time it seemed as

though we should be able to use the hidden wisdom of the ancients as the foundation of a faith which should meet the wants of the age,—a project which had a peculiar attraction to me, for it must have resulted in that apotheosis of the Druse religion, which has in fact been the repository of occult knowledge ever since the days of Hamzé,¹ who intrusted the key of it to the safe keeping of the faithful.”

“They are at this moment fascinating the gaze of an ignorant and gaping public, my friend,” said Santalba, with a smile; “those mysteries which Hamzé got from the Magians and the Sabians, which they received from the Buddhists and the disciples of Zoroaster, and which they had in turn derived from still more ancient religions, are being popularised for the benefit of the most civilised, and therefore the most corrupt, society which at this moment exists upon the face of the earth, with the desire, no doubt sincere on the part of those who have given themselves to this task, that it may do it good.

¹ Hamzé is the great prophet of the Druses, to whom was committed the revelation of the mysteries of their religion.

In fact they have adopted our old idea, and hope to make it the basis of a future religion, believing that the time has come when an enlightened public may be intrusted with occult knowledge. You remember that for a short time we entertained a similar hope, and you remember why we abandoned it. You remember that we discovered that, from the Zend-Avesta and the books of Moses down to the Koran, there were no sacred books to which varied and conflicting concealed interpretations had not been given, over which the mystics had not themselves contended, and that no mystical interpretation of any of them propounded one practical solution for the world's misery and its needs. They quarrel over where we come from, and what we are made of, and where we go to—these mystics—but which of them solves the social riddle? which of them deals with the practical questions affecting the daily lives and happiness of men,—with the great problem of labour and capital, for instance, with the economic question, or with the sex question, with the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to woman,—which are the burning questions for

society? Men have been useful in the world as moral reformers, just in the degree in which they were not mystics. What mysticism was there about Christ's teaching? No doubt men would be glad to take refuge in a concealed interpretation of his moral axioms, for they refuse altogether to practise the open and simple one. But we were in search of solutions, not riddles; of the facts of nature, not of hidden dogmas in regard to it; of truth which is to be found in the practice of what is good, not of truth which is revealed in a trance, the verification of which is impossible. In a word, we were in search of light, not darkness; and as the more profoundly we became immersed in mysticism, the blacker grew the darkness, we turned our backs upon it, and came out into the light. Was not that so?"

"It was indeed; but, in the conflict I was describing, I once more fatuously turned to the old quarter for light, and stumbled into a pit as black as night. Dissatisfied at last with the ignorance, frivolity, and shallowness of many of the invisible beings I have already alluded to with whom I came into contact,

and finding to my dismay that those of a higher class whom I at first met were leaving me, while others of a lower class were increasing in overwhelming numbers, and that my failures in healing were more frequent and my powers declining, and yet not having strength of purpose to follow at once the still small voice I seemed to hear, I invoked the forces of that profounder magic known to the mystics, as I had done with comparative success in those early days of our experiments; but ah, how different now were the results! Then my powers of will were unimpaired, and I could, under great pressure, still retain control of my faculties. Now, weakened by the contact I had been having with inferior beings, I was swept out of myself by unseen influences into unknown regions: for days I remained in trances, until at last I became conscious that I was enslaved. It is true that during these periods I was lifted into conditions of supreme exaltation—that I lived in a world in which the senses were gratified, and in which knowledge abounded—that I received marvellous inspirations; but I was deprived of the verifying faculty. I could not tell what was real

and what was phantasmal, what was true and what was false. Impressions succeeded impressions, until at last my real existence seemed merged in that of one who was not of this world; and when I returned to outer consciousness, though I ate and drank and went through all the routine of daily life, I did it as one in a dream. I knew then that I was taken possession of. Fortunately the possessing influence acted through me in a manner which did not give rise to suspicion as to my sanity; but I lived in constant dread that under its impulse I should be made to act insanely. So far from such being the case, my reputation for wisdom and sanctity increased; and I became the author of a treatise which contains the hidden meaning of the first book of Hamzé, which had never before been revealed. I was compelled to summon a meeting of the Uwahid, a grade, as you know, superior to the Okâls, and to whom is confided the more interior Taweel, or interpretations, to whom I communicated it in secrecy. Its tendency was to destroy the dogma of the existence of celestial beings, of their ministering function to man on earth, and of the existence of a God.

The marvellous skill with which this interpretation was constructed, in the exactly opposite sense in many instances to the outward meaning of the words, yet retaining throughout their correspondential signification, was so great that I did not wonder at my audience being transfixed with amazement at a production so far transcending any human power of composition, and accepting it as absolute truth. My God!" exclaimed Sheikh Mohanna, interrupting himself, while the drops of perspiration stood on his forehead at the bare recollection of his suffering, "what a moment of agony that was! Have you ever dreamt in a nightmare that you were in your coffin, about to be buried alive, and that you were unable to call out or make any sign of life? If you have, you can form some notion of the effort I made to break the spell which paralysed my faculties when I saw my beloved friends accepting from my lips a revelation of deepest hidden truth, which I knew to be a lie. You ask me how I knew it. Because my underlying consciousness was still awake. I knew that I was speaking from a surface consciousness which I could not control, because

it was controlled by another, who stifled every attempt I made to give utterance to the voice which whispered within. Oh, my friend, think of the agony I have endured, and am daily enduring, when I think how that lie is spreading ! That I, who sought but to elevate and purify the faith of my nation, should be the means of giving to it, in the guise of occult science, a production so skilfully worded as to deceive, as it were, the very elect ; and that, like some foul miasma, it is spreading silently and secretly, contaminating with its touch the best and noblest seekers after truth, and poisoning with its atheistic virus the choicest spirits of my people. I dared too much. I strove to force my way into regions which are locked and guarded ; I turned a deaf ear to the voice of my Lord and Master ; I quenched His Spirit, and He has laid His hand heavily upon me."

At this point the voice of the speaker sank so low as to be barely audible, and as he murmured the last words, he shivered slightly, and stretched out his hand to Santalba, whose responsive grasp seemed to give him a new accession of power. "And yet," he resumed,

“my Lord did not leave me comfortless. Oh, what internal resistance I have to overcome to tell you what follows! Reinforce me, my friend; invoke the mighty agency you serve to come to our support, for all the powers of darkness are combined against me, to stifle my utterance. When,” he continued, “I had sufficiently woven the web of mystical delusion round my hearers to satisfy my infernal master, he left me comparatively at peace. I still walked as one in a dream, I still knew I was not free; but I rested—rested with a horrid dread that worse was to follow. I was watching one night in the depth of my despair, resisting sleep, because I feared it might lapse into trance, and I had begun to conceive a horror of all conditions in which my senses were not on the alert, when suddenly I became aware of the bright light which had never visited me since I had invited the gloom of mysticism. It was such a light as arrested Paul on his way to Damascus. And I prostrated myself before it; and I felt a slight touch, and heard a voice saying, ‘Look up, for your deliverance draweth nigh;’ and I looked up, and beheld a figure of radiant loveliness, the

effulgence of which was so dazzling that I could scarcely bear it, and the form was that of a woman, and I was inwardly prompted to inquire as to her nature, and I was answered by internal perception, according to the dogmas of my own religion ; for, as you may remember, we believe that the Deity is in His own essence Light, from which emanated the male principle, which we call the ‘Universal Mind’ or Intelligence, and the female principle, which we call the ‘Universal Soul,’ and which latter, conceiving by the action of the ‘Universal Mind,’ brought forth the ‘Eternal Word’; and I now perceived, what has been hidden from the faithful till now, that the ‘Eternal Word’ was twofold, masculine and feminine, and the feminine principle was shown to me that I might understand this, and I was further made aware that my apprehension of this truth would constitute my deliverance; and as I pondered thus, the figure placed her finger on her lips, and seemed to melt into the brilliancy of the light which blinded me, so that I was compelled to close my eyes, and when I opened them again, the light had vanished. But I buried these things in my

heart, and when I compared this vision with my first experience of intercourse with the gross and superficial beings in the unseen world, who had helped me to work wonders and perform acts of healing, and with my second experience of those more profounder and subtler intelligences of a more nether sphere, who delude men with the specious phraseology of occult science, and seek to draw them away from the practice of true religion, by the substitution for it of esoteric dogmas, I was able to perceive the difference between the true and false ; but I also perceived that the distinction was one which it was impossible to describe, and which could be apprehended only by experience ; and that as my people were not yet ready to receive this truth, I must be silent in regard to it, and that the gesture in the vision had been to warn me of this ; but I derived comfort from the thought, that though I was still in bondage, and had been used as a medium for propagating error, it might still be reserved to me to be the means of communicating a truth which should not merely be the antidote of error among a small and obscure nation, but a great and saving message

to humanity at large. So I bowed my head, and suffered patiently, and awaited the day of my deliverance." Thus speaking, Sheikh Mohanna opened his arms. "And it has come," he added, as he locked Santalba in his embrace.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

M A S O L L A M ;

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

A NOVEL

BY

LAURENCE OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'PICCADILLY,' 'ALTIORA PETO,' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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PART II.

(Continued.)

MASOLLAM:

A PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.

CHAPTER IV.

AMINA ENTERS UPON HER MISSION.

At this moment a low tapping was heard in an outer apartment as of some one desiring to attract attention, and afraid of intruding. Santalba hastily disengaged himself from the sheikh's embrace, saying as he did so, "It is Amina."

"You called me," she said, as he met her.

"Yes, my child, I desired your presence. I have that to say to your uncle which it is important that you should hear. Much as I should wish it, I cannot linger long here, and

we three have many things to communicate to each other which are best said in these silent hours. The sheikh has already told me enough to fill my heart with joy, for I feel that I am leaving you with one who will be more to you than any earthly father; while, with the knowledge and training you have received, you can be not my daughter only, but the guide and support of his old age. Meantime I want him to know and understand you before I leave you together."

So saying he led her to the divan on which her uncle was seated, and placed her by his side. The old man received her kindly, but cast a glance of surprise and inquiry on his friend.

"I have deemed the presence of your niece necessary at this stage of our conversation," he said in reply to it; "in the first place, because her experiences, which it is fitting that you should now hear, have been not less remarkable than yours or mine; and in the second, because, for reasons which I will presently explain, with her at my side, I shall be able to enter upon the considerations suggested by your narrative, aided by a faculty of perception of which I should be deprived by her

absence. I will leave her to tell you her own story, merely saying, by way of preface to it, that on that eventful night when the attack took place upon this village, and I believed that you, as well as her father and mother, had fallen a victim to the fury of the assailants, I was happily the means of snatching this child from the grasp of one of them, at the moment when his knife was at her throat, and I fled with her to Damascus. Seeking earnestly the divine guidance in regard to the disposition which I should make of her, I perceived that she had been intrusted to me as a sacred charge; and in this Daoud Effendi Masollam, with whom, as you know, I always lodged when in that city, entirely agreed with me. So strongly did he feel on the subject, that he proposed to adopt her as his own daughter, and to train her in the knowledge of those truths which were even then unfolding their vast possibilities to our enthusiasm. Having, I believe, then, with reason, the most complete confidence in his purity and singleness of motive, and the highest admiration for his wonderful gifts, I thankfully accepted the offer, on the understanding, however, that

should the occasion present itself when I could take charge of her education in Europe she should be sent to me, as I desired she might supplement her oriental studies with the advantages of training under the influences of Western civilisation. On my return to France I married, and all the more important years of her life she passed under the immediate care and supervision of myself and of that saintly woman whom God bestowed upon me as a most precious gift; who was, and still remains, the light and inspiration of my life, and whose mantle has now fallen upon Amina. On the death of my wife, I restored our charge to the care of the Masollams, who were in Paris at the time, and she returned with them to Damascus. Her history from that time to the present she will tell you herself. I must add, however, that it had been arranged between Masollam and myself that her origin and race should not be revealed to her, but that she should be taught to regard herself as one whose duties were not to any special country or people, but to the world at large, to which sentiment she should be trained to subordinate even her

natural affections towards those whom she considered her parents."

"My difficulty was," interrupted Amina, with an affectionate glance at Santalba, "to avoid loving those who lived in Paris, and whom I knew were not my real parents, more than those who lived in Damascus, and whose child I believed myself to be. Still my devotion to, admiration for, and faith in Daoud Effendi were unbounded; and if I did not entertain the same sentiments for my supposed mother, she commanded my entire respect, not unmingled with a certain awe, and I believed that the reserve she ever manifested towards me proceeded from a fear lest her natural maternal affection should interfere with that higher love which she professed for the cause to which she had dedicated her life."

Amina then proceeded to describe her early experiences and training as bearing upon the service to which she had willingly determined to devote herself, as soon as her faculties had so far developed as to enable her to comprehend its scope and methods, and explained how the habit of blind and unquestioning obedience to those whom she gradually came

to regard as morally infallible, at last reached such a point as to deprive her of all faculty of private judgment. Latterly, she said, this assumption of impeccability on the part of the Masollams had arrived at such a pitch, that she felt that any mental criticism of their acts on her part amounted to absolute disloyalty to them and the cause they represented; and she therefore steadily refused to attend to any objections which her own moral sense suggested in regard to their conduct. She the more readily slid into this attitude of mind because the moral change—the operation of which she fancied she observed in her parents, and which was not without its deteriorating effect on her own conscience—was so gradual and subtle as to be difficult of detection. At last her own moral faculty had become so perverted, that she honestly believed that doubts and criticisms were infernal temptations, which she now perceived to have been the suggestions of conscience and the voice of God speaking within her.

“Does it not strike you as strange,” interposed the old sheikh, “that God should allow those who have no desire on earth but to find

Him and do His will, to be so far deceived in their efforts as to mistake His voice within them for the voice of the Tempter, whom we in our religion call the Rival, or Antagonist?"

"That is a point I have had deeply to consider," replied Santalba. "It has been suggested by my own experience, and by that of others for whom I have the highest esteem and the warmest affection, both in the Churches and outside of them."

"And what is the conclusion at which you have arrived?"

"As it is in the nature of an attempted explanation of the methods employed by the Deity in His dealings with His creatures, I would speak with the utmost diffidence and reverence," answered Santalba. "As the motives by which men are actuated are subtle and infinitely varied and complex, it is evident that in each case the divine treatment must be adapted to meet special conditions; and that as new and higher truth descends into the world, it can only do so at first in an extremely attenuated form, otherwise it would produce a moral shock which would convulse humanity beyond its bearing powers;

and as it can only be conveyed through human instruments, these are in the beginning few in number, often obscure and unknown, who are silently and almost unconsciously to themselves sowing the new seed on soil only here and there prepared to receive it. In this service they encounter innumerable obstacles, and a fierce and persistent opposition from the powers of darkness, who seek to intercept the descent of the new rays of light. What they do, in fact, is to temper them to the bearing point. This consideration is the one great consolation of those who seek to make themselves, as it were, burning-glasses for the concentration of that light. They are wearied and worn out, and are apt to be disappointed and chilled by the gloom and the coldness which seems to neutralise all their efforts ; and they wonder why, if they do indeed possess God's truth, it makes such slow progress, and warms so few hearts. But it warms some ; and each new one is a fresh spark added to that divine fire which, if it is consuming, is also vivifying and comforting, but which, if it spread too rapidly, would become an overwhelming conflagration. It is evident that each one who

desires absolutely to be an instrument for the dissemination of an element at once so precious, and in a sense so dangerous, must be specially chosen according to his moral conditions, and can only be intrusted with so much of it as he can bear, and which he has vital energy and potency to distribute. His strength lies in his faith; for there is a faith which is a sign of strength, as there is a faith which is a sign of weakness. The faith which gives strength is that which demands nothing either from God or man. It demands no heaven; it demands no happiness—not even peace, though it gives it; it demands no success—not even visible results or rewards either here or hereafter. It commands. It commands service; unflinching, unwavering, persistent, blind service—service of God and for man. It believes in service. In incessant, uncompromising labour for human necessities—for the poorest, meanest, most practical necessities; those which shall provide all men with food and clothing,—which shall raise men and women on earth to the level of equality that they possess in the sight of God, not of each other—which shall meet the most pressing questions

of the hour—political, economical, and domestic. It believes in a solution to the sociological problem ; and it works for it hopefully, bravely, and persistently. That is the faith which gives strength. And because that strength manifests itself in phenomena that are strictly according to the law which accompanies a faith of this description, but which science cannot grapple with—because no scientific man can investigate the operation of the law unless he is acting under the influences of the moral forces upon which it is conditioned—it is called mystical and visionary. For the faith which is really mystical and visionary, we must turn to the faith that produces weakness. This demands everything both from God and man. It demands from God a heaven. Ay, it goes further ; it demands from Him a hell, and therefore it demands also a Saviour. It demands from man a Church, where it may find comfort and priestly advice and protection, and peace and happiness arising from the fellowship and support of other believers in dogmas innumerable. This is the faith which is mystical and visionary ; which crawls and supplicates for itself, and leaves the world with all

the ills that human flesh is heir to in the position of misery it has occupied from all time. Nevertheless there are those in these Churches as earnestly seeking after truth as you or I—as ready to do God's service, and to spend and be spent for humanity as we are. And you ask why they are left where they are. My answer is, Because it is where God designs that they should be. Either because they are not yet strong enough to exchange the old faith for the new, and need more suffering and ordeal; or because, unknown to themselves, there is still latent somewhere in them the spiritual pride or subtle egotism which characterises the ecclesiasticism in which they have been reared, and to which they are blind. They are serving God in a certain way. For He can enlist error into His service; and those who hold it sincerely and conscientiously differ in His sight in no way from us, who think we hold truth—or, at all events, the small modicum of truth that we can bear. It is but a question of degree with us all. Some can hold more truth, some less. But God does not esteem His human vessels according to their size, or strength, or the purity

of what they hold. They are all part of Him, made and fashioned by Him, and destined sooner or later to feel the full joy of a union with Him. But it is not for us to speculate upon the methods, or the times and the seasons, however near or remote, when in each individual case this union will take place."

"Nevertheless," said Amina, "on looking back over my past experiences, it is impossible for me sometimes not to feel harassed by regrets. I have hitherto shrunk from paining you by alluding to them; but after what you have said, I hope that even mistakes, if made with a pure motive during a period of delusion, will not be allowed to injure the cause we desired to serve."

"You speak to one, my child," interrupted her uncle, "who has made greater mistakes than you can ever have done, and who has never ceased regretting them—the nature of which I have already explained to our dear friend here."

"As we are making confessions," said Santalba, "of acts done under a pressure which, for some wise purpose, God permitted so far to control our judgment as to pervert our

moral sense, there are probably none of us in the search after truth who have not been led astray, myself perhaps most of all. You, my dear Amina, may spare yourself the revelation you were about to make, for I know how those who, alas, have proved traitors, sought to employ you as a decoy, and to make use of your gifts and your beauty to attract those who might be fascinated by the charm of mystery which surrounded you, and so induce them to contribute their wealth to a cause advocated by a lovely woman in winning and plausible language. I know how you did violence to your own maidenly instincts in consciously using that magnetic spell with which you, in common with the purest and the basest of your sex, are endowed, to enslave those whom Masollam desired to plunder, and almost unconsciously slid into charlatanism in the effort, as you firmly believed, to win souls, with whatever means they might have at their disposal, to God's service. You caught the trick insensibly from your master. I speak feelingly, for I also contrived to do violence to my conscience at his behest. It was under his orders that I, who am by na-

ture, whatever may be my other faults, absolutely indifferent to wealth, engaged in those commercial speculations with the elder Hartwright which were so successful to us both. And though we were careful to adhere rigidly to the world's standard in such matters, I was conscious of repeatedly violating my own higher instincts, and of justifying that violation by the reflection that I had a selfish pride in my own high standard of honour, and that God demanded that I should outrage it as a sacrifice to Him. In all this, my dear, believe me, we have nothing to regret. I can guess without being told, the sufferings you endured at the hands of the woman, who, though enjoying the protection which her position as his wife gave her, should never have stood in that relation to Masollam ; and I know how, from the moment that he accepted that relation, he began to sink, and how both you and I, unsuspecting of the female treachery—as, poor man, he was himself—unconsciously began to sink with him, until at last our eyes were mercifully opened by the recent occurrences in England. I know both what our mistakes and our sufferings were

during this period; but I regret nothing, for our motives were pure, and He can turn every mistaken act to good account in the future; and every spasm of agony we underwent was as it were the blast of a purifying furnace, which was needed to fit us to be the instruments we seek to be. But in order," continued Santalba, "that your uncle should understand our allusions to one whom he has been accustomed to regard as the best and purest of men, you must proceed with your story, and explain to him the circumstances under which you and your mother went separately to England, what happened to you while there, and how you came to leave it."

The sheikh listened attentively to Amina's graphic and detailed narrative, his eyes gradually expanding, and his expressive features testifying the liveliest interest and emotion, not unmixed with wonder, as she frankly described the sentiment which had grown up between herself and Clareville, and the relations which now subsisted between them.

"Mashallah!" he exclaimed, when she had concluded, "and to think you are a Druse maiden!"

“Yes, uncle ; but I am the world’s maiden first. I can only belong to the Druses if the Druses like to belong to me.”

The old man stroked his beard thoughtfully. For a chieftain of these wild mountains he had thought and observed much, but his wildest flights of imagination had never suggested such a problem as his newly found niece now presented to him. He cast a wistful and puzzled glance at Santalba.

“We must wait,” said the latter, reading his thought ; “the future contains the solution. Let us not try to work it out now. Trust her to find it. What were the words on your lips when we heard her tapping outside ?”

“That the day of my deliverance, for which I had been waiting, had come.”

“And even as you spoke she entered. Yes, old friend, the day, not of your deliverance alone, but of the world’s deliverance has come, and it has come in the form of a woman. It could not be delivered hitherto, because the sexes were divided ; but in union is strength. It is only when the sexes are united according to the divine intention that the redemptive forces for the world’s deliverance can play

through them ; and it is through the operation of the divine feminine that this union must be achieved. This is the interpretation of your vision of the twofold Word. Regard women, therefore—but especially the woman by your side—in a different light from what you have hitherto done.

“ You asked me how I could judge in regard to the character of a revelation, and what was the test to be applied to inspiration whereby its recipient might estimate its value. First, let him distrust it absolutely if he is not in full possession of all his faculties. He must not produce abnormal conditions by fasting, or unnatural diet of any sort, calculated to damage the healthy action of all animal functions. On the contrary, he should feel that all his senses are exceptionally on the alert, and that his brain is free, clear, and vigorous. Secondly, let him reject all such inspiration as worthless, unless the revelation it contains has a direct bearing upon the practical solution of the world-problem. If it propounds a method of grappling with the universal misery of to-day—if it suggests the discovery and application of

forces hitherto unknown in nature, by which moral and physical disease may be attacked in their secret strongholds—let him not be deterred by the sneer of science or the bigotry of theologians from boldly searching out such forces and experimenting with them. They lie literally in the womb of nature, for they are its procreative and its reconstructive vigours. Thirdly, let him strive to maintain a moral condition which may correspond as nearly as may be to the most lofty ideal which a conscience in hourly relation with the Deity can suggest ; and lastly, let him associate himself devotionally and interiorly, in absolute purity, with one of the opposite sex, animated by like aspirations, and equally desirous with himself to become receptive to the divine afflatus, regardless of the tremendous sacrifices which such a determination must necessarily involve. If, with these precautions taken, and these preliminary conditions observed, one of these co-workers, being in full natural consciousness and intellectual vigour, receives mental images of methods, hitherto untried and unknown, for grappling with the universal humanitarian need, by the invocation

and application of forces in nature which have never yet been developed, and if such images are confirmed by the mental consciousness of the other co-worker, they may be safely regarded as revelations coming from a source which may be trusted; and the pair may then formulate them for their own guidance in such poor and inadequate language as our vocabularies supply, and may present them to their fellow-creatures in the form which seems best adapted to the limited scope of their apprehension.-

“At this moment,” continued Santalba, “the centre of the world’s civilisation seethes with corruption of the foulest description, arising from the perversion of those passions which were implanted by the Deity in the human breast, for the maintenance and preservation of the race. Infernalised, the forces—of which these passions are the external manifestation—contain potencies which, if unrestrained, would destroy that race. Celestialised, they contain the only potencies which will renew it. This is the revelation we have received, and the message we have to give to the world. I say ‘we,’ because to

each one of us here, in one form or another, it has been communicated. I appeal to the inner consciousness of both of you. To you, Amina, it was revealed through a process of experiences which have extended over years. To you, O sheikh, it declared itself in a single night in the radiance of a divine illumination. At this crisis of the world's history, the human race is brought face to face with two alternatives—union in impurity, which is infernal; or union in purity, which is divine. Yet so strangely perverted has the social moral sense become, that we who seek to prepare it for the mystery of the sacred nuptials, dare only whisper in trembling accents the cry which we should shout with joy—‘Behold, the bridegroom cometh.’ The very idea of divine espousals would be considered immoral by the dwellers in the modern Babylons of this poor distraught world. Therefore, O sheikh,” pursued Santalba, rising and placing Amina’s hand in that of her uncle, “have I brought your niece, this virgin, whose lamp is trimmed and burning, away from the atmosphere of vice and unbelief of those cities, and have

placed her as a sacred charge in your keeping. Regard her as the apple of your eye. Watch over her as one of God's vestals, to be loved and cherished and protected, ay, and even obeyed, till the hour comes when she will be summoned from her retreat to fulfil her high and holy destiny."

Sheikh Mohanna closed his eyes as Santalba ceased speaking, and remained silent for some moments, then slowly rising, he did that which no Druse man ever did before. He knelt before his niece, and bowing down his head, he took her hand and kissed it, and then pressed it reverentially on his forehead; and as he did so, Amina could no longer restrain the violence of her emotions, and she fell upon the old man's neck, and wept tears of joy and gratitude to God for this manifestation of His fatherly love, and care; and suddenly a great load fell from her heart, and the cloud which had overshadowed her seemed to lift its gloomy crest and vanish into thin air. As she raised her streaming eyes to Santalba, he saw the change.

"Said I not truly, my child, when I told you but a few short hours ago that your

deliverance was at hand? No more will the hated voice of your persecutor ring in your ears, or the cravings of his foul passion haunt your life. The pure and heaven-sent love of this good old man has already surrounded you with an atmosphere of protection so powerful that Masollam cannot prevail against it."

"Yea, but, O friend," said Sheikh Mohanna, rising, "she had done already more for me than I have now done for her; for as you placed her hand in mine, and spoke of the divine love which had chosen her to a high and holy destiny, and gave her so solemnly to me in charge, and as I was mentally accepting that charge, I felt that there was imparted to me a sudden shock, like that of electricity, which for a second caused every nerve and fibre to tingle, but it was with delight, and not pain; and at that moment the spirit of darkness which had brooded over me ever since I had allowed myself to become enveloped in the sphere of mysticism, and enslaved by its high priest, fled away; an invisible hand seemed put forth through the one I was holding, and struck the chains in which I had been bound, from my hands and

feet. Suddenly I became conscious that I was a free man; and the first use I made of my freedom was to kneel before her who had achieved it."

Santalba slowly rose. "I thank Thee, my God," he said, "for having accomplished Thy work through me this night."

When, after a few moments, Sheikh Mohanna raised his head, which he also had bowed in thanksgiving, he found he was alone.

CHAPTER V.

SANTALBA DISCOURSES ON THE "PROBLEM OF
THE PERIOD" WITH THE SHEIKH.

THE sun was high in the heavens on the following day, when Santalba once more sought the chamber of his host.

"I have come," he said, "to say a few parting words, for I find that I dare not linger longer here. All over Europe, and in many parts of the east, are men who call themselves disciples of Masollam. Their principal occupation is to collect funds for the great work which it is understood that he is carrying on. It was Amina's chief duty to keep up an active correspondence with these persons, at the dictation of 'the Master'; and one of the causes of the distress she has been lately feeling, arises from the knowledge that she was called

upon to make statements which she knew at the time to be false, but which, as they were dictated to her by Masollam, she did not feel entitled to question or to criticise. To remedy, so far as may be, this error, she has placed in my hands a letter addressed to them; and to as many of them as are known to me, I shall supplement it by statements of my own. The journeys which this will involve will detain me longer than I could wish from the retreat, unknown to Masollam, in which my three friends, Sebastian Hartwright, and his wife, and Clareville, are now at work. I have already parted from Amina, who has all the advice and instruction which are necessary for her guidance. She will keep me informed of what transpires here by letter, though it is probable that I shall feel without that, in a general way, how it fares with you."

"I need not say, O my brother," replied Sheikh Mohanna, "how it grieves me to part with you so soon; but I know the exacting nature of the service upon which you are engaged, and that I can best show my devotion to it by speeding you on your way. Nevertheless I have been pondering much

over our conversation of last night, and it has suggested a question which I should wish answered, for my own guidance. You said that the highest form of inspiration could only descend by means of the operation of a conjunction of masculine and feminine elements; and that therefore its most fitting receptacle was an associated pair. But you will pardon me if I make a personal application, and ask whether those who, like yourself, are deprived of the co-operation of an earthly female associate, cannot expect to be thus inspired."

"She who was my associate on earth, and who has passed into higher conditions, is not prevented thereby from co-operating with me, in many respects far more effectually than she could otherwise have done," answered Santalba; "but this is due to the fact that during our external union we had, by long and arduous effort and ordeal, arrived at a consummation, whereby an internal and imperishable tie had been created, the mystery of which I dare not enter upon now. Hence our mental consociation differs altogether from such intercourse as you have experienced with

the gross spirits of the lower regions of the unseen world, and who, in some countries, seek to communicate with man by rapping on tables, writing on slates, or even appearing in so-called materialised forms, while their human agent is a medium whom they control—a mere funnel through which they pour into the world their moral or immoral platitudes, as the case may be. I have passed through both experiences, and the difference between being a ‘medium under control,’ and arriving at a permanent condition of free and independent mental association, with a pure intelligence of the upper region, is greater than can be described. To be appreciated it must have been felt. It is the difference between liberty and slavery, between health and disease, between darkness and light. In the one case, one is conscious of being not merely a machine, but a machine which weakens and decays under the strain to which it is subjected. The bodily health is injured, the intellectual faculties are enfeebled, often to the point of impairing the mental balance, and life but too frequently is at last rendered miserable, by the invasion of influences which

torture both the mind and body which they have made their abiding - place, and from which they cannot be ejected. It is the penalty which poor mortals pay for attempting to pry, by disorderly methods, into the secrets of nature, which they are not meant to penetrate.

“ In the other case, on the contrary, there is a constant sense of increased mental vigour and bodily strength, a consciousness of moral and intellectual freedom and spontaneity. The individuality, instead of being suppressed, is reinforced. With every accession of power there flows in a rushing current of love for the human race, and a desire to serve it. There is no longing to pry into mysteries, because knowledge seems to ripen in the mind more rapidly than it can be acted upon. And knowledge which means dogma or theory, and does not compel to practical activities, is worthless. The benign operation of the associate intelligence is to reinforce, by means of a subtle impregnation, the moral aspirations and intellectual faculties of the co-worker on earth, and this is effected with such infinite wisdom and tenderness, that no sense is produced of

one intelligence coercing the other from without; but these derived impulses seem to spring from the man's own will-centre, so that he feels one with the being who produces them. But while experience has shown that neither the interpretations of nature's secrets by the mystics, nor the communications which have been received through spiritual mediums, have attempted to deal practically with the world's misery, we owe them this, that they have kept alive a belief in those latent forces in nature by means of which alone that misery can be successfully attacked,—they have been most useful in resisting the opposite tendency characteristic of the age, that of materialism. For if the spiritualist and the mystic wander into regions of phantasy in their attempt to construct definitions of the undefinable, and to base cosmical systems upon data which are not susceptible of scientific proof, and invent dogmas in regard to them which are of no practical utility in solving the problems of work-a-day life, the materialist, on the other hand, cuts himself off from the sources of that moral power which, if he is a good man, he most desires to possess, by refusing to investigate

its dynamic properties, and the laws which appertain to them.

“ Thus science alone does not enable men to regulate their emotions, because it declines to consider as within the scope of legitimate investigation, the nature of the forces by virtue of which those emotions exist. If the circumstance that the phenomena connected with the operation of the moral forces in nature do not furnish facts which are of invariable recurrence, under certain given conditions, is sufficient to exclude them from any attempt at scientific analysis, then we may look in vain to science to furnish us with any one truth which will be of the smallest benefit morally to the human race. But if its devotees will persist in limiting science to the narrow positive ground, which can never make men better, let them at all events treat with respect those who are engaged in the investigation of those vital moral phenomena, the manifestation of which in every human creature it is impossible for them to deny. For it is by the proper regulation of its vital forces that our only hope of regenerating humanity rests. At present civilised society is tossed like a shuttlecock

mainly between three classes: those who devote themselves to mystical dogmatism and produce nothing practical; those who devote themselves to scientific dogmatism and produce nothing moral; and those who, steeped in rival theological dogmatisms,

‘Fight like devils for conciliation,
And hate each other for the love of God,’

and produce a very poor standard of moral practice, but which for the present is all that the poor world has to go upon—with what result, the seething vice and hideous immorality of the most populous centres of Christendom furnish a complete illustration. So long as these three classes are unwilling to grapple with the problems which are involved in the sex question, and to investigate the nature of the forces which produce depravity, with the view to the proper application of the laws inherent in those forces, and by which they may be regulated and directed, will they continue to run riot, in spite of mysticism, science, or theology. Dangers of another kind occur when these disorderly forces chance to be diverted into an opposite channel; when, instead of running into vicious

excess, they propel the ignorant and superstitious to devotional transports, excited by their credulous acceptance of dogmas which have been supplied to them by their theology ; and the Church, finding itself unable to control the emotions it has itself aroused, is compelled to invoke the aid of the faculty.¹

¹ The 'Times' of July 31st, 1885, gives an account of "a remarkable outburst of religious hallucination which has been spreading during the month past near Piacenza," where a little girl asserted that she had seen and conversed with the Madonna. "From that moment," continues the correspondent, "there commenced a literal epidemic of ecstasies and visions. While I write, more than thirty little girls declare that they have seen, and are in direct communication with, the Madonna. . . . Hundreds and hundreds of persons are seen labouring up the steep ascent under the burning rays of the July sun. Some girls scramble up the bare rocks, supplicating the Virgin with loud cries to appear, until they faint with fatigue. Recovering their senses, they say that they hear the voice of the Madonna, while all present fall on the ground, kissing the earth with convulsive sobs and floods of tears. A profound impression is produced. To aggravate matters, women known to be hysterical sing, laugh, and cry, causing others to imitate them. While I write this, thousands are thronging hither from the valleys of the old Duchies, from Piedmont, from Liguria, from Lombardy. The number is estimated at 16,000. The authorities are now interfering, and it is high time. Several doctors who have visited the place declare that the spread of this hallucination is likely to assume very alarming proportions." It would be interesting to know whether these medical men have one kind of medicine for a religious hallucination and another for a secular one.

“Meanwhile the religious instinct of the intelligent classes craves something solid to stand upon—a sure foundation upon which it can rear a new social superstructure. It has outgrown theological dogma; it rejects mystical hypothesis; it starves on scientific discovery. It demands moral fact, a demand which must remain unsatisfied so long as men continue to make arbitrary distinctions and retain antiquated definitions in regard to what they choose to call matter, soul, mind, spirit, substance, and so forth. There is one ground upon which they can all meet, and that is *force*; and one sentiment which they can all entertain for each other, and that is *charity*. With this common ground to start from, and this common sentiment to hold them together, they may hope to arrive at humane results; while facts, whether in regard to the seen or the unseen, if matters of individual experience, should be held as such by the experimenter, without any effort to force them upon the neighbour, in the firm belief and expectation that if they are true and likely to be of value to the race generally, they will be confirmed by the experience of others,

until they become finally and universally recognised.

“I have been led, O sheikh, in answer to your question, into a longer digression than I intended ; but the subject is one which it would require days to discuss, and I have only minutes at my disposal. I must hasten, therefore, to fulfil my commission. Here are some jewels which Amina has requested me to intrust to your safe keeping.”

Thus saying, the Count produced a small box, containing a pair of diamond ear-rings and a necklace. “These stones are, as you will perceive, of immense value, though they do not nearly represent the amount which at various times Masollam has had from me. He justified the purchase of them by the virtue which he declared they possessed. On the strength of these talismanic qualities, he insisted upon Amina always wearing them. And on the ground that this was a fraudulent appropriation of money which I had given him for a different purpose, I told Amina to carry them away with her when she fled from his house. I now make them over to her, to be dealt with in the manner she sees fit. It is necessary to

the work she will be called upon to do, and the position she may have to occupy, that she should feel independent financially, and these jewels will make her so. Possibly an attempt will be made to regain possession of them, and as she does not wish at present to convert them into their money value, she desires to place them in your charge."

"So much of what you have said," observed Sheikh Mohanna, as he took the jewels, "deals with social conditions with which I am unfamiliar, that I the more regret that you cannot stay longer with me now to enlighten my mind more fully in regard to the deeply interesting topics upon which you have touched; but it also convinces me that your work can never lie in this obscure Druse village. Meantime be sure that I will guard with my life, not only these diamonds, but that far more inestimable treasure, her whom you have so generously endowed with them."

"Farewell, then, for the present," said Santalba, embracing his friend; "it may be that I shall return sooner than you imagine, and find, what you expect still less, that, for a time at least, my work may lie in your remote village."

While Santalba was thus starting on his journey, furnished with a letter from Amina to her old correspondents, stating briefly the reasons which had induced her to separate herself from Masollam, the "Master" had some time before anticipated this step by an extensive correspondence, in which his disciples were warned against the woman Amina, and the serpent, in the form of Santalba, who had beguiled her. So incessant were the labours of Carabet as amanuensis, that his business in Tongsley was materially suffering from neglect. Although versed, as he had been from youth, in those arts of deceit and intrigue in which Orientals are so eminently proficient, he yet was amazed at the fertility of invention, and the audacity of misstatement, with which the combined ingenuity of his sister and her husband garnished their correspondence ; while, at Masollam's dictation, he described that poor persecuted saint and his dove-like consort, he felt that whatever little moral sense he himself had ever possessed was gradually becoming so obscured, as to force him entirely to abandon any attempt to solve the riddle thus propounded. He remembered that in days gone by he had looked upon

Daoud Effendi Masollam as the wisest of men, and upon his sister as the best of women; and in obedience to her solicitations, and a certain inward prompting towards good, he had attached himself to them as a servant of the cause which they represented. He had himself never had that cause at heart; he had obeyed rather the force of circumstances and family ties than any aspiration of his own. He sustained, therefore, no moral shock at the revelation suggested by the correspondence in which he was engaged: he had begun by following his sister for better, he now seemed to be following her for worse; but after all, what judge was he of good or bad? These people whom he had been accustomed to respect above all others, thought it was all right, and who was he, to criticise them? He owed all his moral training to them, and this was part of it. Masollam was essential to the cause, and Masollam's prestige, as a pure and holy and gifted man, was essential to Masollam—therefore he was serving the cause by maintaining that prestige; and besides, was not his sister wealthy, and was he not in a sense dependent upon her? and how could he better ensure his own comfort and happiness

than by blind and supple obedience? So he contentedly scribbled and posted packets of lies; until at last the day came when Masollam, turning to Tigranuhe, said, "That, I think, completes the list. No doubt the answers will come pouring in before very long; but we shall be able to escape them by returning to Damascus. This detestable climate chills me to the marrow; and my associations with The Turrets are not so agreeable that I wish to linger here. You still think that it would be better to go in pursuit of Amina than of Sebastian?"

"Distinctly," said Madame Masollam; "and for two reasons. In the first place, we do not know where Sebastian is; and we have discovered that Amina has returned with Santalba to Syria. In the second place, if we found Sebastian, the whole position of matters is so changed since his marriage, and our relations with his uncle are so unfriendly, that it would be very difficult, even in the absence of Santalba, to carry out our original intention with regard to him; and we should be exposed at any moment to interruption by the inopportune arrival of the Count. Besides, I believe Clareville is with him. No; we must allow events to develop in that direction."

"But do you feel sure we shall not meet Santalba in Syria, if he has gone there with Amina?" asked Masollam, nervously.

"No; it is impossible for him to stay there. He is more likely to visit some of those friends to whom we have been writing; but he will find that we have been too quick for him."

"Well, then, give me pen and ink, and I will myself write to Charles Hartwright, to tell him that he is welcome to return and reoccupy The Turrets at his convenience. I thus make him a present of the unfulfilled lease: it will be a civility which costs nothing, and may be of service to us later."

So saying, the old man wrote a letter couched in most friendly language to his landlord; and the same day Carabet, to the surprise of Tongsley, announced his intention of closing up his business. Within less than a week from that time, the mysterious Orientals, whose presence in that north-country town had been a matter of no little gossip and wonderment to its inhabitants, vanished from the scene; and a month later, Mr and Mrs Hartwright, with their sons and Laura, once more entered into peaceful possession of The Turrets.

CHAPTER VI.

SHEIKH SHIBLEY MAKES A PROPOSAL OF
MARRIAGE.

It was not unnatural that the anomalous position which Amina occupied among her own people, should give rise to some discussion among the members of her family; and these, if we include those of more remote degree, were by no means despicable in numbers. Although women are held in far higher estimation among the Druses than among the Moslems, and many of them even rise to the rank of Okâl, or Initiated, and have been known to exercise great influence, they are still regarded as inferior beings, and, as a rule, have but little voice in shaping their own destiny. A Druse woman is never permitted to marry a man of another religion; and if a

Druse man should marry a Moslem or Christian woman, an almost unknown event, she is bound to become a Druse. The fact that a girl born of Druse parents should not be a Druse also by religion, was a novelty so unprecedented, that it formed the subject of several weighty discussions at those meetings of sheikhs, who, coming from other villages, form secret councils in their church or *khalweh* in which the affairs, political and religious, of the nation are discussed; and it required all the great influence of Sheikh Mohanna to stave off a decision which compelled his niece to give in a formal adhesion to the Druse faith, in the terms prescribed by her religion. He explained that, being a person of great intelligence, she could not be expected blindly to adopt a creed involving such profound mysteries, without being instructed therein. That naturally, having been brought up in entire ignorance of the most elementary principles of the Druse religion, some time would be required for her education, and this Sheikh Mohanna undertook to furnish; a task, he said, which would be rendered more easy from the fact that she

had never belonged to any of the existing forms of religion, and that she had therefore none of those prejudices to overcome, which are inseparable from dogmatic creeds. It was therefore agreed that, so far as the religious question was concerned, she should be left in peace, until Sheikh Mohanna announced that she had completed her theological studies, and was ready to give in her adhesion to the faith of her people. There was another question, however, which the old sheikh saw looming in the near future, and which caused him considerable perturbation of mind. He was at no difficulty to account for the frequent visits of her cousin Shibley, whose growing passion for Amina her cold and distant treatment only seemed to inflame, and he was therefore quite prepared one day for a formal demand from the young sheikh for the hand of his niece.

“You have already an affectionate and devoted wife, who has borne you three children,” said Sheikh Mohanna, in a tone of mild remonstrance.

“She is no longer my wife ; I divorced her yesterday,” answered Sheikh Shibley. “Think

you I would come here and ask for your niece to wife if I was still a married man ? ”

“ Then you have been unduly precipitate, and have parted yourself for ever from one whom you will find it difficult, if not impossible, to replace. Dismiss the thought at once from your mind, that your wishes in regard to Amina can ever be gratified, at least while I am alive,” pursued the old sheikh, somewhat sternly. “ I have already conversed with her on the subject, foreseeing this contingency—believe me, in no unfriendly spirit towards you—and she has distinctly, and in the most positive terms, assured me that under no circumstances could she ever be your wife. As I am determined neither to coerce her myself, nor to see her coerced in this matter by others, you will perceive that the marriage you desire is impossible, and you will best consult your own happiness by giving up all idea of it.”

By an immense effort of will, Shibley suppressed the rage with which he felt convulsed, and after a pause, during which he regained his self-control so far as to be able to mutter with a sneer, “ Be it so, O sheikh ; I can

reconcile myself to the disappointment the more easily, since she is still an unbeliever," he turned away and rode gloomily home, more determined than ever to carry his point.

Sheikh Mohanna remained for some time in deep meditation ; he then rose and went to the women's apartments, where he found his sister Sada busily engaged in the domestic operation of boiling carob syrup.

" Where is Amina ? " he asked.

" She has gone to see Afifi, who is dangerously ill of fever," replied Sada ; and the sheikh proceeded in search of his niece to the village.

Afifi was the only daughter of the Khateeb, a lovely girl of eighteen, who, from the moment she had first seen Amina, had been struck with an admiration which had speedily ripened into a devoted attachment. Indeed, during the few weeks which had elapsed since the arrival of the late sheikh's daughter, she had succeeded in winning the hearts of the whole of the female population ; while the men were unwillingly obliged to admit to themselves that she compelled a sentiment of deference and respect such as they

had never before accorded to a woman, and for the growth of which they were somewhat at a loss to account. She had adopted the national costume ; had made herself personally conversant with the domestic affairs of each household ; had afforded pecuniary assistance to the poorest families ; was unwearied in her attendance on, and devotion to, the sick, and most successful in her treatment of them. She was already by these means acquiring an influence, which she turned to good account by acting as a peacemaker in the family disputes which were constantly arising, and in which the whole village was in the habit of taking sides. She distributed her favours equally between the two leading families, whose feud had for years divided the village, which she was the better able to do, as her own position was superior to both, and it was in the house of one of these she was now ministering. It was built in a courtyard entered by rather an imposing stone gateway, above which had been constructed a square chamber, which was the one appropriated by the Khateeb to the numerous guests he was in the habit of receiving from the neighbour-

ing villages. On one side of the court was a pen for goats, and a verandah affording stabling accommodation; on the other, a mill for crushing olives. This was under cover, and was a somewhat elaborate apparatus, which differed in no degree probably from that used in the country from the earliest times. Here was the huge circular bottom stone, about eight feet in diameter, with a rim six inches high, which is traversed by an upright stone of smaller dimensions, the exact counterparts of which are to be found among the stones of the most ancient ruins. They are worked by a huge upright shaft, from which extends a lateral beam, and to it is attached the necessary horse-power.

In one corner of this yard stands a small isolated construction, which contains only a circular pit about four feet deep and two feet in diameter. It is the domestic oven, and sitting near it are two women engaged in baking bread. A crackling wood-fire is blazing at the bottom, so that the smooth sides are heated up to a high point. Between the women is a circular cushion, about a foot in diameter and two inches thick. They in turn

take a large handful of the kneaded and moistened flour, and dexterously throwing it from hand to hand, flatten it out until it is in the form of a pancake the size of the cushion, upon which they rapidly spread it, and, with a quick skilful movement, slap it on the side of the oven, with a force which spreads it out to a wafer at least eighteen inches in diameter. Here it sticks for a minute or two, when it is pulled off and piled in a heap. The women engaged in this operation perform it with incredible skill and rapidity; and the result of their labours, if eaten as soon as it is baked, is by no means unpalatable.

The actual residence of the Khateeb occupies the fourth side of the court in which these varied industries are in progress, fronting the main gateway, and consists of two large apartments, which are divided by a row of arches connected at their base by a low wall, from which spring in each room three arches spanning it transversely; upon these are laid the rough logs of mountain wood which form the flat roof, and which in their turn are covered with a thick layer of tempered mud. These logs are blackened beneath

by the smoke of the winter fires, which are built in the centre of the rooms, the only outlets for the smoke being the doors and windows. In the corners, in the angles made by the arches, on every available space on the wall, are projecting constructions built of mud, ornamented with raised patterns and quaint devices of the same material, which serve the purpose of cupboards and granaries ; and there are little trap-doors in the latter, through which the grain, which has been poured in above, can be allowed to issue at will. Besides which there are projecting ledges or shelves, also ornamented ; and the guns, pistols, and other weapons belonging to the male members of the household, are hung in picturesque confusion side by side with sieves, circular dining-mats of coloured straw, cooking utensils, and other articles of domestic necessity. One large recess is set apart for the reception of mattresses, coverlets, and cushions, which are heaped in it in a pile reaching from the floor almost to the roof. At night these are all pulled out and spread over the floor, thus affording as much sleeping accommodation as there is area ; from which it will ap-

pear that, if there is not much furniture in one sense of the word—for bedsteads, tables, and chairs are conspicuous by their absence—the walls are abundantly garnished with all that contributes to the comfort of Druse home-life. But there is one feature in the internal economy of the establishment which, if it is the least agreeable to the stranger, is the most characteristic. On the further sides of both the apartments I have been describing run rows of mangers on a level with the floor. The more-valuable animals, kept there for the sake of greater security and convenience for winter feeding, actually occupy the same room with the family, though the level of the floor upon which they stand is about two feet lower. In the summer, when the cattle are for the most part away, these mangers are a convenience both to babies and foreigners. They serve as a cradle to the one, and as a seat for the other, as it is more comfortable to sit on the edge of a manger, and put your feet into it, than to tuck them under you on a mat. But even in summer these sociable stables are always to some extent used; and at the moment when Sheikh Mohanna entered

the house of the Khateeb, the apartment occupied by the invalid was also tenanted by a mare and her foal, two cows and a donkey, a lean cat, and a number of long-legged chickens, while he might have counted no fewer than twenty-four men, women, and children crowded round the mattress on the floor, which formed the couch of the sick girl. Amina was remonstrating at the moment of his entrance with the girl's mother, who was giving vent to her feelings in a loud wail, which was occasionally echoed by some of the other women, while her father was endeavouring to rouse his daughter to consciousness by bawling her name in her ear. To add to the din, several babies were crying; a strange cur had entered the yard, and given rise to a furious remonstrance of barking on the part of its recognised canine proprietors; and the donkey, finding the moment propitious, swelled the uproar by a sympathetic bray.

On seeing the sheikh, Amina rushed to meet him with streaming eyes.

"O uncle," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you have come! I am quite in despair. If Afifi dies, she will have been killed by those

people ; she is at a most critical point, and her only chance is perfect quiet, and air that is not poisoned by a crowd that shuts off every pure breath from her. Do, please, exert your authority. Try and clear the room of the different variety of animals that infest it. I believe I could answer for her recovery if I only had a fair chance. I have one of Madame Masollam's medicines here, which I am sure would exactly meet the case. You know what marvellous instinct she had for treating all kinds of disease, and how skilled she was in the use of herbs and simples. She taught me a great deal ; and I have got a collection of most of her remedies, besides many others that are well known and in general use. The people admit that I have used them already with the greatest success ; but, because Afifi is the village favourite, and they think she is going to die, their distress is so great that they will listen to no reason : the Khateeb will kill her, if you do not drag him away from her ear."

It was not without difficulty that even Sheikh Mohanna, with his great authority, succeeded in clearing the room and producing some kind of quiet ; and finding that Amina

was determined to remain with her patient, not only for the rest of the day but throughout the night, he insisted that his own presence was also necessary to secure her the conditions she required.

So absorbed was she in her tender cares, that the old man felt that the moment was not an opportune one to broach the subject which had brought him to her side ; but as he silently watched her flitting about the sick-room like a ministering angel, her natural grace seemed so much enhanced in his eyes by the costume with which he was familiar, that he felt that he could not blame Shibley for having fallen the victim to a passion which a being so lovely was so well calculated to inspire. And indeed Amina's beauty was of a type which corresponded admirably with her own national costume. Her outer garment consisted of a dark-blue robe, trimmed with wide bands of red satin, the short light sleeves of which were cut above the elbow ; it was open all down the front, so as to leave visible the semi-transparent chemise, which, richly embroidered with silk round the neck, and trimmed with strips of a heavy white, con-

cealed as with a tunic the loose trousers which descended to the ankles, round which they were confined. The white sleeves of the chemise, widely pointed, escaped from the shorter ones of the outer robe, leaving the arm bare to the elbow; a scarf of bright scarlet was wound round the waist, above which, and below the bosom, the folds of the outer robe were caught together by a button, thus giving the effect of that double girdle often represented in ancient classical costume. The head-dress consisted of a long white cloth, with the centre of one edge drawn low upon the forehead, its two ends hanging down the back to the heels; bound round the head by a wide fillet of brightly variegated colours, it resembled somewhat that worn by the ancient Egyptians, and its simplicity accorded well with the regular outline of the features of the wearer.

“My beloved child,” said the old skeikh, as Amina, after having prepared and given her patient some medicine, and arranged her pillows, came and seated herself on the cushion by her uncle’s side, “you are wearing yourself out in your labours for your people; you allow

yourself no time for rest, or," he added with a sly glance at her, "for your studies into the mysteries of our religion."

"These are the mysteries of my religion," replied Amina, as she pointed to the sick girl. "Find me a cure for the diseases of body and of spirit, and you have solved the only mystery I desire to penetrate. That girl's illness is not purely physical. She is sick at heart—I feel it here," and she pressed her hand upon her own side. "Do you know why I am successful in dealing with disease? because I nearly always feel the patients' symptoms in myself. Not always. If I don't, it is a sign to me that for some reason I can do nothing for them, or am not intended to. For instance, the other day, Shibley, having heard that I had some skill in the healing art, came to me, with a description of violent pains which he felt in his side, accompanied with shortness of breath; but I could feel nothing of it, though I held his hand for some time, and sought to open myself to some perception of his malady. So I was obliged to tell him I could do nothing for him."

"Perhaps the real reason was that he had

nothing the matter with him—at least, nothing that medicine could cure,” replied the sheikh, with a smile of some meaning.

“I told him he ought rather to consult you than me,” continued Amina, simply. “On all sides I hear stories of the marvellous cures which you used to accomplish, and regrets expressed that you refuse any longer to make use of your exceptional gifts. Will you tell me your reason, uncle?”

“I came to perceive that my perceptions were not to be relied upon, because they were the result of certain organic conditions, which were in themselves disorderly. I induced them, by long periods of fasting, during which I repeatedly fell into trances, when powerful influences would take possession of me, and afterwards project through my touch a healing virtue; but as during these trances I was naturally unable to choose between these influences, or control their action, I began to discover that, while my touch was in some instances beneficial, in others it was pernicious, and this led me to doubt whether I was in the right path, and for many reasons, which it is not neces-

sary for me now to enter upon, I came to the conclusion that I was not acting in accordance with the divine will in the matter, and that these experiences were permitted to convince me of that fact."

"In the absence of scientific knowledge to help us, the whole subject, indeed, is one surrounded with danger and difficulty," returned Amina; "and I have made up my mind, whenever I return to Europe, to enter as a student of medicine, and go through the whole course necessary to qualify myself to become a medical practitioner; for I quite agree with you that such powers as you possessed are too inconstant, and do not belong to the means lawfully at the disposal of man."

"It seems nevertheless strange," said Sheikh Mohanna, with a sigh, "to reject the resources which these profounder spiritual knowledges and potencies supply, and to descend for your wisdom and your remedial agents to the low level of ordinary science."

"Don't suppose," interrupted Amina, quickly, "that I regard the highest established results of medical science as containing more than a part—if you will, but a small part—of the re-

quisite information in dealing with disease ; but it is an essential part. The study of human anatomy, of pharmaco-dynamics, and of therapeutics, is one thing ; the principle of diagnosis is a totally different one. So long as a gulf is allowed to separate—both in the minds of patients and their medical advisers—the physical from the moral organism, so long will diagnoses, which are based upon the hypothetical existence of this gulf, be imperfect. And yet,” she added, “in practice, even the most materialistic of practitioners will often be forced to do violence to his theories in this respect. Take, for instance, the case of a girl who is pining to death under the influence of moral starvation, caused by unrequited affection ; the physician will prescribe, not a drug, but that moral atmosphere which the presence of the beloved object can only supply.”

As she thus spoke, Amina was interrupted by the low moaning of her patient, as she moved restlessly on her mattress. “If I am not much mistaken,” she said, “here is a case in point.”

“And here,” said Sheikh Mohanna, taking his niece’s hand, and looking gravely into her

large soft eyes, "is another. Only in this case the sexes are reversed."

"What do you mean, uncle?"

"I mean that, whether Shibley's symptoms were real or assumed when he applied to you as a physician, he is at this moment morally diseased, his whole nature unhinged, by his love for you. He has just been with me, to endeavour to obtain my consent to your union. I told him that I had already spoken to you on the subject, and that your feeling in the matter had been so clearly expressed, as to leave me no alternative but to refuse that consent absolutely. On which he left me, with a smooth tongue, but an eye that betrayed the passion that lurked behind it, and which meant mischief."

"What you tell me grieves, but it does not surprise me. I was prepared for something of the sort by a conversation which I had with mother, on the subject, this morning. A very painful one."

"How so?"

"It is the first difference I have had with her, and she finally became very violent. She insists that I shall accept Shibley, and declares

that from the moment she heard that I was living she had destined me for him, and that it is not a matter upon which I have any right of choice. She tells me that she has even gone so far as to promise me to him, and to recommend him to divorce his present wife."

"He has followed her advice, and already done so," said the sheikh.

In the burst of her indignation at this intelligence, Amina failed to hear a low quick exclamation which issued from the lips of the invalid, as her uncle imparted it.

"And these are my people!" she exclaimed bitterly; "and this is one of the mysteries of their religion, of which, no doubt, in due course of time, I am to have personal experience! Uncle, you must send at once for that poor abandoned wife and her three little ones. Henceforth they must belong to me and be at my charge—unless, indeed, Shibley can be forced to take her back."

"That is quite impossible—it is strictly prohibited. He can never, even in the whole course of his life, speak to her again; and should they see each other at a distance, they must turn aside to avoid meeting."

“ And she loved him ? ”

“ With all her heart, from the time she was a child. She has never had a thought but for Shibley.”

“ Then,” said Amina, sadly, “ she is a fit subject for the mysteries of *my* religion, and I will instruct her in them.”

“ I understand your feelings, my child ; and, believe me, I sympathise with them. As you must know by this time, I am but a Druse in name. I have long repudiated, in the secrecy of my own conscience, that religion of which at one time I was one of the most learned expounders ; for as I advanced into its more hidden mysteries, I saw that they led to a negation of the facts of my own inner consciousness, and of truths which had been revealed to it ; but my people are not prepared to receive these truths, and I should only do harm by exciting their suspicions in any way. Therefore we must act in this matter with judgment and caution, concealing as much as may be our real designs, for this is the habit of Druses—and in certain cases it is not only expedient but lawful. Instil, therefore, those purer principles of morality which you desire

to impart with subtlety, and not in a manner calculated to rouse existing prejudices or excite suspicion, while you may still be supposed to be receiving instruction from me, as in many things, in fact, you are. And as for this Shibley matter, rest in peace. I will watch over you, and protect you from him. Avoid discussing the subject further with your mother, who will, nevertheless, violently oppose your taking charge of the wife and children; but to this I will make her submit."

"Affi's whole condition has changed!" interrupted Amina, suddenly starting up and going to the girl. "Come here, uncle."

The sheikh approached.

"See," continued Amina in a low tone, "into what a tranquil sleep she has fallen. Feel her pulse—how calmly it beats! The crisis has passed, or rather it was never actually reached. It has been averted by a life-current which has poured in from some unknown quarter. All the moral pain has gone. The girl is cured!" she exclaimed delightedly. "Help me to get down another mattress and some pillows. I will spread them here and go to sleep by her side.

There is no occasion for me to watch any longer, or for you to stay, dear uncle."

Sheikh Mohanna stood for some moments gazing at the girl in deep thought.

"You are right, my child," he said at length. "There is no need of my staying; but before I leave you I will tell you the unknown quarter from which that life-current came. Afifi was not so unconscious as we supposed her to be. She overheard you say that you would never marry Shibley; she overheard me say that he had divorced his wife; and—she loves him!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

WHILE Shèikh Mohanna and Amina had been watching by the side of the Khateeb's sick daughter, Sheikh Shibley was riding gloomily home, revolving in his mind a project for the violent abduction of his beautiful cousin. He was sure of the co-operation of her mother and of many members of her family ; but he foresaw that the preliminary arrangements must be conducted with the greatest caution and secrecy, and might involve the expenditure of more ready money than he had in hand. He therefore determined to raise the necessary amount upon part of his landed property ; and to this end it was needful that he should visit a friend of the Jewish persuasion who was resident at Damascus, and often resorted to by the *fella-*

heen in their financial difficulties. Now this man was an old acquaintance of Carabet's, who, having arrived at Damascus with the Masollams only a few days before, happened to be in his friend's shop at the moment when Shibley entered it. In the course of the preliminary compliments which were being interchanged, Carabet's quick ear caught the name of Teraya, which he knew to be Amina's native village, and where the Jew had some acquaintances whom he was inquiring after—among others, Sheikh Mohanna. As soon, therefore, as coffee was introduced, and the financial subject was entered upon, Carabet took part in the conversation, finally offering to supply Sheikh Shibley with the sum needed on easier terms than he was likely elsewhere to obtain, and making an appointment with him for the following morning at the same place. On Shibley's leaving, Carabet arranged with his friend that the latter should have a commission on the transaction, and particularly warned him not to mention Masollam's name to the Druse.

"Truly the gods befriend us!" remarked Carabet to his sister, when he hurried back

to her with the news. "I happened to turn into old Isaac's, knowing that he was acquainted with that part of the country, to see what I could pick up with regard to the position of affairs at Teraya, when who should come in but a Druse sheikh of a neighbouring village, who it seems is in want of money to pay his taxes with, and who is a cousin of Amina's? for when I asked him whether he had ever known Sheikh Sâleh Zedaan of Teraya, he drew himself up with an air and replied, 'I am his cousin's son, Sheikh Shibley Zedaan.' I therefore made an appointment with him for to-morrow, when I will bring him here, promising him the money at twenty-five per cent, which is five per cent less than he can get elsewhere, provided the security is satisfactory."

"Did you not ask him for news of Amina?" asked Masollam.

"I left all such inquiries for you, O Master! fearing I might excite his curiosity or be indiscreet in my questions. I even took precautions to conceal your presence here."

"You did quite right, brother," said Tigranuhe, with a glance of contempt at the old

man ; “ and I think,” she added, turning upon him sharply, “ you will do well when he comes to be equally guarded ; in fact, excepting in the pure matter of business, you had better not interfere, but leave the extracting of the information to me.”

This was said in a tone of scornful authority, which suggested that the relations of the pair had undergone a marked change since our first acquaintance with them at The Turrets ; and indeed there was evidence of this in Masollam’s countenance as well as in his manner. Those singular facial transformations had become more rare and less marked ; the sudden manifestations of youthful vigour were less frequent ; the eyes seemed to have lost their power of emitting fierce flashing glances, and to be growing dim and sullen. If the vital fuel was not perceptibly burning lower, it had ceased, apparently, to show those reinforcements of combustible material, which had blazed forth periodically in the looks and tones and gestures of the man, and from the fiery glow of which he had derived his highest inspirations. Thus the forces to which he had owed his remarkable powers seemed to be slowly

abandoning him, and his real character, which these forces had suppressed, began to betray itself, more especially in his relations with his wife. A growing hatred of her was gradually taking possession of his soul; and with the consciousness of his own increasing weakness, there entered a sentiment of distrust and suspicion of her every word and act. He became haunted by a mortal dread of the consequences to which her cupidity and her ambitions might lead her,—for in his recent correspondence with his disciples she had compelled him to associate her with himself as his equal in spiritual authority. She had, moreover, in many instances, assumed the right to give directions, and to carry on a correspondence of her own, consulting him nominally, it is true, but only *pro forma*. His own spiritual pride was so overweening, that to submit tamely to this usurpation of a supreme authority seemed more than he could endure, while, on the other hand, he was convinced that, should he rebel against it, he might incur serious risk, since his death would have the double merit of leaving her without a rival, as supreme priestess and prophetess of the sys-

tem which he had founded, and of putting her in possession of all his property. So deeply versed was she in the knowledge of the properties of herbs and medicaments, and so familiar in theory with the art, so much practised in the East, of “removing” human inconveniences in a quiet and unostentatious manner, that he shuddered when he thought of the simple contingency upon which his existence depended. A prey to these apprehensions, his life was rendered miserable ; and while he was constantly revolving schemes whereby he might counteract the designs of his female associate, his manner to her became more cringing and propitiatory, just in the degree in which he feared her. With all this, his passion for Amina was as strong as ever. Tigranuhe, on the other hand, astonished her brother by a growing development of faculty and assumption of power : she no longer disguised, when they were alone, her contempt for Masollam’s weakness and timidity, and read him like an open book.

Such were the relations which subsisted between these singular beings at the time when

Sheikh Shibley came to seek financial assistance. On the following morning, Carabet met him according to appointment, and soon after, Shibley found himself ushered into the handsome, marble-paved, open court, which was the chief ornament of Masollam's mansion in Damascus. Not that the richly divaned and heavily carpeted chambers left anything to desire in the way of expensive decoration and elaborate oriental design; but the court, with its plashing fountains, and orange-trees, and scented flowers, was the striking feature, and the Druse chief, who was not accustomed to such magnificence, paused a moment in admiration of it. Indeed, many of Masollam's disciples, who had at various times come to pick up learning at the Master's feet, and had expected to find a self-denying recluse, living in the utmost simplicity, were amazed and somewhat shocked at the evidences of luxury and extravagance by which they found themselves surrounded, until they were accounted for by the plausible reasons which Masollam had ever ready at his tongue's end. Here a servant met them, who whispered a few words to Carabet.

“I find that my brother-in-law, who is associated with me in business,” explained the latter, “has been unexpectedly detained on some important matters at the Serai, and will be here presently. Will you have the kindness to enter the divan and wait for him?”

As punctuality is not an Eastern virtue, Shibley did not regard this as any hardship, and while he was consoling himself with a nargileh, Tigranuhe entered.

“This is my sister,” said Carabet. “When she heard from me that you belonged to the great family of Zedaan, her heart was made glad, for the dearest friend she has in the world—one who has been to her as her own daughter—belongs to that family.”

Shibley made a graceful salute, and looked at the lady for further explanation.

“My brother speaks truly,” she remarked. “If, as he tells me, you are indeed the son of Sheikh Sâleh Zedaan’s cousin, you must know the strange history of Amina, the daughter of the sheikh?”

“I have heard it from her own lips.”

“And did she not tell you of Daoud Effendi Masollam and his wife?”

Shibley's heart gave a bound; here was a sudden and unlooked-for combination of circumstances indeed. He had heard of the Masollams from Sada—a strange confused account, from which he could gather nothing as to the reasons which had induced them to keep her so long in confinement and in ignorance of her daughter's presence, or of the real causes of their flight. He had conceived of them as rich, mysterious, and designing people, whose motives he had no means of fathoming; and he was the more perplexed, because in his endeavours to obtain further information on the subject, first from Amina herself, and then from Sheikh Mohanna, they had each of them changed the subject, and had manifested the strongest disinclination to return to it. Under these circumstances, in his uncertainty of the ground upon which he was treading, he determined to exercise the greatest caution, and the Druse way of doing this is to prevaricate.

“She has told me of friends she had lived with all the years we supposed her dead. One, indeed, called Girius Bey, came with her; but she did not mention the names of others, or, if she did, I have forgotten them.”

“Know then, O sheikh, that I have been to her as a mother, and that she believed me in fact to be her mother, ever since she was brought to me by Girius Bey as a baby twenty-five years ago ; and that the principal reason which has brought us back from Europe, where we have been recently living, was to see the beloved child again.”

“I can well imagine how you must have loved her,” he said ; “she is, indeed, a pearl among women. Although she has not been with us many weeks, and I have seen but little of her, as I do not reside in her village, I have seen enough to assure me of that. It must have been a severe trial to you to part with one you loved so much.”

“A terrible trial indeed,” said Tigranuhe, drawing a corner of the veil which formed part of her head-dress to her eyes, and wiping away an imaginary tear ; “but not so terrible as the ingratitude from which we have suffered, the misconstruction which has been placed upon our motives, and the falsehoods which have been circulated in regard to our acts. I fear that my husband’s dear old friend Sheikh Mohanna, whom he has always held in the

highest esteem, has had his mind poisoned against us. I do not charge the dear child with any of these things, nor that simple and worthy woman her mother, who, of course, could not understand that in a country like England, where religious fanaticism runs high, we were obliged to conceal her for her own safety. It was that fiend in human shape, Girius Bey, who, when he heard that we had found that her mother was still living, instead of allowing us to send Amina to her at once, was the cause of our bringing both mother and daughter to England."

"What was his object in that?"

"To marry Amina, to be sure," said Tigranuhe, unblushingly.

In Shibley's involuntary start at receiving this unexpected piece of information, the woman read his secret, and she rubbed her hands softly together with satisfaction as she saw the ally he was likely to prove.

A thousand circumstances rushed to Shibley's mind in confirmation of this statement. The undisguised affection with which Amina always spoke of Girius Bey, and which she had taken no pains to conceal during the time

he had seen them together; the influence which he perceived the foreigner exercised over Sheikh Mohanna; and the refusal of the latter to coerce Amina, whose affections he was now sure were already engaged, or she could never have resisted his own attractions,—all proved the truth of Madame Masollam's assertion.

“But why, if he wanted to marry her, did he need the presence of her mother?” he asked.

“He did not need it; but we had pledged Sada to restore her to her daughter, so we were obliged to take her. Moreover, we suspected Girius of a selfish motive, though he pretended it was necessary that Amina should come to England in order that he might settle some money on her; and we thought the presence of Sada might prove a restraint upon him, as indeed it did. I wish,” added Tigranube, with a sigh, “I could see the dear girl removed from the clutch of that unbelieving foreign dog, and safely married to one of her own people.”

Shibley glanced at her suspiciously. Was not she, from his point of view, as foreign and

unbelieving as the man she was reviling? Had not she, too, a game to play? and could not he read her secret? for with the morbid consciousness of a lover, he began to perceive that she had read his.

“And did he settle the money he intended upon her?” he inquired.

“He relieved himself from that intention, if he ever had it, by compelling her to steal some valuable jewels that belonged to me.”

Shibley's eyes kindled for a moment, and then he darted a glance at the Armenian, which she received with a responsive flash. And these two very clever people knew at once what each read in the eye of the other. In the glow of the Druse's, Tigranuhe saw passion; in the glitter of hers, Shibley read avarice. And to each occurred the same reflection, that, dexterously used, each could be made to serve the other's ends.

“Girius has probably converted them into money,” said Shibley.

“Possibly; or possibly Amina may have them with her now. I have been thinking of visiting Teraya, in order to find this out, and also for the purpose of regaining my

influence over the beloved child. It would need but twenty-four hours together for me to induce her to banish her false lover from her heart, and to substitute for him one who was worthy of her. At the same time, my husband could use his influence with Sheikh Mohanna, which is great, in the same direction, and show him the impropriety of allowing the present relations to continue between his niece and this foreigner, if there should be one of her own people seeking an alliance with her ; while, if it should become necessary, you could bring the whole question up for consideration upon the first occasion of a meeting of the Okâls of your religion, as it is a matter in which an important principle is involved."

Tigranuhe's suggestions fell very pleasantly on Shibley's ears. Certainly they presented many advantages over the rough-and-ready method of the night assault on Sheikh Mohanna's residence which he had proposed to himself, and which, even if it were successful, must involve him in serious feuds and trouble later. He felt a strength and comfort in the bold and subtle intelligence of his newly found ally ; and thinking he would like to talk

matters out more openly than was possible in the presence of Carabet, he glanced uneasily at the Armenian.

“Brother,” said Tigranuhe, detecting the movement, “go and see whether the Master has returned from the Serai”—accompanying the words with a look which Carabet interpreted without difficulty to mean, “Go away, stay away, and keep Masollam away.”

“Now,” she continued, when her brother had vanished, “there is no danger of interruption: and to give you an evidence of my sincerity, and save time, I will speak frankly. You have come here to borrow money. It is unnecessary; you can have it without borrowing, provided we come to an understanding in regard to our mutual interests. My diamonds I believe to be at Teraya. I am in communication with all the diamond merchants in Europe in a position to purchase such stones, and they are few, and should have been informed ere this had they been offered for sale. Not being with them, I am convinced they are in Amina’s keeping. Girius loves her too well to deprive her of them. Were it not for her fear of offending him, I

should only have to ask Amina for them, and she would give them to me. As it is, I am prepared to pay any one well who will restore them to me ; and more than that, if he desires, as a still greater reward, the possession of her whom he deprives of these gems, I will secure him the prize he covets."

"I thank you, O lady, for speaking thus openly; for, as you rightly judge, I am he who covets the prize, which is to me worth gems of infinite price. But how can you assure her to me? for I fear me that she is one who will submit to no pressure, unless her heart also consents."

"Leave that to me, my son," responded Tigranuhe, assuming an air of maternal benevolence. "I have not reared the maiden from infancy, and studied the properties of the gifts with which nature teems, without having at my command potions of such exquisite and delicate virtue, that they can be applied with certain effect where the character of the temperament is known; and I know Amina's temperaments—I can play upon her passions as upon the strings of an instrument."

Shibley listened to this statement with a certain credulous wonder: it never occurred to him to doubt it.

"Be it so," he said. "I perceive indeed that you are a woman of knowledge and of skill, and I place myself under your guidance."

"Return, then, to Teraya, assure yourself not only that the diamonds are there, but also where they are kept. Then return here with all the information you have been able to obtain, and we will fully discuss our plans. Above all, do not breathe to a living soul that you have seen us in Damascus."

Shibley hesitated a moment, and then said, not without a shade of embarrassment—

"It is well, O lady, to have affairs of this sort clearly defined. If, through my instrumentality, you obtain possession of the jewels, I would inquire, how much money do you propose to give me? For although I am obeying your instructions in this matter for the sake of Amina, and not for the sake of money, and although I place every confidence in your assurances that you will win for me the love of her I desire as a wife, still the greatest skill avails not against destiny; and

if by chance, after winning you your gems, I lost my bride, I should need compensation and consolation indeed."

"And you shall have it. If you recover for me my jewels, and I obtain for you your bride, I will give you as a marriage present fifty thousand piastres. And if you recover for me my jewels, and I do not win Amina for you, then I will engage to double that sum, which will furnish you with sufficient to obtain possession of her in another, though perhaps a more violent way."

"It is well," said Shibley; and taking from his girdle a brass inkstand, containing also some reed-pens and a small roll of paper, with which he had come prepared for a very different negotiation, he wrote in a few words the substance of the agreement, which he presented to Tigranuhe for signature. That lady was somewhat taken aback by the prompt and business-like character of this proceeding; and as she slowly perused the document, she sought in vain for an excuse, under cover of which she might avoid committing herself in writing to so strange a compact. She felt, however, that any hesita-

tion would rouse the suspicions of the Druse ; and knowing the inveterate tendency to mistrust which characterises the race, she signed her name in Arabic characters, below which the sheikh stamped his own, with his brass signet.

“I am sorry,” she said, when he had done this, “that my husband has not been here to give further validity to this document, the more especially as I fear, since he has not returned yet, that he may now be detained for many hours longer ; but if you like to leave it with me, I will obtain his signature.” Madame Masollam thus hoped to gain possession of the contract.

“It is unnecessary,” replied Shibley ; “I will bring back a copy for both to sign, as I am well aware that this is of but trifling value, but it will be useful as a memorandum. And now, as you have given up the hope of your husband returning soon, and as I would start with as little delay as possible on my journey home, I will bid you farewell, O lady.”

“May God prosper you, and grant you a safe return !” ejaculated Madame Masollam,

piously. "A cunning man and a treacherous," she mused, as she watched the Druse striding across the courtyard. "Safer perhaps as an enemy than a friend: at all events, one to be narrowly watched."

"What a sweet revenge it would be," she muttered, "if I could, whether by fraud or force, place Amina in the embrace of this semi-barbarian! What a revenge on the 'Master,' on Santalba, on that haughty English aristocrat Clareville, and above all, on herself! There is no other woman, either in this world or the other, that I am afraid of; and each time that I meet her in my trances, in the inner region, her powers have increased, and her guardian spirits have drawn more closely round her; but the battle must be fought out on the terrestrial plane." She closed her eyes and remained motionless for a few moments, and then murmured again softly to herself—"There is no longer room for doubt. The crisis for us both has arrived. And it is now a struggle between us, perhaps of life or death."

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSPIRACY AND TREACHERY.

WHEN Sheikh Mohanna had assured Amina that he would have Shibley's divorced wife at once brought from the village of the latter to his own house, he was aware that difficulties might arise which he did not mention to her, and that the sheikh might raise objections to this transfer, which there might be much trouble in surmounting. Not that Shibley had any right directly to interfere; but the parents of the unfortunate woman were so absolutely dependent upon him, that he had only to command them to refuse to part with their daughter, to be certain of being obeyed. When, therefore, Sheikh Mohanna's son Kassim rode over to see the family, with a view of secretly conducting the negotiations

without Shibley's knowledge, he was immensely relieved at finding that the sheikh was absent at Damascus; and as the invitation was both flattering in the highest degree and financially advantageous—for the mother and her children were dependent on the pittance which Shibley chose to allow them—they hastily and thankfully accepted it, with the joyful consent of the old people, and the same afternoon Kassim returned triumphantly to the paternal mansion with his charges. Here they were most affectionately and tenderly received by Amina, in spite of the hot indignation of her mother, who, however, stood in too great awe both of her brother and her daughter to give vent to it in the violent language which was at the tip of her tongue. Her suppressed emotions were mild, however, in comparison to those which almost overpowered Sheikh Shibley, when on his return home he discovered what had occurred. He stormed at the elders of the village, and especially at the family of his late wife, threatening them with starvation and other calamities as the consequences of his wrath; threats, however, which produced comparatively little

effect, for Kassim had assured them, on the part of Sheikh Mohanna, of protection and pecuniary assistance should they stand in need thereof.

Meantime Sheikh Shibley, still under the influence of his passion, rode on to Teraya, determined to assert his right to keep his children and their mother in his own village, and to expostulate with Sheikh Mohanna on their abduction from it without his consent. He had cooled somewhat before he entered the presence of the old man, and made a mighty effort to retain his self-control; but Sheikh Mohanna, with his quick perception, was in no way deceived by this surface calm, nor by the methodical manner in which his visitor went through the prescribed routine of compliments.

"It grieves me, O sheikh," the latter said, after he had exhausted the list, "to think that this must be the last visit I can pay to you—that practically you have closed the doors to me of that hospitable mansion which from my boyhood I have been accustomed to regard as a second home."

"Not so, my son. I shall always be glad to see you."

“ You know that it is not permitted to me to visit freely in a house which has become the home of my divorced wife, where at every turn I run the risk of meeting her.”

“ I already told you that I disapproved of your conduct in this matter, more especially when you informed me of the motives by which you were actuated. I therefore the more readily acceded to Amina’s request, that I should invite Fadda and the children here, because it would aid you in the good resolution of giving up the idea of marrying your cousin, if you are prevented from even seeing her, as you must be, so long as she keeps Fadda by her side.”

Shibley gnashed his teeth at this honest avowal by Sheikh Mohanna, that his motive in affording a home to the discarded wife, was that she might be used as a shield to protect his niece from the advances of her cousin.

“ You have no right,” he exclaimed, “ thus to expose me to open insult ! The probability of my marriage with Amina is a matter of current rumour. Sada has spoken of it everywhere, and even given it as the reason of my divorce. That the woman whom it is known

that I desire to marry, should take my divorced wife and children into her own apartments in your house, is an outrage I will not tamely tolerate. I wish to have my children under my own eye in my own village, in charge of their grandparents, their natural protectors, and not subjected to the daily influence of an unbeliever in our religion. It is a matter I shall refer to a council."

"Do as it seems best to you; but remember that the eldest is not yet six, and you cannot claim him till he is seven."

"We shall see about that when the exceptional position of affairs is explained!" said Shibley in a loud tone, rising angrily. "Meantime, beware," he added, with a menacing gesture, "how you add to the suspicions which already exist as to your orthodoxy and devotion to the interests of our nation and our religion. Do not suppose, because men uniformly treat you with respect, that you have no enemies."

Thus saying, Sheikh Shibley strode fiercely from the room, without even the customary politeness of a parting salutation.

He went straight to the house of the Kha-

teeb. "Go," he said to Afifi, who was its only occupant at the moment, and who, though still looking pale and weak, was able to be about, and received him with a beaming smile—"go, my child, to Sada, the sister of Sheikh Mohanna, and tell her I desire to see her. The effort will not be too much for you, will it? I have been sorry indeed to hear that you were ill. Do not," he added, "tell any one but Sada that I am here."

"Oh, I am rapidly recovering," replied the girl, "and can easily run on your errand."

Afifi knew well why Shibley could not do it himself, and as she sped on her way, indulged in a little quiet chuckle, for which, under the circumstances, she was to be excused. In a few minutes she returned with Sada; and though she longed to linger and hear their conversation, she discreetly retired.

"Sada," said Shibley, after a pause, "the outrage which I am enduring from your daughter and Sheikh Mohanna is more than I can bear."

"I have said so to Amina," replied Sada. "I have warned her against the consequences of her conduct."

“And what said she?”

“That she was doing her duty, and that God would protect her in it.”

“Anything more?”

“Yes; that though she never could have loved you, she might have esteemed you,—henceforth she could never do even that.”

Shibley's brow grew as black as night, and his fingers twitched nervously with the violence of his emotion.

“I would save your daughter,” he said at last,—“save her to her people, save her to her religion; but her unruly spirit must first be crushed. So long as she feels wealthy she will defy us; and she is wealthy, is she not?”

“She is.”

“In what does her wealth consist?”

“In some valuable jewels which she carried away with her on the night we fled from the Masollams.”

“By what right did she take them?”

“Girius Bey said they belonged to him, and made her take them. He has now given them to her as a present.”

“And she has got them with her here?”

“They are in Mohanna’s box, where he keeps all his *koshans*.”¹

“Could you get them for me? You see, if I can get hold of them first, then, if she becomes my wife, she still remains in possession of them?”

“I would not dare. Besides, if Sheikh Mohanna discovered you had stolen them, he would not give you Amina, in order that she might follow the jewels. On the contrary, he would make you restore them.”

“But I do not mean him to suspect who has them. However, if you will tell me where the key of the box is, I will get them in some other way.”

Sada pondered for some time.

“I do not see,” she said at length, “how the possession of the jewels will help you. Amina will never consent to marry you because she has lost her jewels.”

“No; but I am going to carry her off by force, and if I do not get the jewels first, I shall never get them afterwards. She will tell Sheikh Mohanna to give them back to Girius Bey.”

¹ Title-deeds.

"That is true," said the old woman. "Well, I will tell you where the jewels are; but I must give you this warning, that if you succeed in getting them, and fail in carrying off Amina, then, rather than that she should lose them finally, I will tell who has got them."

"Rest satisfied; I shall not fail, or if I do, I shall restore the jewels. I am no common thief."

"I know that," said Sada, with a glance full of affectionate admiration. "Well, then, the key is kept on the little shelf in the corner of the wall, just above where my brother sleeps, hidden behind some of the sacred books."

"I know the shelf. Where is the box?"

"The box is under the raised divan—exactly at the opposite corner."

"Good. O Sada, not a word of our having met here. It was fortunate that the Khateeb was out. Do not let Afifi gabble; and believe me that I love your daughter too much for any harm to come either to herself or her property. I would save her from the Franji. We shall both lose her again otherwise."

As Shibley rode home, revolving the posi-

tion of matters in his mind, he had formed two new resolutions, neither of which was creditable to his moral sense ; but then his moral sense was a very abstract quantity, and his passions, so to speak, a very concrete one. Like many others of the human family, his conduct depended largely upon the amount of pressure to which he was exposed by temptation, and temptations were crowding upon him. Since he had felt himself so violently wronged by Sheikh Mohanna, it had gradually dawned upon him that the easiest way of revenging himself for the insult to which he had been exposed, would be to precipitate the end of the old man. With Sheikh Mohanna dead, he would be in fact, as he was now in name, the head of the family of Zedaan. He became the natural guardian of Amina and her mother. His right to marry the former would be unquestioned, and it was a fate she could only escape by flight. In whichever direction he turned now, it was Sheikh Mohanna who stood in his way. The more he reflected, the more he perceived that it was absolutely necessary that Sheikh Mohanna should be got rid of. Having made up his mind to murder,

there was no great difficulty in reconciling himself to robbery. On thinking over the contract he had made with Madame Masollam, he was more and more struck with its weakness and absurdity. If Amina was satisfied that she was the rightful owner of these precious gems, why should he allow strangers to take possession of them under a vague and unproved claim? When he first heard of their existence, he was glad to appear to come to any terms, just to know accurately all the circumstances of the case; but since his conversation with Sada, who evidently considered the diamonds her daughter's property, he began to take the same view. By the time he entered the gates of Damascus, he had matured a very elaborate and ingenious scheme—provided he could induce the Masollams to fall into it—by which he hoped, in the simplest manner possible, to terminate the existence of Sheikh Mohanna, without incurring any suspicion himself, and, at the same time, to enter into full and comparatively peaceable possession both of Amina and her diamonds. As for any consequences which might possibly result to himself from the utter betrayal of the Masollams

which his plan involved, he had too great a contempt for their power of mischief to trouble himself about them. If worse came to worst, he could always fly with Amina and her treasure to the Jebel Druze, where he would be safe from pursuit. Indeed, that fertile and semi-independent region offered so many advantages, political and financial, over the district he was now inhabiting, that he was seriously considering the desirability of emigrating thither with his whole village, should he succeed in his designs, whether he was troubled afterwards by the Masollams or not. Nevertheless he was careful to bring the duplicate copy of the contract for Masollam's signature, so as to confirm Madame Masollam in the conviction that he had no intention of departing from it, unless by common agreement.

While these stormy events had been transpiring at Teraya, the moral atmosphere in Masollam's house at Damascus had not been altogether undisturbed. The "Master" had resented keenly his exclusion from the interview which had taken place between Tigranuhe and Sheikh Shibley. It was an indignity to

which she had never before dared to subject him; and his first impulse when Carabet came, not to invite his co-operation, as he expected, but to inform him that his sister wished to remain alone with her visitor, was flatly to disobey, and he even rose to do so, when Carabet, who was a peace-loving man, and foresaw the storm to which this would give rise, succeeded in calming his indignation for the moment. It was roused again, however, when he heard from Tigranuhe's own lips the nature of the bargain she had made with Sheikh Shibley. He had in his infatuation never given up the idea of making his peace with Amina and inducing her to return to him. And he saw in the marriage with the Druse sheikh, which his wife was plotting to effect, that she intended to render this impossible. It was evident to him now why she did not desire his presence in the room while these negotiations were being conducted, and he determined, while appearing to acquiesce in them completely, to take the first opportunity he could secretly to thwart them. He therefore suppressed his feelings, and although Tigranuhe instinctively felt the opposition to

which he gave no utterance, she did not expect it would take an active form. In fact she rather congratulated herself upon this new evidence of his subjection. When, therefore, Shibley presented the contract for Masollam's signature, the latter read it over with unruffled composure, and with as little intention of adhering to its terms as Shibley himself.

"I regretted when you were here last," he said, "that I missed seeing you, both for the pleasure it would have given me to make your acquaintance, and also because I always like to be present myself at delicate negotiations of this nature. Fortunately I am blessed with a wife to whom I can absolutely intrust them. She has narrated to me all the circumstances of your interview, and I thoroughly agree with the arrangement as it stands."

Masollam managed to pump some youthful vigour into this speech, and favoured Shibley with a glance that was meant to be penetrating, but which died out harmlessly into vacancy.

"I have some hesitation in asking you to sign this now," said the sheikh; "because since my visit to Teraya I see how easily all

our ends may be gained in another way. I know exactly where the jewels are and how they may be obtained, and I have formed a plan which, if you agree to it, will enable you to take the diamonds with your own hands out of the box in which they are kept. There is one new preliminary condition which is absolutely necessary to the success of my scheme, as you will see yourself, if you will listen while I unfold it to you."

Shibley then told them of the outrage to which he was subjected by the residence of his divorced wife and her children under Amina's charge, and of the insuperable obstacle to his hopes which the protection and authority of Sheikh Mohanna afforded Amina.

"So long as that old man lives," he continued, "I am convinced that neither you, O lady, with all your skill in love-potions, nor I, with all the resources at my command, and I have many, will succeed in abstracting Amina from his control. Now, although I am quite ready to sign this document if you wish it, I should prefer to tear it up, if you will agree to something that cannot be written, and in consideration thereof, I will waive

all demand for pecuniary compensation for enabling you to recover your gems. Remembering what you have told me of your knowledge of the properties of herbs, I will leave you to guess my meaning."

"I think I understand it," said Tigranuhe, bluntly ; "you want me to poison Sheikh Mohanna."

"Not so ; I wish you to supply me with the necessary decoction, and instruct me as to its use."

"Before I can entertain this new demand, I must hear your plan in full."

"My plan is this, that we all of us leave Damascus to-morrow ; that on the following day I proceed straight to Teraya, while you move to Hasbaya, or any other place large enough for your arrival not to cause remark, and yet near enough to Teraya to be within striking distance at short notice. I will at once call again on Sheikh Mohanna, to express the greatest contrition for my unseemly conduct on the occasion of our last meeting. I know the art of completely winning over the old man, who, it must be said to his credit, never retains an angry feeling against any

one; and I will insist on his paying me a visit of reconciliation, with his two sons, and will entertain them all at a banquet to which I will invite other guests. I desire that when the time comes for him to return home, should he refuse to stay and pass the night, he shall be taken so violently ill that one of his sons is despatched with all speed for Amina and her mother; the known skill of the former in medicine, which doubtless she owes to you, will account for this summons. Meantime you will have received notice from me that Sheikh Mohanna and his sons are dining with me, and will arrive late at Teraya; you will probably not be warmly received by Sada and her daughter, but they will scarcely dare to turn you out of the house. Such a breach of hospitality they could not venture upon in the presence of the whole village. I will leave to your own ingenuity the task of effecting your reconciliation, in which probably you will be interrupted by the arrival of the hasty summons for Amina and her mother. On their departure you will be left alone in the house with one or two ignorant and helpless women. When they are asleep you

will possess yourselves of the diamonds, and before the dawn you will be on your return journey to Damascus. Amina will meanwhile be watching her uncle through his dying struggles, and after he is dead, she will never leave my house again. What say you of this plan ? ”

“ Excellently conceived. There is only one objection to it, which you could not have foreseen. Amina will know that her uncle has been poisoned ; for she will recognise the symptoms, and probably apply the antidote.”

“ As for her knowing that her uncle has been poisoned, that I do not care about. No one will believe the ravings of a girl half distracted with grief. That she should be able to apply an antidote is more serious. Cannot you devise a poison that she will not recognise, when both contingencies would be averted.”

Tigranuhe meditated deeply. “ Yes,” she said at length, “ I think I know what will do. If you would like it to take effect about an hour after your guest has done dinner, you can administer it with the coffee that follows

that meal. The consequences will be very painful to witness, but Amina has never seen them, nor had them described to her. There is an antidote which sometimes succeeds if given in time, but she will never guess what it is."

"Then you both of you agree to it, and I may tear up these," said Shibley, looking at Masollam, and holding up both the papers between his hands.

"If my wife chooses to supply you with drugs, it is no affair of mine what you do with them," replied the old man.

"You may tear them up. I agree to your proposal," said Tigranuhe; "but I shall require time to prepare the potion. If you will return in a couple of hours, I will have it ready, and instruct you as to its use."

"His plan is a clever one," said Madame Masollam, when the Druse had taken his departure; "but he left out the main feature of it, so far as we are concerned."

"Which was that?" asked Masollam.

"Why, he means to send a party of his people to waylay us, as soon as we are well clear of the village in the early morning, with

the diamonds in our possession, and to rob us of them."

"I half suspected as much myself," said Masollam.

Tigranuhe looked at him contemptuously. "And when you half suspected it, how did you propose to meet the danger?" she asked.

"I had not finally determined on any plan."

"Well, I have. We have most fortunately in Khalil Abiad a stanch friend and ardent disciple at Hasbaya, where he wields a great influence. We will go and stay with him. We will tell him that we have reason to fear that we may be robbed on our return from Teraya, and we will not leave that place in the early morning after we have got possession of the property, until at least a dozen well-armed and mounted men arrive to escort us away from it."

Masollam bowed his head in acquiescence: he no longer made any effort to pretend that he had a will of his own; but he had an idea that was actively germinating in his mind, and when Shibley came back he took care to be present, and observed his wife narrowly as

she handed the Druse an ordinary homœopathic bottle, filled, not with globules, but with a pale-blue liquid. "A cup of coffee, with the contents of this phial in it, will do all that you require," she said. "One of its chief merits is that its taste is easily disguised."

CHAPTER IX.

A DOMESTIC CRISIS.

THE distance between Damascus and Teraya is a little over fifty miles, and the first night the travellers determined to sleep at Rashaya. The Masollams were not superior in point of endurance to the average Cook's tourist, and their European experiences had induced habits of luxury which did not accord well with the usual conditions of Syrian travel. They took care to provide themselves with all kinds of culinary delicacies ; were very particular about their tea and spirit-lamp, and their own pillows and bedding, so that Sheikh Shibley, much to his disgust, found himself riding out of Damascus followed by a larger train than he anticipated, and could scarcely restrain his impatience at having to stop for afternoon tea.

At Rashaya, Masollam had a friend who insisted that the Druse sheikh should also be his guest, and who entertained the party sumptuously, Madame Masollam being provided with sleeping accommodation in the women's apartments, while Masollam and Shibley shared a room together. As going to bed consists in throwing off an outer garment, lying down on a mattress on the floor, and pulling up a coverlet, the operation is not one which occupies much time. In less than a quarter of an hour after it was completed, Masollam perceived to his satisfaction that his companion was profoundly wrapped in slumber. He now took from his pocket a phial exactly resembling that which he had seen the Druse, on receiving it from the hands of his wife, put into the breast-pocket of the outer garment which was now lying by his side. This phial was also filled with a pale-blue liquid. Silently and cautiously the old man substituted the one for the other. "If it is necessary for the accomplishment of this barbarian's wishes that my old friend Mohanna should die," he said to himself, "it is equally necessary to the accomplishment of mine that he lives; I will

save him, therefore, from the tortures of the damned by lulling him with the dreams of the blest." Thus it happened that the sheikh rode off next morning with an anodyne instead of a poison in his pocket, while Masollam and his wife, having parted company with him, went on their way to Hasbaya.

Shibley had not overestimated his powers of reconciliation. So skilfully did he assume an air of contrition ; so much overcome did he appear with the recollection of his unseemly behaviour ; so entirely did he recognise the folly of any further insistence in his matrimonial designs as regarded his cousin, that the old sheikh, whose kind heart was always ready to accept excuses and to believe in them, was completely deceived ; the more so when Shibley asked him to use his influence with the religious elders to obtain for him a special dispensation whereby he might be permitted to take back Fadda.

"I know," said Shibley, "how strict the rule is, but this was a word spoken in haste, under the influence of a momentary passion ; perhaps, under the circumstances, an exception might be made in my favour."

“I doubt it, my son ; but I will use what influence I have to forward your wishes.”

“I will invite the sheikhs to my house to consider the matter, if you will come to meet them there,” Shibley suggested.

“Assuredly I will come.”

They then proceeded to discuss the composition of the conclave which should be assembled, and it was agreed that on the second evening following, Mohanna and his sons should dine and sleep at Shibley's. On his return home the latter sent word to this effect to the Masollams.

The firing and singing which took place two nights after, indicated that Ain Ghazal, which was the name of Shibley's village, was *en fête*. For the sheikh had determined to do honour to his distinguished guests, and to receive them with more than usual *éclat*. They were kept in ignorance by their host of the subject which was to be submitted for consideration ; but this was a matter of no surprise, the first hours on such occasions being always taken up with compliments and feasting, and the real business only being entered on in the silence of the night. What that business was, it was not

Shibley's intention that his guests should ever know ; long before the time for its consideration arrived, he expected that Sheikh Mohanna's illness would be the all-absorbing interest.

While the sheikhs were feasting at Ain Ghazal, the Masollams were approaching Teraya, at which place they arrived shortly after sunset. Sada, Amina, and Fadda happened to be all sitting on the terrace, enjoying the delicious air of evening, and gazing over the rapidly darkening landscape, as the party crossed the *meidan*, and drew up at the foot of the stairs.

Since Santalba's departure, the shadow of Masollam had ceased to haunt Amina ; for the first time since she had left The Turrets, a sense of repose seemed to soothe her whole being, and she had never been in the enjoyment of it more completely than at the moment it was destined to be so rudely disturbed. She gave a little scream of terror as she looked over the edge of the terrace. It was no longer the shadow, but the reality which was haunting her now, and in her distress she instinctively clutched at her mother's arm. Sada's eyes followed her daughter's scared look ; but she exhibited a courage and

a presence of mind on the occasion, which was not to have been expected of her, but which may be accounted for by the confidence she derived from the fact that she was in her own house and in her own village.

“Run in, my child,” she said; “leave me to meet them.”

Amina had scarcely disappeared across the court, when the Masollams stepped upon it.

Tigranuhe, who, whatever may have been her faults, had very little of the humbug about her, greeted Sada with a somewhat stately formality, while the prospect of once more seeing Amina had so agitated Masollam, that he was trembling visibly, and presented an aspect of imbecility calculated to inspire pity rather than alarm.

“*Tafuddalu*,” said Sada; which was in fact the only thing she could say, without outraging every oriental *convenance*, and which may best be translated by the Italian expression *favorisca*.

“We could not pass your village, on our way back to Damascus from Europe, without stopping to explain what I fear you must have considered our strange treatment of you in

England," said Tigranuhe, "and to correct all the false impressions which have doubtless been produced in your mind by our bitter enemy Santalba, who is here known as Girius Bey."

"It is past now, and I am happy. I have recovered my daughter; I am back with her among my own people: it is unnecessary to try and explain anything," said Sada.

"I do not want to try and explain or correct anything," interposed Masollam. "I only want to ask forgiveness; that is the reason I have ventured to pay you this visit, hoping that, notwithstanding the wrongs that you and your daughter have suffered at my hands, you would still receive us for a night under your roof."

Tigranuhe's eyes flashed angrily.

"What nonsense are you talking of wrongs that they have received at our hands!" she exclaimed. "Did we not cherish Amina for twenty-five years as our own daughter? were we not the means of restoring her to her mother? and did they not repay us by escaping from the shelter of our roof under cover of the night? I say that there is much to be

explained on both sides, and many misapprehensions to be corrected, and that it was as much for the purpose of telling our friends that we have forgiven their ingratitude, which I know was not intentional, as of excusing ourselves for an apparent harshness towards Sada, which we could easily convince her was not intentional either."

"Let us not go back upon the past," returned Sada. "Both Amina and I are trying to forget it, and what is forgotten is forgiven. But you must be fatigued after your journey. Come in and rest." And she led the way across the court to the guest-chamber, followed by the Masollams. Shortly after, Zarifa brought in some sweetmeats and lemonade; she had been sent by Amina to report, and Tigranuhe favoured her with a glance which spoke volumes of wrath, while she coldly returned her respectful salutation. Then followed coffee; and after a little constrained conversation, during which Sada answered Masollam's inquiries after Mohanna, and expressed her regret that the sheikh should happen to be absent, she excused herself on the ground of domestic duties incidental to the unexpected

arrival of her guests, and sped off to Amina's room.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," she said, in reply to her daughter's look of eager inquiry ; "they both seem to me rather subdued. Madame, disagreeable as she always is, not in the least changed ; but the old man changed altogether. He seems to have grown twenty years older and to be almost silly."

"You do not know him as I do : he can be twenty younger again when you least expect it, and his silliness is only assumed."

"I do not think so ; but come and judge for yourself."

"No ; I never wish to see him again," said Amina, with a slight shudder.

"He has been asking most kindly after you. I really think he has a sincere regard for you."

"I thought so too once. I am sure I had for him. That is what makes the idea of seeing him so painful. It will recall too much."

"Well, please yourself. I must go and see that some dinner is sent to them. I have done all that civility requires, and shall leave them to eat it by themselves."

This arrangement suited Tigranuhe very

well, who was thinking more about those diamonds, from all allusion to which she had so carefully abstained, than about her hosts; but it was far otherwise with Masollam, whose morbid craving to see Amina was becoming almost intolerable to him. The sensational *rapport* which existed between the "Master" and his wife, now that they no longer had any sentiment in common, produced a friction which positively amounted to physical pain. As there are certain sounds, the mere thought of which will set one's teeth on edge, so other distressing sensations can be produced by causes which originate in those hypersensitive regions of our being, which are affected by the moral conditions of those with whom we are in contact. Masollam was acutely conscious of every change in his wife's mood, even though it found no expression in utterance; and she could have told him every time he was thinking of Amina by a certain sense of constriction in the chest, which latterly Amina's own presence had always given rise to. Each time that by an act of intense longing Masollam drew as it were the influence of her he loved into himself, Tigranuhe could recognise it by

this pain, and it made her furious. It was while they were thus sitting together over the repast that Sada had provided for them, vainly attempting to do it justice, that they each arrived at the same mental conclusion, and that they both knew that they had arrived at it. They perceived that life together involved an amount of suffering which had become intolerable, but that life apart was impracticable ; their interests were too complicated, and involved those of too many others, to make it possible to divide them either morally or materially. Those interests must remain centred, if not in both of them, at least in one of them ; and to that end one must be got rid of ; and the question naturally suggested itself to each, Which ? It was a question which neither of them had the least difficulty in deciding. As the answer occurred to them at precisely the same moment, and involved such fatal consequences, they both, in obedience to the same impulse, looked up, and each recognised the dread import of the other's glance. Had they spoken all their thoughts, they would not have known more accurately what had passed through the mind

of each ; hence it will appear that, under the new and highly sensitive conditions which are now overtaking the race, people who are antipathetic to each other will find it more difficult than they did formerly to live together in intimate relations.

The Masollams were by no means similarly affected by the painful revelation they had severally received.

Now that the suspicion he had long entertained, that Tigranuhe would take his life, had ripened into certainty, the Master was seized with a fit of abject terror : a cold perspiration bedewed his forehead, his teeth began to chatter, and he staggered to his feet and tottered out into the courtyard, not to conceal his panic, for that, he knew, was impossible, but to draw a breath of fresh air. Tigranuhe followed his retreating figure with a scornful glance. Though she knew that he had made up his mind to murder her if he could, she did not quail, but rather contemplated the situation as an expert American duellist might, who was on " shooting at sight terms " with his opponent, if he knew that the latter had never handled a rifle or a pistol

in his life. It was rather a relief to feel forced, in self-defence, to decide upon an act for which she had for some time past desired an excuse for perpetrating : and Tigranuhe was not without her own moral standard ; indeed, at one time it had been of the highest, and now, if her nature could throw the darkest shadows, it was because it had in it the capacity for casting the highest lights. Hitherto she sought in vain for some justification for the impulse which moved her to take her husband's life, and, unable to find one, had heroically struggled against it. She felt the more strongly impressed to resist this tendency, as there were moments when she was conscious of a general homicidal propensity, especially while dabbling with her poisons ; and she knew that it was a temptation which, if it were not resisted with the utmost force of her will at the outset, might lead her, as it has already so many who have figured in the annals of history and of crime, to extremities which she could not afterwards justify to her conscience, and which she would consequently have reason to regret. She had therefore refused even to entertain the idea

of poisoning her husband, although it had repeatedly occurred to her as the simple solution of the difficulties created by his protracted existence, and although she felt convinced that he was deliberately and wilfully resisting the will of God in continuing to live, more especially since he had sacrificed his gifts to an unholy passion. For, strange as it may seem to those who have never met such characters, and who may possibly doubt that they exist, Tigranuhe was firmly and honestly convinced that she was a priestess by divine right—the prophetess of the new age—especially chosen by God to establish the supremacy, and to inaugurate the reign of woman. She had used man, in the form of Masollam, as the ladder by which to mount to her present lofty elevation ; she had gradually, by an almost unconscious process of absorption for years past, been appropriating his knowledges and acquiring his gifts ; until now she could not only afford to do without him, but his presence had become a positive hindrance and embarrassment,—unless, indeed, he chose humbly to accept the position, subordinate to herself, for which he had been de-

signed by a merciful and all-wise Providence. From the day when these personal ambitions—which in her mind assumed the form of divine inspirations—took possession of her being, there commenced within her a secret, and at first totally unconscious, antagonism to Masollam. They were working on different lines, but their divergence was so latent, that it only slowly developed under the pressure of circumstances; and this pressure was only accentuated when the influence of Santalba was introduced still further to complicate matters.

Before the discovery of Sada by Masollam, he too had been tempted from the path of duty and of strict service by the blind devotion of his disciples, and the wealth with which that devotion had supplied him. The demons of pride and avarice had effected a subtle entrance, and at first almost imperceptibly tainting his motives, had gradually acquired a mastery over them—still speciously, however, deluding him with the belief that, in obeying their promptings, he was acting in accordance with those higher intuitions, under the plausible guise of which they inspired his soul. These became

more delusive in the degree in which they assumed the form of vision or supernatural impression.

Santalba, on the other hand, who, while developing his inner consciousness, and sensitising his whole being to its promptings, had not allowed his individuality to fall under a control he could not cognise, remained true to his highest inspirations; and it was under these new relative conditions that these three people, whose intercourse for some years previously had been but slenderly maintained, had found themselves once more compelled to act together. For when Masollam discovered the existence of Sada, he at once wrote to Santalba announcing a fact in which he, as the saviour of Amina, was so nearly interested. The correspondence which followed led to the visit of Sada and the Masollams to England; and Santalba, ignorant of the changes which had been operating in the Masollams, believed that in undertaking that visit they were both actuated by motives as pure as were his own. But, as we have seen, the motives of the Masollams were not only morally tainted, but, being personal, they were of necessity mutu-

ally antagonistic ; and hence, when they all three met at The Turrets to work together, they immediately came into a collision, the nature and results of which form the subject of our story. Masollam's object was to get possession of Sebastian Hartwright's money with the aid of Santalba, in the prosecution of an elaborately devised plan, the full scope of which will become more apparent later, but which Santalba foiled. Tigranuhe's object was not merely to secure possession of this money, but to obtain an ascendancy over Santalba. For this reason she remained behind with him in Paris, in the hope, afterwards, with his assistance, to subjugate Amina more completely to her will than she could do while the girl gave her entire devotion to Masollam ; and, with these two as her allies, to achieve her final conquest of the Master. When she had once gained the recognition from them all of her feminine spiritual headship, she intended to inaugurate in the West the great movement by which the human race was to be regenerated through woman. She would remain the mysterious veiled prophetess, visible only to the most deeply in-

initiated, and rarely even to them. This was necessary, as she could not speak any European language well enough to converse fluently; and even if it had been otherwise, she shrank from meeting in conversation the acute, logical, and highly instructed intellect of the West. They could be met by the Master, who, in recognition of this new avatar, was to sink to the position and assume the title of "the Consort"; by Santalba, "the Knight"; by Sebastian, "the Squire"; by Carabet, "the lackey"; and lastly, by Amina, the "Vestal," who was to give lectures, take the chair at evening meetings, and preside at those *réunions* to which all fashionable London was to be invited in the magnificent mansion which was to be taken as their residence with Sebastian's money. It is scarcely necessary to say that the title which Tigranuhe had reserved for herself was that of Queen.

From a purely social point of view, it is to be regretted that this splendid projection of an oriental imagination should have had from the first to struggle against difficulties beneath which it utterly collapsed in embryo. The opening of a sort of palace in Mayfair, where

a mysterious queen, invisible to the common herd, should hold a court from which regal hospitalities, spiced with mysticism, were dispensed by a lovely virgin, aided by such adepts as Masollam, Santalba, Sebastian, and Carabet, and which should not only represent the supremacy of woman generally, but accord her those rights which she demands in vain in other quarters, would have been the sensation of the season. And considering the present mood of the great metropolis, it is very probable that Queen Tigranuhe would have received the spiritual allegiance of thousands. All this was ruined by the infatuation which induced Masollam to fall in love with Amina, and by the refusal of Santalba, from the moment when she first met him in Paris, to recognise in her any of that supreme spiritual authority which she endeavoured to assume. She had not been so unsuccessful in the East : here in Damascus she had made many disciples among women,—having been engaged in an active propaganda in harems, the entry to which was prohibited to Masollam,—and in this queen of oriental cities she now determined to erect her throne. As a spiritual

one, it must needs be invisible. Indeed she well knew that the Government would not permit any other; but it would be reared in the hearts of women, and, as its influence spread, it would render every harem a hell upon earth to its unhappy lord. The collapse of that religion which had degraded the position of the sex more than any other, must inevitably follow a general feminine revolt; and it would be a divine Nemesis indeed if the phoenix which arose from its ashes was the apotheosis of woman. From which it will be seen that Tigranuhe^{*} was a persevering person, not easily baffled; and that with the instinct of true genius, when defeated in one quarter, she could, with the utmost rapidity of conception, transfer her field of operations, and map out her plan of campaign in another. But to succeed in it the Master could not be allowed even the position of consort. Emancipated women of the East, who have suffered so long at the hands of the other sex, would never permit men the dignity of this rank. He would be expected to accept the service and the name of "the Slave." As Tigranuhe looked out of the door and saw Masollam sit-

ting on the edge of the fountain in the court, and felt that she had excited those sentiments of fear and rage and vengeance which were convulsing his nature, she perceived that there was no longer room for doubt or hesitation. He was the one great obstacle to the successful accomplishment of the divine work on earth which was to be achieved through woman. This was no ordinary homicidal temptation of the kind she had already resisted: it was a divine impulse, mixed, it might be, with an instinct of self-preservation; but was not her life the first essential to the great mission with which she was intrusted?

“Poor old man!” she said to herself reflectively, as she mixed some sour milk with her rice and stewed lamb, “I will manage it so that he shall go to sleep quietly, and wake in a region where he can be of more use to me. God knows I bear him no malice because he has made my life a torture for months past. He has been overpowered by a class of temptations which he had not strength to resist.”

She had never thought so kindly of him as when she knew he was plotting her murder,

and had decided on anticipating his designs by removing him on the first opportunity from this sublunary sphere—had never felt so entirely at peace with herself, or so conscious of the singleness and integrity of her motives.

“Master,” she called out in a more conciliatory and gentler tone than she had used towards him for months past, “the sun has given me a little headache during our ride this afternoon. Won’t you come in and make me a little tea?”

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAGEDY.

THE Master started as if he had been shot when he heard this unexpected summons, so extreme was the nervous tension from which he was suffering at the moment. His first impression was that it concealed a trap of some kind, and he hesitated a moment before he could pluck up courage to obey it. He was aware that Tigranuhe, prior to her departure on this enterprise—the main feature of which was not unattended with peril—had armed herself with a pretty little silver-mounted revolver, and an exquisite dagger of minute dimensions, the blade of which, of damascene workmanship, left nothing to be desired, and would have commanded a high price at Abou Anticha's, or at all events—which comes nearly

to the same thing—that eminent curiosity-dealer would have demanded a high price for it from the ingenuous tourist; but he reflected that to assassinate him then and there would be to defeat her own ends, and that for the moment, at all events, he was safe. With drooping head, and an air of extreme submission, therefore, he obeyed the call. He had scarcely done so, and was engaged in unpacking the saddle-bags which contained the spirit-lamp, when Sada entered. As he did not feel that it would be polite to begin boiling water in her presence, and as, moreover, he was extremely anxious to recur to the topic of Amina, and discover whether it might not be possible to procure an audience with her, he suspended his operations; while Sada, who had yielded to an impulse, partly of curiosity, partly of politeness, and partly of gossip in returning to her guests, inquired of them as to the incidents of their journey from Europe, and expatiated on her own travelling fortunes and misfortunes, speedily becoming as communicative and confidential as though nothing had ever happened to sow the seeds of distrust between them. Thus, without being obliged to ask any ques-

tions directly, Masollam heard a great deal about Amina, and although Sada could tell them nothing that she had not heard already from Shibley, Tigranuhe was glad to let her gabble on. She interrupted her once to inquire about the Sebastian Hartwrights and Reginald Clareville. Sada said she had been present at the wedding, immediately after which the young couple had disappeared, she knew not whither; while Reginald had travelled with them as far as Paris, in which city they had finally parted from him when he accompanied them to the train to see them off on their journey to the East. Since then she had heard nothing of them, though she knew that from time to time Amina had received letters, in regard to the contents of which she was extremely reserved. In her turn Sada asked, not without kindness, after Carabet, by whom, she remarked, she had been treated with a respect and attention she should never forget, albeit she was not permitted to leave her own rooms; and she observed laughingly that he had incidentally taught her a trade, which would always keep her from want. She had actually manufactured an antique since her return to

Teraya, which she had sent to Damascus by Shibley, and which he had disposed of there to the waiter of a hotel for five hundred piastres, although its manufacture had cost her nothing, and been the amusement of a couple of hours.

“Don’t you think,” said Tigranuhe at last, still disposed to be amiable to “the Master,” now that he had so few hours, or at most days, to live, “that you could induce Amina just to come here for one moment before we retire to rest? it has now become so late that we must all go to bed soon. We propose starting before you are up to-morrow morning, and I know that my dear husband would like to see Amina once more, if only, as he says, to ask her forgiveness before he—dies,” she added calmly.

Masollam felt a cold shiver run down his back; but he gave a ghastly smile, for the prospect of seeing Amina rallied him.

“Tell her it is my last prayer,” he said.

“Who talks of dying?” ejaculated Sada; “have you any serious illness? You certainly do not look well.”

“Tell your daughter I have a mortal disease

on me, and if I do not see her now, I shall never see her again in this world."

"Poor old creature!" mused Tigranuhe; "he sees he cannot fight against me, and has reconciled himself to his fate; I shall certainly make it as easy for him as possible."

"May God have pity on you, and restore you to health; I shall certainly go at once, and make her come," said Sada—who was a kind-hearted soul, though a goose—and went off on her mission. In a few moments she returned with Amina, looking very pale, very statuesque, and, in her native costume, very beautiful. As she turned her full unfaltering gaze, first on one and then on the other of the visitors, Masollam was unable to restrain his emotion and buried his face in his hands; even Tigranuhe shrank from meeting her eye, and lowered her own lids, furious with herself as she reflected that she, the queen of the sex, should be compelled to this act of tacit submission to a subject. She determined at once to repair the error and assert her dignity.

"I am surprised, Amina, at your conduct," she said, in a severe tone. "Although we, your oldest friends, whom you have been accus-

tomed to consider your own parents, who have never treated you with anything but love and kindness, to whom you owe everything, have been in the house for several hours, you decline to see us, although we have come out of our way expressly to visit you, and only at last obey with reluctance the summons of a dying man."

This speech jarred so much on Masollam from its first word to its last, which was especially repugnant to him, that before Amina could answer he interposed—

"It is true that Tigranuhe considers me a dying man; and although I am not conscious myself of being in so serious a condition as she declares, her intuition, as you know, in cases of disease is so infallible, that I am willing to accept as correct her statement that I have only a short time to live—a few days, I think you said, my dear," and he turned to Madame, who bowed her head in assent. "You see," he pursued with a smile, in the apparent resignation of which Amina thought she detected the gleam of another meaning,—“you see she will only grant me a few days more of earthly existence; and as

all men in the immediate presence of death desire, or should desire, to make reparation for wrongs they may have committed, and should seek reconciliation with, and forgiveness from, those whom they are conscious of having injured, my predominant feeling, ever since Tigranuhe told me that I had not much longer to live, has been to see you. Do not think, my darling daughter, that I concur in her reproaches. On the contrary, I consider your consenting to meet us not only an act of condescension"—and as Madame's eyes flashed daggers on him, he added, as though purposely to infuriate her still more—"towards us both, which we in no way deserve, but of especial compassion and charity towards myself. In Madame Masollam's name and my own, I thank you for it."

The old man drew himself up with an air of dignity, and Amina's quick perceptions instantly sensed the storm that was raging between those with whom her own relations had once been so intimate, and she was literally appalled by its fury. Like an electrician, whose calculations are all thrown out by the violence of an unexpected atmospheric disturbance,

she looked in blank dismay from one to the other; and as the vague dread of some unknown catastrophe crept over her, all feeling of fear for herself, which had been the predominant sentiment when she entered the room, gave place to one of compassion for the strange couple in whose presence she was. It was they who were in danger, not she, and it was their salvation from each other, and not her own from them, that was to be achieved. A great love seemed to surge into her being—a love which, by reason of the peace that it contained, might still these raging waters.

“You are right, my mother,” she said, taking Tigranuhe’s hand and kissing it, “and my father is wrong. It is I who have to ask forgiveness—not you, nor he. Perhaps if I had acted differently, I could have prevented much that has happened. I thank God that He has brought you both under my roof, and given me an opportunity of telling you this, and of assuring you of a love that is still ready, at the cost of any sacrifice, to serve you both; for,” she added, in a low sweet tone, “I perceive that, since I have left you, both stand sorely in need of love and service.”

Masollam groaned ; he too felt that a change was being worked within him, and that the passion of which he had been the slave, was giving place to a nobler sentiment. In a softened mood he stole a look at Tigranuhe, in the hope that he might perceive in her an indication of yielding to Amina's tender influence ; but what had melted him had petrified her. She had instinctively felt that to allow that sacred fire to touch her icy heart, was to abdicate her throne for ever. The authority of a divine love spoke through that gentle girl, and to obey it was to acknowledge Amina's supremacy as queen by right of that love. At no moment of her life had her hatred of her adopted daughter been more intense. Amina felt it, and cast a despairing glance at Masollam ; their eyes met for a moment, but she read in those of the old man the evidence of her triumph. If she had failed with Tigranuhe, she had won with him.

"I do not think," she said, affectionately placing her hand in his, "that my presence here just now can be of any more use. May God protect you both to-night ; and be sure,

however early you may start in the morning, I will see you before you leave."

Amina glided from the room, followed by Sada, and the Masollams were alone.

"I was a fool," said Tigranuhe, "to send for the girl; but I yielded weakly to what I felt to be an overpowering desire on your part."

"Thank you," replied Masollam, meekly; "you did me a service I shall never regret."

"But I shall," muttered Madame; and then she added in a sharp tone, "it is strange that the summons has not yet arrived for Amina from Shibley. It is near midnight. It should have been here an hour or more ago. I was in hopes it would arrive while the girl was in the room with us; in fact, that was an additional reason for my sending for her."

"I have something to say," said Masollam, "to which I fear you will only listen with impatience." He spoke timidly, and with great hesitation.

"Then don't say it."

"I must; a great deal depends upon your answer."

“Go on, then,” said Tigranuhe, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders.

“I want to know whether you will not abandon the idea of depriving Amina of her diamonds. We do not need them. We are abundantly rich.”

“You might well say that I would only listen to such rubbish with impatience,” flashed out Tigranuhe. “Her diamonds, indeed ! Since when have you come to consider them hers ? Abundantly rich ! We can never be abundantly rich as long as there is more wealth to be had. If a great deal depends upon my answer—No ! there you have it. Now I am going out on a reconnoitring expedition.”

“Won’t you have your tea first ?”

“No ; you can be getting it ready. I must wait another hour to give them all time to get to sleep ; but I am impatient to take a general survey. Fortunately there is a good moon ;” and Tigranuhe stepped out into the court.

Masollam got the tea, lighted the spirit-lamp, poured one cupful of water into the pot, which he then put upon the lamp, took the phial out of his pocket, which he had abstracted from

Shibley's, waited until the water boiled, keeping an eye upon the courtyard all the time; and when it had boiled, he poured the whole contents of the phial into it, adding the necessary tea. He then took another cup, poured a few drops of the tea, after it had sufficiently drawn, into it, and watched steadily. As he observed Tigranuhe approaching, he lifted this cup to his lips, and continued apparently to sip it, as she took her seat on the cushions near him.

"You like your tea stronger than I do, to-night especially, when you will have to keep awake, so I poured out mine and drank it, without waiting for you. I am afraid yours may have got a little cold." And he set down his almost empty cup, from which in fact he had drunk nothing, and poured out another for his wife.

"It will be a very easy matter," she said, taking the cup mechanically. "The house is already so quiet, that I can go to work with safety in an hour. How thirsty that salt pickle they gave us at dinner has made me!" and she drank the whole cup at a draught. "How frightfully strong you have made it!

and it has been standing so long it has got quite bitter. Give me a biscuit, and make me some more, very weak."

Masollam obeyed, and Madame sipped the second cup deliberately, smoking a nargileh the while.

"Now," she said, when she had finished it, and the hour had almost expired, "I shall go to work seriously, and," she continued as a sudden suspicion flashed across her mind, "you must come with me; after what you said about my refusal to give up the jewels having important consequences, I can't trust you; you are quite capable in your blind devotion to that girl to give the alarm, and—look here," and Madame pulled the little revolver from her breast, "if I have the slightest suspicion of treachery, you know what to expect, and that I can be absolutely depended upon in a matter of this sort. Now, take off your shoes, and come along."

Shibley's instructions were so exact that Tigranuhe had no difficulty in following them. It is true the door of the sheikh's room was roughly bolted; but Tigranuhe in her preliminary expedition had discovered the trick of

pushing the bolt back with a lever. The room itself was unfurnished, as all Druse rooms are. The key was easily found in the shelf in the corner, and the box under the raised divan.

“Help me to pull it out,” said Tigranuhe in a whisper; “it is impossible to find the casket in this confusion of deeds and manuscripts otherwise.”

With a combined effort, the pair succeeded in dragging the box from its hiding-place, and Tigranuhe began to rummage among its contents. At last, with an exclamation of satisfaction, she grasped her prize. It was almost immediately followed by a groan, for on raising herself from her stooping position, she was seized with a sudden deadly faintness, accompanied by a violent spasm.

“Ah!” she ejaculated, as, recognising the symptom, the truth flashed upon her; and hastily raising her left hand, which still clasped the pistol, she had just time to discharge it at Masollam, and to hear the sharp cry of pain which followed the report, before she herself sank to the ground, and lost all other consciousness but that of the agony which was convulsing her frame.

Amina was pacing her room in agitated thought, when the sound of the pistol-shot started her from her meditations. She had found it utterly impossible to compose herself to rest after leaving the Masollams, so heavily did the presentiment of an impending misfortune weigh upon her. She seemed to be walking upon a mine which might explode at any moment ; but in what direction its disastrous effects would be chiefly felt, she had not been able clearly to discern. Ever since her uncle had accepted Shibley's invitation, she had been conscious of a vague feeling of uneasiness about him, and this at one time increased to such an extent, that she at last had extracted a promise from him if possible to return the same night. Her anxiety was not allayed by the fact that it was now past midnight, and there were no signs of him. But since her interview with the Masollams, her fears had taken another direction. She knew now that a great danger was under her own roof, and the figure which seemed to cast its dark shadow over her soul was no longer that of the Master, but of Tigranuhe.

Gradually her own heart seemed turning to

stone ; a chill took possession of her frame, and she began physically to experience, especially in her extremities, a sensation of intense cold. There was so little of imagination in this, that she had been obliged to wrap herself up in a warm shawl, and even now as she walked up and down, she found herself stamping her feet in her effort to keep up the circulation. It seemed as though she was becoming slowly petrified into the image and likeness of Tigranuhe herself. Wild ambitions began to fire her soul. Visions of regal pageants and coronation ceremonies, in which she was always the central figure, rose before her distorted imagination ; but there was always one obstacle which, at the critical moment, seemed to interpose between her and the realisation of these lofty aspirations. She perceived that to succeed she must kill Masollam, and then a vague dread seemed to seize her that if she did not kill Masollam, he would certainly kill her. It was at the moment when she was struggling back into a sense of her own identity, and when she was beginning to perceive the drift of the painful revelation which was made to her through its

temporary obscuration by that of Tigranuhe, —in fact it was at the very moment that a conviction that the Masollams were in danger from each other, and that she must rush to their rescue, was forcing itself upon her—that the sharp ring of the shot burst upon the still air of night, and she knew that she would be just too late. She rushed wildly to the guests' apartments, although the sound had not seemed to come from that direction, and found the room lighted but empty, the deserted tea-apparatus and still smouldering nargileh showing how recently the occupants had left it. She flew across the court, entering her uncle's outer apartment, where the open door of his inner room revealed the presence of intruders. The moonlight was streaming into it through a large uncurtained window, and at the door lay Masollam, moaning and breathing heavily; writhing beside her uncle's open strong-box was stretched Tigranuhe, her frame from time to time contorted by violent spasms, her teeth set, her hands clenched, but her gleaming eyes showed that she was fully conscious. At a glance Amina perceived that her

left hand clasped a pistol, and her right her own jewel-box. She stooped down, and gently, but with great difficulty, disengaged both the one and the other. She had scarcely done so when Sada, accompanied by Zarifa, both of whom the report had also aroused, entered the room. Tigranuhe glared at them savagely, like some mortally wounded wild animal, unable to turn upon its pursuers. She evidently struggled to speak; but her jaws were so tightly locked, that for some moments the effort was in vain. At length the spasm relaxed in its fury, and she murmured the name of a potent drug. Amina's quick apprehension at once perceived its full import.

"Leave her for the present," she said to the two women, "and look to Daoud Effendi. I will return in a moment;" and she sped to her own room, returning in a few moments with a lamp, the medicine, and the appliances necessary for administering it. She succeeded in giving Tigranuhe a powerful dose before the recurrence of the next spasm. She now turned to Masollam, who had been raised into a sitting posture, and whom she was relieved to find was more frightened than hurt. The

ball had passed through the upper or more fleshy part of the shoulder, grazing the bone, and she set herself to stay the profuse bleeding. This was soon sufficiently stanchèd to enable him to be removed to a bed which had been prepared for him, for the whole household was now on the alert, and Amina was in a position to give her undivided attention to Tigranuhe. She had her carried to her own room, whither, when she had gone for the medicine, she had already conveyed the diamonds, so that the motive of the attempted crime remained a mystery to all save Amina, Sada, and Zarifa,—and of these three, Sada alone knew its origin and secret history, and in her heart she cursed Shibley. It was not to hand these precious gems back to the Masollams, that she had told him how they might be stolen. But then Sada did not know that at that moment a band of armed Druses were in the act of leaving Ain Ghazal, for the purpose of stealing them back again ; still less did those Druses know that a strong party of armed Christians were on their way from Hasbaya to protect the thieves.

Meantime, throughout the whole of that

weary and eventful night, did Amina watch by the side of the bitterest enemy she had in the world, mitigating, by the most skilful and tender ministrations, the agonies of her suffering, and aiding by the magic of her healing touch, and the life that flowed through it, the powerful but less subtle effect of the antidote she was administering.

CHAPTER XI.

SHEIKH SHIBLEY FAILS IN HIS PLOT.

IN inviting some neighbouring sheikhs to meet Sheikh Mohanna at Ain Ghazal, Shibley's motive was, as our readers are aware, quite other than that which he had made the pretext for the assembly when he had discussed the subject with his venerable guest. He desired their presence there for many reasons. He had no fear that any accusations by Amina, even should she venture to make them, of foul play on his part, would be credited. He was known to entertain the profoundest respect and affection for the old sheikh, and it was not likely that he would choose the occasion, when so many witnesses would be present, to murder him, the more especially when, as he would be able to prove

to them, his own interests would be only injured thereby. Amina was scarcely known to them, and, as a stranger and alien in religion, was still distrusted; and if, in his desire to save her uncle's life, he sent for her to exert her medical skill upon him, he could not afford better evidence than he was ignorant of the malady by which his relative had been seized, or he would have avoided laying himself open to so grave an accusation as, by his own act, he thus enabled her to bring against him. On the other hand, he intended to say that he had asked her uncle to agree to their union; that the latter had consented; but that, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, they had both considered the subject one which should be submitted to a council of their spiritual friends, as Amina's contumacy raised a serious question; that this had become all the more important now that she was evidently about to lose her only protector. He then meant to explain why he desired their consent to constitute himself that protector; and, provided her own mother would agree to that arrangement, he would ask them to approve of his determination to keep them both in his house.

In fact he saw his way to strengthening his own position by making this grave catastrophe the occasion of taking these influential neighbours into his confidence in his domestic affairs and matrimonial designs. With a view to preparing their minds in this direction, he had taken occasion privately to throw out a hint to one or two of his leading guests as to the nature of the subject which was to come under discussion, among others to the Khateeb of Teraya, who was a man of high authority, and much looked up to in all matters touching religion in the neighbouring villages as well as in his own. Shibley felt that he could count absolutely upon the devotion of this man to his interests, for he had ever reckoned him among his warmest friends, and had more than once discussed fully and confidentially with him his projects in regard to Amina, and the difficulties by which they were surrounded. He had always met with the warmest sympathy, for the Khateeb was somewhat jealous of Sheikh Mohanna, and resented the introduction into the village of a strange girl, who seemed disposed to set at defiance the highest spiritual authority, and to invoke successfully

in so doing her uncle's powerful protection. But within the last three or four days other influences had been at work on the Khateeb's mind, of which Shibley knew nothing. His wife was an ambitious scheming woman, who was well aware of her daughter's affection for the young and handsome sheikh, and who was extremely anxious to gratify it, and thus to form an alliance with the ancient family of Zedaan ; and she had made Shibley ever a welcome guest in her house, in the hope that her daughter might inspire him with a passion which might induce him to divorce his present wife.

She had never yet ventured to allude to this delicate subject to her husband. When, however, she heard him express a somewhat indignant surprise that Shibley should have divorced his wife for the sake of Amina, without first consulting him, she thought the moment opportune. She explained that their own daughter was pining away for love of the young sheikh ; that Amina had, on the other hand, manifested her dislike to him by taking his divorced wife under her roof to serve as a protection against him ; that the interests of

the nation would be in no way served by assisting Shibley to marry a girl who hated him, and refused to consider herself a Druse ; whereas the interests, not only of the nation, but of their own family, would be served by the Khateeb becoming Shibley's father-in-law, while it would secure the happiness of the daughter they both loved so fondly. In fact, with so much feminine skill and logic did Afifi's mother ply her arguments, that she ended by completely converting her husband to her way of thinking ; and he went to Ain Ghazal with the secret intention of thwarting Shibley's designs in regard to Amina by every means in his power.

As, according to Tigranuhe's calculation, the poison was not to take effect for an hour after it was administered, Shibley was obliged to exert all his ingenuity when the repast was over to postpone the discussion of his affairs ; but the sheikhs were beginning to wax impatient, and the Khateeb had just suggested that they should enter upon the business which had called them together, when it was observed that Sheikh Mohanna had fallen into a profound slumber. All efforts, consistent

with politeness, to rouse him proved unavailing; and as Shibley felt little doubt that this was the first indication of the action of the poison, to be followed before very long by some more violent symptom, and as he could find no further excuse for delaying the discussion, he determined to enter upon it, the more especially as it would perhaps afford an opportunity of having something decided before the confusion took place which would result from a more violent manifestation of sickness. He therefore said that he regretted that a fit of drowsiness should render Sheikh Mohanna incapable of listening to what he had to say, which was, shortly to lay before them the decision to which he and the sheikh had arrived,—that it would be desirable, both in Amina's interests and in that of the family of Zedaan, that the daughter of the late Sheikh Sâleh should be allied to its present head, and compelled to give in her adhesion to the Druse religion, and should henceforth be identified with the nation, not merely by blood, but by marriage and by faith. He went on to say that he had not only secured the consent of Sheikh Mohanna to this arrangement, but of

Amina's mother Sada, and, he would venture to say, of the Khateeb, to whom he referred in confirmation of this statement. To his surprise, the Khateeb replied in guarded and qualified terms. He said, that since he had last expressed a general sympathy with Sheikh Shibley's wishes, two events had occurred. One was a conversation with Sheikh Mohanna, whose language did not by any means accord with what had just fallen from Sheikh Shibley; and the other was the divorce by the latter of his wife, which had taken place without his knowledge, and, in his opinion, prematurely : it should have followed rather than preceded the meeting they were now holding. Under these circumstances, he suggested that they had better postpone any further discussion of the matter until some future day, when Sheikh Mohanna would be able to take part in it.

Shibley bit his lip with vexation. He began to suspect, as he watched the old sheikh slumbering peacefully, that Tigranuhe had played him false. More than two hours had now elapsed since he had emptied the phial into the cup of coffee he had himself handed the old sheikh, and the latter showed no sign

of pain or other disturbance. He suggested to his guests that the sleep did not seem natural, and that perhaps Sheikh Mohanna was seriously ill; but they refused to entertain this idea, being accustomed to sound sleepers, and those who lived near prepared to take their departure, among them the Khateeb, while others proceeded to make themselves comfortable there for the night. Shibley now felt no doubt that he was betrayed; and he even feared that the Masollams might effect the robbery before his own men, who had not yet started, could overtake them. He had already given them their orders, and now went out to hurry them off. As he did so, he whispered in the ear of their leader that the woman was not to be allowed to escape alive. He knew that this involved his own flight to the Jebel Druze; but he was too thirsty for vengeance, and too much enraged at the failure of his scheme so far, to allow this consideration to weigh with him. Moreover, he still had hopes by a bold dash of being able to carry off Amina with him. After what he had said at the meeting, which would certainly be reported to Sheikh Mohanna, the

latter would perceive that he had been invited to Ain Ghazal under false pretences ; and although he would remain ignorant of the full blackness of the treachery, from the fatal consequences of which he had so narrowly escaped, Shibley could not expect again to be received by him as a friend.

The day succeeding this tragic night had not dawned, when a messenger arrived at Ain Ghazal, in hot haste from Teraya. Shibley had been too much agitated to sleep. He was revolving in his mind projects of violence, and anxiously awaiting some news of the mission of robbery and vengeance which he had despatched, when he heard a horse clatter into the courtyard. Hurriedly rising, he met a young man, whom he recognised as one of Sheikh Mohanna's retainers.

"Where is the sheikh?" asked the messenger excitedly. "He must return at once to Teraya. Two visitors arrived last night, and they have been trying to murder each other, and are lying at the point of death, and the *sittat*¹ Sada and Amina urgently beg the sheikh to return at once."

¹ Ladies.

“What kind of visitors?” asked Shibley, whose heart began to sink within him at the prospect of losing alike his treasure and his vengeance.

“An old man and an old woman; they looked like Nusrani.”¹

“Did they come alone?”

“Two baggage-animals and a *muchareh*.”²

“Come in. I will see whether it is possible to wake the sheikh; he has not been well.”

Sheikh Mohanna had slept off the first effects of the potion; and although drowsy, and at first scarcely able to rouse himself, the startling nature of the intelligence speedily put new life into him. In a few moments the horses were saddled, and he was riding with his sons through the grey morning twilight to Teraya.

“I think I shall save her,” said Amina in a low tone to her uncle, as he entered the room in which Tigranuhe was lying, with closed eyes, and in a state of exhaustion almost amounting to collapse—“or rather that she will save herself—for she retains her full consciousness, and I am simply obeying her direc-

¹ Christians.

² Muleteer.

tions. The violence of the paroxysms is certainly abating ; the fear seems to me that she may not have strength to rally. It will be better that she is not excited by knowing that you are here. Zarifa," she continued, turning to her maid, "you can remain with her now, and give her the medicine as she asks for it. I can do nothing more for her just now, and I need a little rest after the terrible strain that this night has been."

"You need refreshment too, my daughter ; come to my room, and tell me what has happened while you take it."

Sheikh Mohanna listened attentively to Amina's recital of the events of the night, and after she had finished, remained thoughtful and silent for some moments.

"There is something in all this deeper than we can fathom," he said at length. "I much fear that there has been some collusion between Shibley and the Masollams. My absence was evidently arranged, and I have little doubt that my suspicion, when I woke from a sleep that seemed unnatural, that I had been drugged last night, was well founded. It was evident that Shibley never intended that I

should be in a condition to take part in the discussion to which he invited me. You tell me that Daoud Effendi is not seriously wounded. Rest here, my child, while I go and see him. I would speak with him alone."

Masollam had just awoke from a troubled sleep. He was lying propped up with pillows, and he turned his eyes languidly upon the sheikh, without manifesting any emotion.

"Peace be upon you! I am glad to see you once again in my house, O Daoud Effendi, my old friend; but it grieves me much that it should be in such a condition, and under such circumstances."

"I have much to be thankful for, and I do not complain. God has dealt very mercifully with me," Masollam added after a pause, "for I have sinned against Him grievously. How is Tigranuhé? Will she live?"

"Amina is hopeful."

Masollam raised his eyes, then closed them, and for some moments his lips moved.

"I desire to confess to you," he said at length. "God wills it."

The old man then narrated the circumstances of Shibley's visit to Damascus. He

described the nature of the contract he had entered into with Tigranuhe; the complex motives by which he was himself actuated in his determination to thwart their designs; his substitute of the narcotic for the poison; his conviction that Tigranuhe had determined to rid herself of his presence; and the instinct of self-preservation which had decided him to anticipate her. He went on to narrate the effect of Amina's visit upon him. How her few words had shattered the hard shell, which, under the influence of Tigranuhe and his own uncontrolled passions, had for years past gradually accreted round all that was originally pure and noble within him, until his whole nature had become petrified, and he retained but the outward mask or semblance of what he once was. How for a moment, as the petrification began as it were to melt, all seemed chaos within, one idea alone crystalising itself out of it, and this was, that he must not attempt to save his own life by taking Tigranuhe's, if she would abandon the idea of the robbery she meditated. But when she refused to do this, then it seemed as though the means had been providentially put

into his hands by her own criminal act, and he determined to use the poison she had designed for another, on herself. He perceived now that he had no justification for this act; but his whole moral sense was too disturbed at the time for him to see anything plainly. He blindly followed the ruling instinct. But ever since that supreme moment, the change within him had been slowly but surely progressing. As a drowning man is said to pass all the events of his life in rapid review during his last moments of consciousness, so there had been revealed within the last few hours to his quickened moral sense, the influences which had been operating for years past to distort it. He could look back and analyse the processes of this moral disintegration with a painful distinctness.

He could see how, by reason of glorying in his own humility, he had become inflated with the pride of Lucifer; how he had made the profession of extreme disinterestedness a cloak to conceal his avarice, and had become wealthy in proportion as he had become skilled in the art of obtaining money under false moral pretences; how like one of old he had let the

woman tempt him, and had absorbed the virus of her poison, her insatiable ambition, her unrivalled power of deceit, her cruelty, her malice and her jealousy; how — already an arena of conflicting lusts and passion—he had allowed a love, which in his infatuation he had imagined pure and holy, to enter which dominated all the rest, and paralysed all those faculties and gifts which the ignorant call supernatural, upon which his authority and his great prestige had been based; how this love had hurled him into violent collision with the guardian influences of her he desired to possess, operating on earth through Santalba and Clareville, and how in the conflict which followed, he was overthrown and vanquished; how henceforth his very intellect began to weaken, and he found himself gradually falling a helpless victim to her he called his wife. All this he told Mohanna, with a lucidity and a power of expression which proved to the old sheikh that, with the restoration of his moral fibre, his intellectual vigour was returning, and that by the pistol-shot with which Tigranuhe had attempted to take his life, she had, under Providence, effected his salvation.

When he had finished, the old sheikh took Masollam's hand in both of his.

"What you have told me, O my friend," he said, "affects me more deeply than I can find words to express; the more especially as I, like yourself, have passed through the valley of the shadow since those early days when we used to open our thoughts to each other; but there is one who will feel it, if possible, more acutely than I do, whose sympathy for you will be as tender as that of a mother, in whose heart you will ever find a home. You know whom I mean."

"Yes," replied Masollam, gently bowing his head. "Santalba."

At this moment Sada appeared at the door.

"The Khateeb is here," she said, "and wishes to see you."

With a faint pressure of Masollam's hand the sheikh left him, and found the Khateeb in his outer apartment.

"I have come, O sheikh," he said, "to tell you what happened at Ain Ghazal while you were asleep last night, as it is a matter which somewhat perplexes me, in regard to which I would be glad to have some explanation."

“It was my intention,” replied Mohanna, “to have paid you a visit for the purpose of talking to you about this very subject; I have therefore to thank you for having anticipated me.”

The Khateeb then gave a very accurate report of the conversation which had taken place, and of Shibley's presentation of the matter.

“I feel obliged to you,” said Mohanna, when he had listened to it, “for having insisted on a postponement of the question; the statement of Sheikh Shibley was, as you rightly conjecture, false in every particular. As he evidently did not desire the truth to be known, I will not now betray his confidence, the more especially as the subject will come up again before long in a very different form from what he anticipates. Meantime you would do me a service by keeping me informed as to his movements and designs, in so far as you are yourself aware of them, and, believe me, I shall not forget your loyalty and good faith on this occasion.”

The Khateeb took his leave, and Sheikh Mohanna returned to Amina.

“Have you got the letter,” he asked, “which you received from Santalba yesterday, just before I started for Ain Ghazal?”

The girl pulled a letter from her bosom. “This is not the one,” she said, with a slight blush, as she was about to open it. “I have made a mistake; it is from Reginald Clareville. See, here is the letter from Santalba.”

“When does he say that he expects to be here?”

“He hopes they will all four arrive here about the end of next month; that would be a month from now.”

“It will be a time of suspense and possible difficulty for us, my child; I would they could have been here sooner—and yet we have no right to complain, for our dear friend allows himself no rest; it is scarce eight weeks since he left us, and we did not then expect him so soon.”

“He says events are moving very rapidly in the interval, and indeed we see as much from the unexpected culminations of our own latest experiences. He must have felt we could get through this crisis without him.”

“Then you suppose, by his hurrying so

much to get back to us, that there will be another in a month from now?"

"I do not say that. No one can really foresee the future, not even those who are not hampered with quite such gross bodies as we are, and have passed into another stage of existence. All that either they or we can do—if we have a little more insight than our neighbours have yet attained to—is to calculate probabilities with rather more accuracy. And now tell me about Daoud Effendi; I have not seen him since I bound up his wound."

Amina listened with great interest to Mohanna's narrative, not only of his conversation with Masollam, but with the Khateeb, for the sheikh had made it a point to conceal nothing from her, and she had been aware of the object of his visit to Shibley. She shuddered at the evidence which it all conveyed of the determination of the young sheikh to force on a union with her in spite of all obstacles. And the fact that one attempt involving so much treachery and crime had failed, only served to increase her anxiety—as well for the sheikh's life as for her own,

for she was determined never to let Shibley obtain possession of her alive.

“What do you intend to do?” she asked.

“Of an active kind, nothing. It is important to conceal from Shibley what we know, especially as we have no means of bringing it home to him. Better to lull him into security by avoiding any act which may savour of hostility or even suspicion towards him. To make him desperate is to make him still more dangerous. We are now thoroughly warned, and have only to take the necessary measures of precaution, to keep ourselves well informed as to his movements, and to trust in the protection of Providence. He has never given us any reason to doubt it,” added the sheikh, with a smile.

“You are right, uncle,” said Amina. “I had a foolish momentary impulse of panic just now, but it is past. For us, what the world calls danger, does not exist.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE KHATEEB COMES TO SHEIKH SHIBLEY'S AID.

To calm his own agitation, and distract his mind from the anxiety to which he was a prey after Sheikh Mohianna's hurried departure, Shibley mounted his horse and galloped off to recall the band whom he had sent to waylay the Masollams, and whose mission he now knew to be hopeless. He found them posted at the spot he had indicated, a lonely gorge, whence he had calculated escape would be impossible, if the travellers had been set upon from front and rear, as he had planned. His men reported that a few minutes previous to his arrival, a party, well armed and mounted, had passed through the gorge on their way to Teraya; that one of the Druses had ridden out to accost them, the others remaining in

ambush, and had asked them whence they had come, and whither they were bound; and that they had replied they were on their way from Hasbaya to Tibnin, a reply which seemed to them suspicious, as there was a more direct route; that they were at the moment holding a consultation as to whether it would not be desirable to follow and watch them, when Shibley had himself arrived.

“You have done well,” he said, “but there is no need for you to stay here, as I have just received intelligence that the travellers have abandoned their intention of leaving Teraya to-day. Return home, then, and I will none the less reward you liberally for the service you were prepared to render me.”

“Traitors!” muttered Shibley between his teeth. “So they not only played me false in the matter of the poison, but were prepared to give me a fight for the treasure besides, if, as I suspect, these men come from Hasbaya to serve as an escort on their return journey.” To make sure of this, Shibley made a rapid circuit, and when he had almost reached Teraya, wheeled sharply round and rode along the Hasbaya road, as though coming from the

village. He soon met the party he was in quest of. Riding up to their leader, he inquired if he was on his way to Teraya to escort Daoud Effendi Masollam and his wife back to Hasbaya? On receiving an affirmative reply, he informed them that he had been requested by Daoud Effendi to tell them that, as the latter had determined to remain some days more at Teraya, their services would not be required; and, with his suspicions thus reduced to a certainty, he himself rode into Teraya, and alighted at the house of the Khateeb at the moment when the latter was absent on his visit to Masollam.

He met with a cold and gloomy reception from Afifi and her mother, for the Khateeb had reported the occurrences at Ain Ghazal, and the determination which Shibley had manifested to secure Amina for his bride. Shibley saw that at all hazards he must regain the friendship of this family as the last means which existed of obtaining information as to what was transpiring at Mohanna's house, and the disposition of the sheikh towards himself. He was tortured with anxiety to know how much the old man knew of his treachery; and

his main object in so speedily coming to the Kháteeb's was to persuade the latter, if possible, to keep silence as to what had passed while the sheikh was asleep. When he heard from Afifi that her father was at that moment visiting Mohanna, he saw that he was too late, and that he must at once invent explanations which should satisfy the mother and daughter, and, if possible, win them back to his interests.

“The Khateeb has told you what happened at my house last night, I suppose,” he remarked, “and my object in coming here now is to explain it. You heard, no doubt, that I consulted the sheikhs present in regard to my marriage with Amina; I could not tell them then what I can tell you now, what my real motives are. You do not suppose that I really care for a girl who despises her religion and her people, and manifests an especially strong aversion to me, the head of her family. But perhaps you do not know that she is enormously rich; the possessor of treasure, concealed in her uncle's house, which would make the house of Zedaan the most wealthy in the nation. It is this treasure,

not the girl, that I desire to obtain ; for it is not right that any woman should possess such wealth. Her uncle, however, refuses to compel her to part with it to those to whom it should more properly belong, or even to consent to her marriage with me, whereby I should without further difficulty enter into possession. Once mine, I should lose no time in getting rid of one whom I dislike as much as she dislikes me ; and," he added, with a tender glance at Afifi, "I should follow my own inclinations in taking a wife. But it is a duty I owe, not only to my own family, but to my people, not to let the vast sum of money represented by these jewels slip away to the pocket of some Franji upon whom the strange girl has set her affection. With it I could enrich all my relatives to the third and fourth degree, and yet have abundant for myself ; and she whom I should make my wife," and he again looked at Afifi, "would be the richest woman of the nation."

The eyes both of mother and daughter sparkled at this prospect, and Shibley perceived the impression this unexpected revelation was producing.

“Does my husband know anything of this?” asked the wife of the Khateeb.

“No one knows of it yet; but it cannot long remain a secret, for last night the Jew from Damascus arrived with his wife, by whom Amina was brought up. They claim the treasure, and endeavoured to steal it during Sheikh Mohanna’s absence; but it seems they quarrelled over the spoil, and tried to murder each other, and are both now lying at the point of death. But here comes the Khateeb; doubtless he will be able to give us the latest information.”

But the Khateeb was rather in an unamiable mood, because he knew nothing. He had heard various wild rumours, and had expected that Sheikh Mohanna, in return for the information he had given him as to the occurrences at Ain Ghazal, would have taken him into his confidence, instead of which the old man had maintained a complete silence with regard to the tragedy which had taken place under his own roof, and the Khateeb had been too proud to allude to the subject. He listened at first moodily, but gradually with awakened interest, to Shibley’s narrative; for the latter did not

conceal from him that, having reason to suspect the robbery, he had taken precautions to arrest the thieves. He dwelt on the danger of the loss to the nation of all this wealth, on the lack of devotion exhibited by Sheikh Mohanna to the interests of his family and race, and finally promised the Khateeb to wed his daughter, if he would co-operate with him in obtaining possession of the jewels, either by fair means or foul. Fair means meant marrying Amina first, and divorcing her afterwards ; and foul meant stealing the jewels, and going off with them to the Jebel Druze.

The Khateeb, who was a man of caution and deliberation, refused to give any hasty pledge in the matter. He had won the confidence of Sheikh Mohanna so completely by his recent conduct, that he could betray him all the more easily whenever it became his interest to do so. In the meantime, he recommended Shibley to return quietly home, and avoid doing anything which should give rise to fresh suspicion. He was sure, he said, that his movements would be narrowly watched, and therefore, whatever might be the plan decided upon, it would require to be matured

and carried out with extreme secrecy and caution. The Khateeb being now thoroughly in possession of all the facts, said he would think them over, and in the course of a few days would ride over to Ain Ghazal, and tell Shibley the results.

With this assurance the young sheikh returned home somewhat relieved in his mind, and awaited events. On the following morning the Khateeb saddled his horse and set forth on a round of visits. He was away a fortnight, Shibley meanwhile tortured with impatience, and only obeying his instructions by the exercise of great self-control. At last he was gladdened one day by the entrance of the Khateeb. The latter now assured Shibley that the object of his journey had been to explain the situation to the sheikhs of a large circuit of villages. He had sounded them privately and in succession. He had explained to them how very much more important it was, now that Amina was known to be the owner of great wealth, that she should be compelled without delay to give in her adhesion to the Druse religion, and identify herself by marriage with the race to

which she belonged, than if she had been a pauper; and there was not one who had not seen it instantly in the same light. From being an anomaly, and therefore rather a nuisance than otherwise, she had become a most valuable and cherished prize; and the Khateeb skilfully directed the general indignation against Sheikh Mohanna for practically proving false to his nation by not regarding her in the same light. The discovery of Amina's treasure had in fact been due to an accident, whereas it was the evident duty of her uncle to take measures from the first for securing her jewels for the family, instead of keeping their existence a secret from those most interested in them. His reluctance to force Amina to give in her adhesion to their religion, his refusal even to consent to her marriage with Shibley, all told against him, especially in the minds of those who had resented his assumption of having had a revelation of a secret interpretation of one of the books of Hamzé, which was in many respects unorthodox. Finally, the Khateeb had had a secret meeting with several of the sheikhs most hostile to Mohanna, in

which it had been agreed that he must be formally called to account, and not only give explanations of his conduct, but, under the pain of penalties provided in such cases by the religion, be required to coerce his niece into the proposed marriage with Shibley—a marriage much desired by the girl's own mother. Some of the leading sheikhs had agreed to make a secret propaganda in this sense, and when all was prepared, to notify Mohanna that a grand meeting was convened for a certain date, to take place at Teraya, on important questions affecting the interests of the nation, in the Khalweh, or church, which is the secret council chamber of the Druses on these occasions.

“As one or two of the sheikhs whose presence is the most necessary are absent from home,” pursued the Khateeb, when he had finished this statement, “the meeting will necessarily be delayed for some days longer; but no harm can result from this; on the contrary, it will lull them into all the greater security. The fact that the thieves, who were caught, as I now understand, red-handed in their attempt to steal the jewels, are still kept

in the house as honoured guests, upon whom both Sheikh Mohanna and his niece lavish the greatest care and attention, is another most suspicious circumstance which will have to be inquired into."

"Do you think," asked Shibley, "that the sheikh has any idea of the object of your late journey?"

"It is impossible for me to be certain that there may not be one who is sufficiently his friend to give him a hint of it; but if so, he has carefully concealed his suspicions from me, for I called on him yesterday immediately on my return. There are various questions pending in some of the villages, and I accounted for my journey by pretending that I had gone upon invitation. It therefore caused him no surprise; and he took occasion again to thank me for the part I took in the discussion we had that night, when I suggested that the consideration of the whole matter should be postponed. As it turns out," added the Khateeb, drily, "you are likely to have more reason to thank me for the course I adopted on that occasion than he has."

“Yes, for it has enabled you to gain his confidence; but now that you are in possession of all the facts, you understand the haste I was in to bring matters to a conclusion, though, as we now see, it would have been premature.”

The Khateeb was right in his conjecture; among those whom he had consulted in regard to the conduct of Sheikh Mohanna, there was one who was too good a friend of the old man not to keep him accurately informed of the conspiracy which was being hatched against him. Sheikh Suleiman was an ardent admirer, and a most devoted adherent and disciple, of Mohanna. He was a young man of an enthusiastic temperament and a devout mind, and had from his youth been attracted by those qualities in the sheikh to which his own nature furnished a willing response. He lost no time, therefore, in making a night journey to Teraya—for one of the most marked characteristics of the Druses is the secrecy with which all their operations are conducted; and Sheikh Suleiman considered that it was most important that the Khateeb should have no inkling that his treachery to Sheikh Mo-

hanna had been discovered by the latter. Hence it was that the old sheikh was especially on his guard when he received the Khateeb's visit, not to let him suppose that he knew anything, while he east about in vain for some loophole of escape from the toils which were being so subtly and silently woven round him.

"I see only one way," he said, on discussing the matter with Amina, "and that would be to send you off swiftly and silently to some Christian friends I have in Damaseus, who would take care of you until the arrival of Girius Bey and your other friends from Europe."

Amina shook her head. "For many reasons," she said, "such a scheme is impracticable. In the first place, Tigranuhe is too ill to be moved; the nervous shock to her system has produced some kind of creeping paralysis. Have you remarked how indistinct her utterance is becoming, and with what difficulty she can move her limbs? She told me last night that she knew that she was going to lose all power in them. It would be impossible to move her in her present condition, and as

impossible for me to leave her. In the next place, if you allowed me to escape with my diamonds, how could you justify yourself to your people. Believe me, we are stronger united than separated, and shall not be abandoned in the hour of our need. Until we see a distinct avenue of escape opened, or find weapons put into our hands to meet this crisis, our duty is to await it in faith that we shall be protected by other means than those of our own devising. Let us thank God for the calm we are enjoying, even though the indications point to its being a treacherous one.

The old man bowed his head in acquiescence, and at this moment Masollam entered the room. He was so far recovered that he was able to move about, and spent most of his time in Tigranuhe's room watching by her bedside, and manifesting a tenderness which, if that invalid did not actively repel, she neither invited nor seemed to appreciate. If, in obedience to occult natural laws, occult mainly because of the blindness and prejudice which refuse to investigate them, phenomena termed miraculous can be produced, whereby the blind can be made to see, the

deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the sick to be healed—there is no reason why operations as wonderful and apparently miraculous, of a moral kind, should not be performed by the same or correlated laws, whereby the whole nature undergoes a transformation, known to theologians as “the casting out of devils,”—the last well-authenticated instance having occurred, according to them, in the case of one Paul, who cast “a spirit of divination out of a girl, who brought her master much gain by soothsaying,” some eighteen hundred and thirty-three years ago. It was some such change as this that had been operated upon Masollam, — partly through the agency of Amina, and partly by reason of the shock which he had sustained on the night when he himself narrowly escaped death at the hands of Tigranuhe,—which left him bereft of his gifts, but restored to his moral equilibrium ; a meek, subdued old man, crushed beneath the load of the memories by which he was haunted, but strong, notwithstanding, in his determination to bear it, and to make such reparation as lay in his power to those whom he had despoiled and deluded. To this end he had been once more

using Amina as his amanuensis ; and many of those with whom Santalba had been so recently in communication, now received, in a handwriting with which they were familiar, letters dictated by Masollam, admitting the truth of all that the Count had said in regard to himself, and furnishing unanswerable evidence of his repentance by announcements of the arrangements he was making to pay them back in full all that he had ever received at their hands, though by so doing he would leave himself a beggar.

“Not a beggar,” Amina had said, when, after a full calculation of his assets, it seemed that such must be the result. “Not while Count Santalba and I live, either in purse or in love.”

Neither she nor Sheikh Mohanna had thought it necessary to take Masollam into consultation over their own troubles, and the dangers that were menacing them, fearing to add to his burden ; but as he entered, he observed the anxious expression of the old sheikh, and though nothing external betrayed it, he was conscious of a slight mental agitation in Amina.

“ You look troubled,” he said, glancing from one to the other. “ I fear me that the continued presence of Tigranuhe and myself here is a cause of embarrassment to you.”

“ By no means ; it is my presence here which is a cause of the most extreme embarrassment both to my uncle and myself, and all concerned,” answered Amina.

“ How so ? I only ask from sympathy, not from curiosity.”

“ I feel as if I must tell him, uncle,” said Amina ; and she narrated all the circumstances of the plot in which Shibley and the Khateeb were engaged.

“ When do you expect this meeting to take place ? ”

“ We do not know exactly ; it depends upon the return of some sheikhs who have gone to the Lebanon.”

“ And when do you expect Girius Bey ? ”

“ In about a fortnight from now, perhaps in less.”

“ Did you not tell me that Clareville and the Sebastian Hartwrights would accompany him ? ”

“ Yes.”

“Then send them a telegram from Damascus to hurry them, and manage to delay the meeting until their arrival. If you can do this, and I am not speaking now in a spirit of prophecy,” and the old man smiled sadly, “but from facts of which I have certain knowledge—I say if you can manage this, you will successfully defy the whole Druse nation.”

Sheikh Mohanna looked up surprised, and somewhat incredulous.

“I cannot now tell you my reasons for making such a positive assertion,” said Masollam, with a strong emphasis; “but believe me, I would not risk it if there was the smallest doubt about it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

AMINA ASSERTS THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN.

ON the day following this conversation, Santalba received a telegram, dated Damascus, the result of which was, that the next evening he left Paris for Switzerland, where he was joined by Clareville and the Sebastian Hartwrights, proceeding thence by the most direct route for Syria. The express messenger who had carried this message to Damascus from Teraya had scarcely returned to Teraya with the answer, announcing the departure of the party, when Sheikh Mohanna was taken seriously ill, and according to the custom on such occasions, visitors flocked to his house with the view of crowding round his bed. The Khateeb was one of the earliest to present himself, and was much surprised and offended at being received by

Amina, and informed that the sheikh's illness being one that required absolute quiet, she was compelled to refuse admittance to all visitors. This aroused a strong feeling of indignation against her throughout the village, and much strengthened the hands of the party with whom, either from jealousy or for some other reason, she was unpopular. Gratitude is too much mingled with suspicion to be a virtue among the Druses. Amina's devotion to the sick, her generosity with her purse, and her tender consideration for all with whom she was brought into contact, had rendered her, it is true, generally popular with the women; but the men all the more resented the presumption on the part of a woman which should venture to exclude them from the sick-room of the sheikh while they suspected her motives; and it required all Sada's influence and authority—which, as widow of their late sheikh, was considerable—to prevent them from forcing their way in. The Khateeb had the same morning received a message announcing the return of the sheikhs from the Lebanon, whose arrival had alone delayed the assembling of the council at Teraya; and angry and

suspicious, he rode over to Ain Ghazal to consult Shibley. That young man, who had been fuming with impatience, saw in the incident an excuse for forcing his own presence on Amina, and decided, as a relation of the family, to claim his right of access to Mohanna; while it was agreed that the Khateeb should pay a visit to the newly arrived sheikhs, to whom he had not had an opportunity of explaining the nature of the case in regard to which their decision was desired.

Shibley was anxious to see Mohanna for several reasons: one was, to judge for himself of the nature and gravity of his illness; another was, to endeavour to explain his own conduct on the occasion of the meeting which had taken place at his house, and, so far as might be possible, restore himself to the good graces of the sheikh; and a third was, to discover the motives which induced the latter to keep the Masollams as permanent guests in his house. His mind was tortured with suspicion and worried by conjecture at this totally unaccountable proceeding. He had remained entirely in the dark as to what really had happened on that eventful night.

It had leaked out that Masollam had been wounded by a pistol-shot, and that Tigranuhe had been at the point of death; but whether they had actually attempted the robbery of the diamonds or not, he was ignorant. He had indeed assumed, as he had told the Kha-teeb, that they had quarrelled over the spoil, but he had no assurance of this; and if it were not so, the spoil was still there, and they were in the house with it, and might at any moment take advantage of the opportunities which their protracted visit must have afforded them, to appropriate it and make their escape. Tigranuhe's illness might be assumed; he had heard that Masollam was rapidly recovering. At any moment they might disappear with the prize. The very thought made him tremble. Certainly it was a matter that must be looked to, and one in regard to which he could only satisfy himself by a personal visit. It was evident he had nothing to fear. More than a fortnight had elapsed since he had unsuccessfully attempted the sheikh's life, and misrepresented to the assembled company the object of their meeting; but a profound stillness had reigned

ever since at Teraya. At all events, a visit there now would ensure him an interview with Amina ; and he was possessed by such an insatiate craving to see her again that it was worth any risk ; and it would also give him an opportunity of a private conversation with Sada, from whom he hoped to extract all the information he thirsted for with regard to the Masollams. Indeed he thought it just possible he might see Daoud Effendi himself. It was therefore with a heart beating violently under the influence of passion, nervousness, curiosity, and a desire for vengeance, that Shibley rode across the *meidan* to the entrance of Sheikh Mohanna's house at Teraya. After the manner of Druses, he walked in unannounced, and was actually in the sick man's room before any one had seen him. The sheikh was asleep, and Amina was sitting by his side reading, when, hearing a step, she looked up, and saw her cousin within two paces of her.

With infinite coolness and presence of mind she rose gently, placed her finger on her lip, and softly left the room, beckoning Shibley to follow her.

She led him across the court to the guest's room, and motioned to him to be seated.

"I have been expecting you," she said. "I was sure you would come when you heard that the sheikh was ill. Indeed he has been surprised that you have never been to see him since the night he dined with you."

Her perfect calmness, and a certain air of condescension, which would have irritated Shibley even in a sheikh of rank superior to himself, exasperated him beyond measure in this girl, who seemed placed above him on some lofty pedestal, at a height to which he could never hope to attain. His first instinct was one of rage, and a desire to hurl her at his feet and crush her beneath them; and then another and softer feeling stole over him, one which he had never experienced for any human being, and of the existence of which he had been ignorant. As he gazed at her in silence—for he was too much overcome by this conflict of emotion to speak—it grew in strength until, to his own astonishment, he felt an almost uncontrollable desire to throw himself at her feet and worship her. As he

looked at the dainty slippers peeping from beneath the folds of the full trousers, it would be a greater pleasure, he thought, to be trampled under those tiny feet than to obey his own first cruel instinct. Amina kept her large calm eye fixed upon him, as a keeper does upon a tiger which he is taming. Shibley wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow.

“You know,” he said at length, in a suppressed tone, “why I could not come. You brought Fadda here to prevent me.”

“I brought Fadda here because you treated her as no brave man should treat a woman. I was ashamed that my father’s cousin’s son could be so base and cruel, and I made her the only reparation in my power.”

“Silence, girl !” exclaimed Shibley. “Who are you that you should dare to use such language to me ? Another word, and I will strike you to the earth.”

“Is that the way Druse men win the affections of the women they love ?” said Amina, rising from her seat.

“It is the way Druse men make the women they love obey them.”

“And hate and despise them if they are true women,” added Amina, with a glance of supreme contempt as she moved towards the door.

Shibley's impulse was to endeavour to retain her by force, but he saw that she would escape him, and he still had enough self-possession to perceive that the scandal which would result from a pursuit could in no way advance his ends. It was not by such means that he would obtain the information he desired.

“Stop, Amina!” he cried; “you are different from Druse women, and I was wrong to treat you as one.”

Amina paused. She was anxious, if possible, to gain ascendancy over this savage nature, and not to drive him out of the house like an infuriated wild beast.

“Now that you understand that,” she said, turning to him, and again fixing her eye on his, “perhaps we shall get on better. I do not on that account forget that you are the nearest relation I have on my father's side, and, believe me, my earnest desire is that we should remain good friends; but I will leave

the room and refuse ever to see you again, unless you promise to remember what you have just said, that I am different from Druse women, in that I will not submit to be threatened, and will not permit you to treat me with disrespect."

"One would imagine," said Shibley, grimly, "that you thought yourself man's equal."

"In every respect," returned Amina; "and from the exhibition you have just afforded of your own manhood, I perceive that some Druse men are inferior to the women of other nations."

Shibley had never seen a Spanish bull-fight, but if he had, he might have likened himself to the bull, and Amina to the *toreador*; her stabs maddened him, but he felt powerless to retaliate. He could only keep her with him by submission, and her presence was what he craved for more than aught else at the moment.

"At all events," he said with a short laugh, "Druse women have this in common with those of other nations, they have sharp tongues, and often talk nonsense. Had Sheikh Mohanna been instructing you in our

religion, as he promised, you would know that it does not allow us to consider women as the equals of men. However, as there are none of them like you, I will consent to make an exception in your favour. And now that we are good friends again, tell me what is the matter with Sheikh Mohanna."

"He has an attack of fever—he has, indeed, never been thoroughly well since the night he spent with you. He must have eaten something then that disagreed with him."

Shibley shot a sharp suspicious glance at her.

"How are your other patients?" he asked.

"Daoud Effendi is much better. His wife, I fear, will never recover; she is still too ill to be moved."

"What is the nature of her illness?"

"You would not understand my description of it if I gave it you."

"Do you know how it was produced?" persisted Shibley.

"By an overdose of a very powerful medicine. Why are you so interested?"

"Oh, I have heard so many rumours about an attempt to steal some diamonds, and a

quarrel which resulted from it, that I was anxious to know the truth."

"The Druses seem to me very fond of gossip," said Amina. "And now I must leave you for a moment, for perhaps my uncle may need me."

"I will come with you," said Shibley, rising.

"No, you won't; you will sit here, and take your first lesson of obedience to a woman. I will return in a moment." And Amina tripped off, leaving Shibley hesitating between insubordination and what he considered indignity. He decided in favour of the latter. In a few moments Amina returned, followed by Zarifa, bearing refreshments. She had taken the opportunity of making all safe. Sada and Fadda she had posted with the sheikh. She had warned both of Shibley's presence, and extracted from them a promise not to leave Mohanna's side while he was in the house. Masollam, when he heard of the visit, was only too anxious to avoid meeting the young sheikh, and remained with Tigranuhe. Amina therefore returned with her mind at ease, and for an hour exerted all her power of fascination to reduce her cousin to

that condition of abject slavery, the fetters of which the Western lover delights to rivet upon himself, but which were as new and irksome to Shibley as harness to a zebra. At the end of that time he rode away in no respect wiser than he came in regard to all he desired to know, feeling, nevertheless, delightfully soothed and comforted. His had been a gay youth; he had been married twice, and although flirtation is attended with considerable difficulty among the Druses, he had managed to indulge the tender passion—at great risk, it is true—in forbidden directions; but what he felt now was so foreign to all previous experience, that he was unable to do more than revel in it as a new sensation. His faculties were too uncultured, and his perceptions too dense, to enable him to attempt analysis. He did not know that the subtle joy which seemed to flood his being, arose from an unconscious element of purity, which he derived from Amina, but which had never entered into the composition of any love he had felt for woman before. For she had been giving him love—not that of a woman for her lover, but that love which God furnishes to those who live for

the whole race, and who believe that His love alone put forth through them can save it. So Shibley rode home, trying to read the riddle that he had become to himself—wondering at the strength and the character of that devotion with which a woman had inspired him, and the sweetness of which seemed to increase just in proportion as he elevated her above himself in his own estimation, and invested her with attributes which made her worthy of his worship. What was strangest of all was, that he was conscious that in proportion as he did this, he seemed to rise instead of sink in his own self-respect. To exalt the woman he loved above himself, appeared to him now something not to be ashamed of, but to glory in ; and this was so entirely opposed to all his preconceived notion of the relation of the sexes, that he tried to combat it ; but as this only had the effect of rendering him miserable, he violated the prejudices of his nature and the teaching of his religion, and was happy. Had Shibley been a philosopher, he might perhaps have come to the conclusion that no moral progress was possible without violations of this sort.

“I shall be glad to see you again whenever you like to come,” Amina had said when they parted; “and you need not be afraid of meeting Fadda, for I shall take care that on these occasions she is always by my uncle’s bedside.”

Amina had two motives in making this speech; one was to keep Shibley away from the sheikh, to whom his presence could only be painful after what had happened, and who really had very little the matter with him. In fact, his illness had only been definitely decided upon when it was certain, from the message that had arrived from Paris, that it need not be made to last more than a fortnight, and partook therefore of the nature of that complaint to which statesmen and diplomats are especially liable. Amina’s second reason for inviting Shibley to come and see her was as strategic as her uncle’s illness. She hoped to acquire an influence over him, which, should occasion demand, she might use to procure delay, or, at all events, to moderate the violence of his designs against herself. She would have shrunk from venturing upon so bold a course, had it not been for the near ap-

proach of rescue in the shape of Santalba and Clareville. As it proved, her calculations were not misplaced. Shibley was only too glad of the opportunities thus afforded of *tête-à-têtes* with his cousin, and of the pleasure which he derived from them. He troubled himself neither about his uncle's illness nor the Masollams' designs. Another world was being opened out to him—a world of new emotions, of vague yearnings, of budding aspirations. The consciousness began to dawn upon him that there was nothing about him worthy of her he loved. His inferiority was no longer an admission made to satisfy her, in which he himself did not believe, but a stubborn reality, which all his vanity could not deny. A new motive for existence had burst upon him—one which the wildest flights of his unenlightened imagination would never have suggested—and this was to win the respect of a woman. He saw now he could not win her love without. Hitherto it had mattered not to him whether the woman whom he desired to make his wife loved him or not. She was his slave, and had to do his bidding; his own happiness was in no way affected by

demonstrations of affection on her part, while, by the custom of his people, all outward show of tenderness on his was accounted an unworthy weakness. Now, in defiance of this prejudice, he began to long for an occasion when he might outwardly show himself deferential to Amina, if by so doing he might win her love, without which he felt that his union with her would lose all its charm. The change which in so short a time seemed stealing over him puzzled the Khateeb exceedingly; while Shibley's almost daily visits to Teraya so outraged his notions of propriety, that he felt called upon to remonstrate with him, more especially as Afifi had discovered that these visits were made exclusively to Amina, and that he had never been allowed admittance to the room of the sheikh.

"This illness of Sheikh Mohanna is suspicious," he said to him one day; "I believe it is merely assumed for the sake of gaining delay."

"Possibly," replied Shibley, who was now in no hurry to precipitate the storm he had himself conjured up.

"Then why don't you insist upon seeing him and judging for yourself?"

“Because Fadda is always there, and you know I cannot meet her.”

“Know you not that it is as great an outrage of propriety to meet Amina alone almost daily, as you are doing, as to meet Fadda? Our friends, when they assemble, may have your conduct as well as Sheikh Mohanna’s to consider, if you are not careful. This girl, with her foreign ways, is making a fool of you, as she has already of Sheikh Mohanna.”

“She would make a fool of you too, if you saw as much of her as I do,” said Shibley.

The Khateeb frowned. “This is trifling,” he said, “and an insult to our friends, who have been notified of the reason we have invited them to meet here, and are waiting for the summons. I for one will be no longer a party to delay. I will at once request their attendance at my house, when we will discuss the position of the whole family, yourself included, whom this girl’s presence has so strangely disturbed.”

“You are right,” said Shibley, suddenly changing his manner; “I have been weak and foolish, and am being hoodwinked. Thank you, old friend, for your good advice. I perceive this thing must not longer be delayed; but,

as he is ill, it had better take place at Sheikh Mohanna's, and not in the Khalweh. It is right, however, that he have notice of it, so that he may order the necessary preparations to be made."

"Well, see to it at once," said the Khateeb; "and let an early day be fixed without delay."

Shibley hurried to Amina. "A messenger has arrived at the Khateeb's," he said, "from some of the sheikhs of the neighbouring villages, notifying their wish to meet here at an early day to discuss some matters of importance."

"Do they wish to meet at the Khalweh or here?"

"Here."

"Will the fourth day of the week do? To-day is the first; my uncle is recovering so rapidly that I have no doubt by that day he will be able to receive them in person. Before then I do not think it would be possible."

"I have no doubt, in that case, that it can be fixed for that day."

Amina had received through Carabet a tele-

gram announcing the safe arrival of the travelers at Beyrout, and calculated that on Tuesday night, or at least in the course of Wednesday, they would be at Teraya.

“Do you know what are the matters which the sheikhs are coming here to consider?” she asked.

Shibley hesitated a moment. “No,” he said at length.

“I do,” she said calmly; “and as it is a matter which affects all the family so much, it is important that I do not lose any time in telling my uncle. He will see how necessary it is for him to make haste and get well, so I am afraid I must ask you to take leave of me for to-day.” And she added gravely, “I am sure, considering the object of this assembly, you will agree with me that, in order not to give more occasion for complaint as to all our proceedings than is necessary, it will be well for you to suspend all further visits to me until after it has taken place. I trust,” she concluded, with a look full of meaning, “that nothing will occur then to prevent our meeting afterwards on the same friendly terms that

we have been doing lately ;” and with a salutation of more than common cordiality, Amina tripped away, leaving Shibley more convinced than ever that he had lived all his life in a delusion upon the important subject of woman.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PARTY OF RESCUE FROM THE WEST
ARRIVES AT TERAYA.

LATE on the following Tuesday evening, there arrived at Teraya a cavalcade consisting of four foreigners, with their servants and baggage-animals. They rode so silently through the village in the darkness, that, except for the barking of dogs, there was nothing to indicate the approach of so unusual a party ; and in fact the next day was far advanced before it came to the Khateeb's ears that some Franj had arrived at Sheikh Mohanna's. Santalba and his three friends had been joined at Beyrout by Carabet, in obedience to instructions which had been sent to him by Masollam ; and the Armenian was thus at length afforded the opportunity of gratifying a curiosity which the prolonged absence

of the Masollams had severely tried. Since the first letter from Amina, announcing his sister's severe illness, he had received messages from the Master, in which the latter informed him of his intention of making a prolonged stay at Teraya, and directed him to proceed to Beyrout and hold himself in readiness to accompany Count Santalba, and the party whose acquaintance he had already made in England, to Teraya. He was excessively puzzled by instructions which implied a reconciliation for which he could not account; but he was too well trained to question them, although his sister's silence suggested matter for doubt and anxiety—nor did anything fall from Santalba or any of the others of the party in the course of their ride which tended to enlighten him. Indeed he was himself the first to inform them of the presence of the Masollams at Teraya. Amina had confined herself, in a letter which met them at Beyrout, to saying that she looked anxiously for their arrival and aid in matters which could better be explained by word than by letter, and they had pushed on without delay under Carabet's guidance. And now, as Clareville looked up at the lofty

beetling cliff, with the outline of the large irregular building which appeared to clamber up its steep flank, faintly defined against it in the gloom of the night, and remembered that this was the birthplace of her he loved best on earth, and^e was now her home, it became invested in his eyes with a tender and mysterious charm ; and as he thought of its inmate as of one menaced by an imminent danger, and of the appeal from her which had summoned him to her rescue, he felt like some paladin of old plunging into strange lands, and confronting unknown perils in defence of youth and beauty. It was the first introduction to the East of Reginald, as well as of Florence and Sebastian, and their arrival by night beneath the frowning precipices of the Teraya cliffs was well calculated to impress the imagination. Florence shuddered as she felt the influence of the wildness of the surroundings : the marvel to her was not that Amina should be in danger now, but that in such a spot she could ever have considered herself in safety.

The inmates of the strange abode which the travellers were now straining their eyes

through the darkness to examine, had evidently been apprised of their approach, for lights began to flit about on the face of the cliff, and to travel rapidly down to its base, and here as they reached the foot of the long flight of stairs, they found assembled Sheikh Mohanna and his sons, Sada, and Amina. It was perhaps as well that the hour was one unpropitious for spectators, for Druse *convenances* would have been shocked at the extravagant delight exhibited by Amina at once more meeting her friends, and her enthusiastic demonstrations of it. It was natural that she should kiss Santalba—that she had done ever since her infancy; and that she should take Florence in her arms and twine them round her in a tender caress; and that in the cordial welcome with which she greeted both Reginald and Sebastian, she should remember that they came to her as her saviours as well as her guests. Although the travellers were tired, they would not retire to rest until their curiosity was satisfied in regard to the danger impending over Sheikh Mohanna and Amina; and a solemn conclave was held in Sheikh Mohanna's room, which lasted until the small hours of the

morning, in the course of which Amina gave a narrative of the stirring events of the past few weeks, and of the point to which matters had culminated ; of the nature of the meeting which was to be forthwith held at Teraya by the sheikhs and Okâls, in which her own fate was to be decided ; and of the assurance of Masollam that no decision of theirs could avail against the influences which Santalba had it in his power to bring to bear against it.

“He was right,” said the Count, calmly turning to Sheikh Mohanna and repeating in Arabic what Amina had just said. “Strange as it may seem to you, you may leave the whole question with confidence in my hands—though I am a stranger to your nation—for reasons which I will privately explain to you to-morrow. And now we can all retire to our beds with our minds not only at rest, but in a spirit of deep gratitude for this new manifestation of our Father’s care for those who live only to serve Him, and for the especial favour He has shown us in the restoration to reason of our beloved friend Daoud Effendi Masollam, whom I yearn once more to clasp in my arms.”

While this was taking place in Mohanna's room, Carabet had been closeted with the Master; and after hearing from his lips the tragic incidents of their first night at Teraya, and of the change which had been operated thereby upon his own nature, had been introduced by him to his sister's bedside.

Carabet was shocked at a change of another kind which he perceived had taken place here: the keen and intelligent eye had become dim and apathetic; the features, always sharply defined, were now peaked and haggard; the cheeks and forehead furrowed with deep wrinkles; the utterance had become thick, and so indistinct as to be scarcely intelligible; and the hands, almost transparent from their thinness, lay apparently powerless upon the coverlet.

"You see now," whispered Masollam, "one reason why it was impossible for us to have returned to Damascus. That she is alive at all is due to the unremitting care and attention of that angel who has restored me to reason, and who sheds a life-giving influence upon all those who come within the range of it."

Carabet was watching his sister's face while he was listening to Masollam ; and although the latter spoke in so low a tone as to be inaudible to the invalid, he distinctly saw her mouth twitch into a scornful smile.

“ There at least is one,” he said to himself, “ who, if she has been restored to life, has not been restored to reason.”

Masollam seemed to read what was passing in his friend's mind, and sighed heavily.

“ It is true,” he said, “ that from our finite point of view, there are cases in which the prolongation of existence appears but a doubtful boon, which only seems to render the frail organism a more convenient tenement for those spirits of evil which had taken possession of it during bodily health ; but who can judge of those mysterious inner processes, which come into more powerful operation just in the degree in which the vitality of the outer particles — of that gross external crust which we call the body — weakens ? That poor emaciated frame is at this moment the arena of a terrific spiritual conflict : the moral victory, it is possible, can only be won at the cost of physical life ; while, on the other hand, natural exist-

ence may be prolonged by the agency most destructive to moral progress. But our knowledge is too finite to enable us to judge of the deep internal causes which produce these varied effects. I am myself an instance of an exactly opposite experience. My bodily functions weakened in proportion as my spiritual insanities increased; whereas now, just in the degree in which I am regaining moral tone does my natural health improve, and do all my powers strengthen."

Carabet found little consolation in this exordium. He was really attached to his sister, and was unable altogether to overcome a natural feeling of animosity against the hand that had stricken her down. He turned gloomily away; it seemed for the moment as if his whole existence had been a failure, all his aspirations, myths, and all those in whom he had trusted, frauds. He felt inclined to doubt whether there was a God worth loving, a moral standard worth living for, or a world worth trying to save; and in this unsatisfactory frame of mind he sought the mattress that had been spread for him, and like many others of the inmates of the

house that night, was too much agitated and troubled in his mind to win the repose to which, after the labours of the day, he was fairly entitled.

“Have you any idea,” asked Clareville, when he found himself alone with Amina next morning, “what is the nature of the influence which Santalba can bring to bear upon these Druses in their meeting to-morrow, in the efficacy of which he seems so confident?”

“No, indeed,” returned Amina; “and so strange does it seem to me, that had I not learned from experience how thoroughly his assurances are to be trusted, I should myself be disposed to doubt his power. He and my uncle are at this moment in deep consultation.”

“From what has transpired, however,” said Clareville, “it would seem as though the general result of the experiment of this return to your own people has not been very successful.”

“On the contrary, all new experience is knowledge gained. It was necessary that I should come here and live among my own people,—to learn their character and the nature of their prejudices, to discover their

virtues, and probe their weaknesses, in order to find out how they may best be reached; by what methods, without using one set of dogmas as a battering-ram wherewith to demolish another set, new and higher ideas of daily life and duty and social observances may be instilled into them by love and by example. And strange as it may seem to you, considering the position in which you find me placed, the result is not discouraging. There is a curious unrest among them, an expectation of a new development, which takes the form, in their minds, of the reincarnation of Hakeem; they are, in fact, like the Jews, expecting their Messiah, and though they have prophecies indicating the form this manifestation is to take, and the signs which are to precede it, various interpretations of an occult nature are given to these prophecies. Thus the armies, consisting of four millions of Chinese, which are to herald his approach, are not supposed by the more highly initiated to mean living men but spiritual armies—the Chinese being the symbolical term used for such of the “initiated,” after they have passed into the other world, as shall have been found

worthy to be enrolled in the advent hosts of the mighty Lord Hakeem; and I find from my uncle that among the Uwahid, or most deeply versed in the mysteries, there are differences of opinion in regard to these symbolical interpretations, and that some go so far as to assert that Hakeem will not appear in person but in spirit, and will take possession of the hearts of all men as the Lord of Love, and that the submission of all the princes of Christendom and Islam to him, means the union in love of the creeds that now live by reason rather of the hatred than of the love that is in them—and that the massacre of the infidels means the massacre of the evil passions which are in men, by the arm of the Lord Hakeem, who is Love. Then will come the universal reign of love, for which a few of the best of the Druses, among them my uncle, are passionately longing. But what is the most remarkable is, that they all believe that England contains many members of their sect; and you will find, if you travel among them, that one of the first questions you will be asked is, whether there are many Unitarians or Muwahideen in England?

When you say that there are not, they smile incredulously, believing either that you wish to conceal the fact, or that you are ignorant of it, but it in no way affects their own firm convictions in the matter. And the reason for this is, that it is by the English Druses that the immediate advent of the Messiah is to be announced; and they will come bringing presents to their Eastern brethren; but they will only be known and recognised, in the first instance, by certain of the initiated, for the nation is not yet prepared to receive all the light which these English Druses will bring. It will therefore have to be tempered, so as to dawn upon them gradually. And the effect of it will be to make it clear to them that before their Lord of Love can come, they must erect a Temple of Love in which he may be worshipped, and that this Temple of Love will consist of four spiritual buildings, one inside of the other. The inmost building is the heart. When, after long and painful conflict, the Lord of Love has ejected from the heart all that opposes Him, then the second building, by which it is enclosed, may be reared. It is composed of the family, or such members

of it as, having built within their hearts the Temple of Love, are now fitted to be the family temple of the Lord of Love. The third Temple of Love, which encloses these other two, is the National Temple of the Lord of Love, composed of all the families in the Druse nation who have a family temple. And the last and grand structure, which encloses all the others, is the Universal Temple, which will be the consequence of the example set by the Druse nation to other nations, who, seeing the beauty and excellence of the effort and its results, will forthwith endeavour to imitate them, until finally the Universal Temple will be reared, pervaded, and dominated by the Lord of Love."

"And are you and I to inaugurate the Druse millennium?" asked Reginald, with a smile, looking up into Amina's glowing face.

"If the Druse millennium means the world's, and if that can only be brought about by the efforts of individuals upon it, I do not see that the magnitude of the task constitutes a reason why some one should not begin it."

"I suppose we must begin with the family," said Reginald.

Amina glanced at him sharply, for she thought she detected a suspicion of levity in his tone.

"I speak in all seriousness," he added, gravely.

"I do not yet know," she said, very softly, and placing her hand in his, "what you have achieved during these months that have elapsed since we met. Does the Lord of Love reign in your heart, not for me, but for the human race, which transcends all feeling for individuals, or family, or country, which seems to bind you up indissolubly with its destiny as a whole, so that you feel that you cannot rise independently of it, but can only rise with it, in the degree in which you feel that individually you are as it were shouldering the whole human burden, sympathising with its miseries, and acutely suffering in your own person from its distracted condition? Can you paraphrase those lines of Shakespeare and say—

" 'The world is out of joint ; O blessed love !
That I was ever born to set it right' ?"

"I have gone into the depths to try and

learn the lesson," he answered. "See, here come Sebastian and Florence ; they descended with me. Amina wants to know what we have been doing with ourselves since we parted," he said, turning to Sebastian.

"Florence had got all her plan cut and dried. She elaborated it as soon as it was decided we were to be married," said Sebastian, in reply to this appeal, "and had come to the conclusion that in order to sympathise with the sufferings of the poor, we must endeavour as far as possible to adopt their mode of life, if only for a time ; and immediately on my release from the asylum, she proposed to me a very peculiar species of honeymoon. As you may remember, two hours after our wedding we started for the Continent. Florence did not even want you to know what our plan was, so I kept it a secret from everybody but Reginald and Santalba, whose assistance was necessary. The latter knew the contractor of a short line of railway that is being constructed in Switzerland, and begged him to give me employment as a deserving navvy out of work, with a young wife to support. We invested in some raiment appropriate to our condition. I allowed

myself just money enough to take me to my destination third class, lest I should be tempted into luxuries, and on the third day entered on my work with a pick and shovel at two francs a-day. Florence got taken into a washer-woman's establishment, and spent most of her day drubbing people's linen on the stones by the side of the lake. As soon as Reginald had seen you off from Paris he joined us; but thanks to a better biceps than I have, he commanded 25 centimes a-day higher pay. Though our experiences did not last so long as we intended, in consequence of Santalba suddenly arriving and carrying us off with him here, it was enough to make us realise the hardships and sufferings of those who have barely enough to live upon, and to whom a few days' ill health means starvation. I was laid up with rheumatism for a week, during which time I was entirely dependent for subsistence upon the earnings of Florence and Reginald. We had determined to die sooner than come upon any other funds than those earned, and it is that absolute dependence upon his daily health that makes the labourer's life so precarious. We laid our-

selves out, so to speak, to be brought into contact with misery, and we had not to seek far to find it. It was the old story, familiar to those who work among the poor ; but painful though the experience of philanthropists may be, it is nothing to that of being so poor yourself that you can do nothing to relieve the misery round you, and of being compelled to live among vice, and sickness, and squalor, as though you were part and parcel of it. Reginald lost so much flesh sitting up with sick people all night, giving them half his food, and having to work all day besides, that his biceps no longer gave satisfaction, and he was docked his extra 25 centimes."

"The moral ground he was breaking up was stiffer than the material," said Amina, with a smile. "He was tunnelling through prejudices as well as through rocks, and levelling himself down to other people, and levelling other people up to him, making the crooked ways straight and the rough places smooth ; and more than that, by the loving contact you were both maintaining with mother earth, and that Florence was keeping up on the lake bank, you were all purifying your organisms

of gross magnetic elements which you had acquired in the fashionable world, and which had impeded the growth of pure and divine life within you. I did not know what you had been doing; but the moment I touched you when you arrived, I felt that a subtle change had taken place in those finer essences which at The Turrets were so charged with a force of fashionable filth as to be at times almost intolerable. I do not mean that you were in any way responsible for it; but it is no more possible for people to steep themselves in society without absorbing some of its poison, and incorporating it into the system to such a degree that highly sensitised organisms can be conscious of its existence, than it would be for them to wade through a sewer and not offend their delicate olfactory nerves."

"Oh," exclaimed Florence, "how very dreadful! and was I really so very offensive to you, dear, in the days when you first knew me?"

"People whom one loves, and whom one is working to save, are never offensive in one sense, though they may be in another; but

you are pure and sweet now, my darling, and we will not look back upon those dreadful days when we all suffered so much, but rather to the brighter time and the holy work that is in store for us. See, there is a party winding up the valley towards the village. I wonder who they can be."

At this moment Sheikh Mohanna and Santalba joined the group assembled in the upper court.

"Ah," said Mohanna, "they are my two friends, Sheikh Mahmoud and Sheikh Ibrahim. I thought," he added, with a sly twinkle of his eye, "as I am to receive so many of Sheikh Shibley's friends here to-morrow, I would take the opportunity of inviting one or two of my own."

"They both hold the view that I was explaining to you of the Druse millennium," said Amina in a low tone to Reginald, "and are among the most learned of our people, and stanch friends of my uncle."

For the rest of the afternoon Sheikh Mohanna and Santalba were employed in receiving their friends in confidential interviews. First, they had a long private talk with the

two newly arrived sheikhs, then with Reginald and Amina, then with Sebastian and Florence, and finally with Masollam and Sada. In fact it was evident that a very important subject was under discussion, the nature of which will appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAND COUNCIL.

THE sheikhs began to arrive at an early hour on the following day at Teraya, meeting in the first instance at the house of the Kha-teeb, to which Shibley had already repaired in a somewhat uneasy frame of mind. It is certain that, could he have anticipated the friendly relations he had now established with his cousin, he would have trusted rather to his own fascinations and persuasion to advance his suit, than to the council he had been the means of convoking to compel her acquiescence in it. He might with perseverance and docility have won a willing bride. It is true that he must have forfeited a great amount of his own self-respect, have done violence to the prejudices of his race and his religion, and,

above all, to the tyrannical impulses of his own nature; but it need only have been for a time. When once he had won the prize, the sacrifices he had made for that purpose would no longer be required of him, and he could have reasserted his own manhood and independence; whereas the step he was now taking would lose him all the ground he had won. Amina would violently resent this interference with her liberty, and the attack which it involved upon her uncle. While he was painfully uncertain whether the facts were sufficient to sustain the charges he proposed to bring against that venerable man, one thing was certain, to hesitate under the circumstances was to be lost. He had, in his desperation and his impetuosity, chosen his own battle-field and his own weapons, and the only course open to him now was to make the best of them. Things had gone so far that it was as much the interest of the Khateeb to carry the matter through successfully, as it was his own; while he knew that the personal feeling of jealousy of several of the other Sheikhs was such that they would strain every point to its utmost against Mohanna.

“I hear,” said Shibley to the Khateeb, “that Sheikhs Mahmoud and Ibrahim arrived here yesterday. Sheikh Mohanna must have had sufficient warning of our intended meeting to have had time to invite them. They are men of such weight that our task will no longer be a simple one.”

“It was your own fault,” retorted the Khateeb, “for allowing that white-faced girl to beguile you with stories of her uncle’s illness, and make you lose valuable time by amusing you with private interviews. The two sheikhs are not the only new visitors who have arrived. Girius Bey and three other Franj—two men and a woman—are also there.”

This intelligence excited in Shibley’s breast a most violent spasm of jealousy. He was convinced, as Tigranuhe had assured him, that Santalba was his rival, and this belief had been confirmed by sundry affectionate allusions which Amina had made to her friend in the course of their conversations, and by his own observations on the occasion of their first arrival. It was evident that the opportune appearance on the scene of this hated foreigner was to be accounted for by the fact

that, his cousin had summoned him to her rescue; and, what was more galling to the young sheikh's pride, that she had been trifling with his affections, in order to gain the necessary time. He experienced a strong reaction of feeling from that mood of tenderness in which a few moments before he had been regretting the assembling of the sheikhs. In the presence of this new danger he saw it was his only chance; for, after all, she was a Druse maiden, she belonged to her people, and, if they decided upon her lot definitely, all the foreigners in the world were powerless to interfere with their decision, so long, at all events, as she remained a Turkish subject, and did not belong, as he had been careful to ascertain, to any sect of the Christian religion which might give a foreign power a right of interference on religious grounds. It was in no doubting or half-hearted mood, then, that he led the way across the *meidan* to the *manzil* in Sheikh Mohanna's yard, where he found the sheikh, who had been notified of the approach of the party, waiting to receive it, attended by his two friends.

It would have been impossible to imagine, from the air of dignified cordiality with which he received his guests, including Shibley, that Mohanna knew that one of them had lately attempted his life, and that their object in meeting now was to accuse him of being a traitor to his religion and his nation. That unruffled serenity and benign repose of manner indicated a sense of superiority over all those by whom he was surrounded, none the less marked because it sat so unconsciously upon its possessor, and irritated those of his guests who tried to imitate it, just in the degree that they were conscious in failing. When half an hour had elapsed, which was devoted to minute inquiries after the health of every individual sheikh, the Khateeb approached the business of the day by a long panegyric upon the learning, the virtues, the generosity, and the general reputation of Sheikh Mohanna; he further congratulated him upon the recovery of his niece, upon her estimable character, her charity, her intelligence, and other good qualities, and called to mind that this was not the first time he had alluded to them in connection with her religious views. He now explained

that his duty as Khateeb required of him to ask Sheikh Mohanna whether he had fulfilled his promise of instructing his niece in such of the mysteries of their religion as were permitted to women to know; and whether she was prepared in the prescribed manner to give in her adhesion to it.

When this long harangue, which I have endeavoured to condense as much as possible, was terminated, Sheikh Mohanna bowed his head, and, in a tone in which there was a slight tinge of irony, replied—"My niece having had some reason to believe that the question which the Khateeb has so delicately and opportunely raised might come up for discussion to-day, begged me to express her desire to come before you herself and explain her own views in regard to it."

To this unexpected suggestion the Khateeb strongly objected; but the temptation of seeing Amina was too powerful for Shibley to resist, and he eagerly accepted the proposition. A warm discussion ensued in consequence, in which, as Sheikhs Mahmoud and Ibrahim supported Shibley, and carried many with them, the Khateeb was finally overborne, and it was

decided that Amina should be invited to appear. The curiosity of many of the sheikhs to see her no doubt largely influenced this decision. Sheikh Mohanna insisted upon going himself to bring her, a proceeding which excited a good deal of unfavourable comment, as displaying a great lack of dignity on his part. In a few moments he returned, accompanied by Sada and Amina, both wearing veils, through which their features were indistinctly visible.

"The sheikhs here assembled," said Sheikh Mohanna, addressing his niece, who remained standing, "desire to be informed whether, now that you are instructed in all the mysteries of our religion which it is permitted to a woman to know, you are ready to adopt the faith of your people?"

"It is impossible for me," answered Amina, "to adopt any religion in which women are excluded from knowledge which is permitted to men, as I do not believe that the Lord Hakeem intended any such distinction to be made—the divine feminine principle not being in fact inferior to the divine masculine, for inferiority is not possible to any divine attribute.

If the Druses recognise the equality of the divine feminine, so they must recognise the equality of the human feminine. My request therefore is that I may be initiated into all the knowledge permitted to man. I believe that the Okâls of my own nation are too intelligent to expect me to adopt a religion, the knowledge of which is in great part withheld from me."

This short speech, delivered not in the pleasant dialect common to Druse women, but in classical Arabic, and with perfect calm and self-possession, so far from exciting the assembly by its audacity, as might have been expected, seemed rather to stupefy it. It raised a question which every man present felt was entirely new to the whole nation. To grant Amina's request was evidently impossible. It would alter the whole status of Druse women. Even if an exception were to be made in her favour, they were not an assembly powerful enough to grant such a privilege; on the other hand, to coerce her to belong to a religion which she only desired first to be allowed to understand, seemed as she had put it to be only reasonable, though no woman had ever desired such knowledge before.

“Are you of opinion, O sheikh,” said Sheikh Mahmoud, suddenly breaking the silence and addressing the Khateeb, “that the ‘universal soul,’ which represents the feminine principle, is inferior to the ‘universal mind,’ which represents the masculine?”

“Assuredly,” said the Khateeb; and a discussion arose upon the point, which was felt to be a momentary relief. Meantime Shibley was getting impatient.

“We are assembled here to-day,” he broke in at length, “to consider other questions besides the one raised by the Khateeb, in which both my cousin and I are deeply concerned. It seems to me to be a matter of secondary importance whether she accords us her consent in her views upon religious matters. What is important is, that she should not repudiate her race as well as her religion, and deny the duties she owes to her own family. She has come back to us with treasure which would raise the villages peopled by her relatives to a position of affluence. It would not be acting according to Druse custom for her to carry all this away, and bestow it upon some Franji whom she may wish to wed. As a Druse maiden

—whether she chooses to say she is one in religion or not, does not matter—she is not permitted to wed a foreigner, much less to bestow her wealth upon him. As her nearest male relative, I claim both her hand and her money. I have the consent of her mother, as she will tell you, to our wedding; but Sheikh Mohanna refuses his. I maintain, as head of her family, that Sheikh Mohanna has no right or title to dispute my authority in this matter; and I appeal to you, O sheikhs, for your approval of the step I propose to take this day, which is to remove her, together with her property, from this house to my own, and there make her my wife.”

This whole proposition was so simple, the idea of the girl going away and bestowing her wealth on a foreigner was so monstrous, and the fact that Shibley had privately promised a substantial *douceur* out of it to all who were now helping him to get it, was so potent an argument in favour of his cause, that with the exception of Mohanna and his two friends, who remained silent, a chorus of unanimous voices supported Shibley in the view he took of his own rights and duties; and

in their enthusiasm the sheikhs announced that they would themselves escort her with their retinues to Ain Ghazal that same afternoon.

“I shall not permit my niece to be carried away against her will, until I have exhausted every means of resistance, and, for reasons which I will presently bring forward, I deny the right which Sheikh Shibley arrogates to himself to interfere in this matter.” So saying, Sheikh Mohanna made a sign to Sada, who immediately left the room.

“It will be better for you not to increase the animosity you have already excited against yourself,” said Shibley, flushed with the arrogance of a success which seemed certain, “by appealing to a trial of strength with the sheikhs now present. I had hoped to be spared making the accusation against you, for which the secret presence in your house for more than two weeks past of a couple of unbelievers of bad character has given occasion, and this for the purpose of screening the double crime which they attempted to commit. Let me have my way in peace, and I will trouble you no more. Resist us, and we will not only

overbear any force you can bring against us now, and carry off my bride; but we will summon you to answer for opposing the decision of the council before those competent to judge of so weighty a matter, and at the same time bring against you these other charges by which we will prove your treachery to your race and your religion."

"Peace!" said Sheikh Mahmoud authoritatively; "this is not language which a youth of Sheikh Shibley's years should use to an elder whose long and useful life is in itself the best disproof of his rash assertions. Sheikh Mohanna has told us that he denies the right of Sheikh Shibley to interfere in this matter as the head of his cousin Amina's family, and has expressed his readiness to make good his position. Let us call upon him to do so. For it is evident that if he can succeed in this, there is no longer ground for dispute."

"This is mere folly," exclaimed Shibley angrily. "Will he dare to deny that I am the only son of my father, who was Sheikh Sâleh's nearest male relative?"

"No," said Sheikh Mohanna; "I will not

deny that; but I will prove that your birth confers upon you none of the rights you claim. Behold!" he added in a loud voice, pointing to the door which Sada was now entering followed by a tall Druse sheikh, "behold, Sheikh Shibley, and sheikhs here assembled, the head of the ancient family of Zedaan!"

An exclamation of astonishment burst from the lips of several of the older sheikhs who had known or remembered the late Sheikh Sâleh in his early years, at a resemblance so marked that it seemed as though Sheikh Mohanna had conjured the old sheikh himself back to life and youth. The whole group rose impulsively to their feet, as Sheikh Mohanna stepped forward to receive and introduce the stranger. He was a strikingly handsome man of seven or eight and twenty, with regular features, a clear dark complexion, a black moustache, but otherwise closely shaved, and piercing black eyes. He wore a snow-white turban, a long robe of orange-coloured Damascus satin, bound round the waist with a shawl-girdle, over which was an *abayeh*, or cloak of fine dark brown woollen reps, richly embroidered with silk on the shoulders. His loose white

trousers were thrust into boots, reaching nearly to the knee, of red leather; his bearing was at once dignified and graceful.

“I am grateful for the opportunity with which Sheikh Shibley has furnished me,” said Mohanna, leading the young man forward, “of presenting to so many illustrious sheikhs here assembled Sheikh Abdullah Zedaan, the only son of Sheikh Sâleh Zedaan, who was saved with his sister Amina, twenty-five years ago, at the time of the massacre, and like her carried off by the foreigners who were present at it, and who, believing all their family to have been murdered, brought them to Damascus. Amina was, as many of you will have by this time heard, adopted by Daoud Effendi Masollam, who is at this moment a guest in my house. The boy was cared for by the Englishman who was here with my friend Girius Bey on that fatal night. He and his wife took him with them to England, and she, dying childless soon after, made it her last request to her husband that the child they had brought from Syria, for whom she had conceived a warm affection, should be brought up by her husband as his own son.

But here come those who can furnish you with fuller details and more ample proof than I can do of the truth of this statement."

As he thus abruptly concluded, Santalba and Masollam entered the room. Both Sheikh Shibley and the Khateeb had been so utterly taken aback by this most unlooked-for turn of events, that they remained silent during a general introduction which now took place between the new arrivals and the sheikhs—the latter being only too glad, by an excess of civility towards Sheikh Mohanna and his guests, to efface the unfavourable impression which their recent attitude in support of Shibley might have produced. They were sufficiently shrewd to perceive that the cause of the latter was lost, without waiting for further proof of Sheikh Abdullah's identity, and were quite disposed to pay court to the rising sun of the house of Zedaan. They struggled who should first kiss his hand and do him honour, and in a few moments the circle was again formed and seated, including this time the three new-comers, while Sheikh Mohanna insisted that Amina and her mother should occupy places on the carpet by his side.

Then turning to Santalba, Sheikh Mohanna said—

“And now, O Girius Bey, will you narrate to the sheikhs here present the history of the rescue and subsequent life of Sheikh Abdullah.”

To the surprise of the company, Santalba responded to this appeal in the purest Arabic.

“Know then, O sheikhs,” he began, “that on that fatal night, the recollection of which is still fresh in your memories, I was a guest in this house with a dear friend of mine, an Englishman now dead, by name Hartwright. Being foreigners, we not only escaped the general massacre ourselves, but succeeded in snatching the two children, one a mere baby, and the boy, about two years old, from the knife of the assassins. Supposing that their parents and all their relations had been killed, we took them with us to Damascus, where my friend had left his wife. The girl we left with Daoud Effendi Masollam, the boy Mr and Mrs Hartwright took to England. Then Mrs Hartwright died, leaving him in charge of her husband, who had him educated and brought up as his own son, in complete ignorance of

his origin, which he never revealed to him up to the day of his death. He was a man of immense wealth, the whole of which he left in my charge, to be given to his adopted son when he arrived at the age at which, by English law, he would be entitled to hold it. At the same time he made me his guardian, and left it to my discretion to reveal his history to him or not, as I might judge best. For some years I did not feel that the time had come when I should make this revelation. In the meantime he entered the Parliament or governing council of his country, and owing to his great wealth became a person of some consequence. Quite recently circumstances arose which made it necessary, in my opinion, to tell him that by birth he was a Druse ; but I, at the same time, extracted from him a promise that he would not disclose this fact to any one without first consulting me. There were many reasons why, in his own interests, I thought this desirable, with which I need not trouble you. The only other persons in the secret were Daoud Effendi Masollam and his wife. The former is here present to confirm the truth of my statements ; and if any

further proof were wanting, there is the recognition of a birth-mark by his mother, who acknowledges him as her long-mourned son, and the striking resemblance which he bears to his father, and which must be apparent to all those among you who are old enough to remember Sheikh Sâleh."

Here there was a general chorus of assent on the part of all the older sheikhs, many of whom had repeatedly interrupted Girius Bey's narrative by exclamations of wonder and delight, more especially when they learned that the new sheikh was a man of wealth and influence, and actually a member of the governing council in England. The whole Druse nation was already assuming in their eyes a new and more important position in the world from that which it had hitherto occupied, and a suspicion began to arise in the minds of one or two of the more enthusiastic, that their newly discovered sheikh might be none other than the long-looked-for Druse Messiah in person.

As Sebastian became aware that all eyes were fixed upon him with wonder and admiration, he felt moved to speak.

"Will you explain to the sheikhs," he said,

using Santalba as his interpreter, “that there are occasions when no language, even that with which one is familiar, can express the feelings which agitate the breast, and that it must be therefore doubly painful to me not to be able even to try and say what my heart is full of, in my mother tongue, when my mother is present, and so many near relatives? Tell them—and I speak for my sister here as well as for myself—that though we have been brought up in strange lands, we can never forget that we are Druses, and that whatever knowledge or wealth or influence we possess, we shall use only under a sense of the responsibility which we feel towards our own people, and remembering the claims which they have upon us; but they must see that we can be of most service to them by retaining our independence, and using the position and influence which our connection with another country gives us for their advantage. In the meantime, however, I intend, by spending much of my life in my native village, to acquire that knowledge of my people, and of their customs and language, as may enable me to identify myself with their interests, and qualify me for

any duties which Providence may assign to me in relation to them."

When Santalba had finished interpreting this speech, Sheikh Mohanna turned to Shibley.

"I will not throw a cloud over this auspicious moment," he said, looking more especially at the young sheikh, but addressing all present, "by any further allusion to the subject which brought us hither, excepting to say that I have already banished it from my mind, and that I entertain no ill feeling towards any one who is now present. In evidence of which I beg you all to remain here as my guests to-night, and to share in the rejoicings which are to take place to-morrow, when many more sheikhs whom I have invited will arrive to celebrate, in a proper manner, the joyful return to his home and to his people of this worthy representative of the noble house of Zedaan—Sheikh Abdullah, whom may God long preserve!"

A murmur of applause followed this speech, amid which Mohanna rose, when Shibley, whose eyes had been constantly turned upon Amina, rushed forward impetuously and kissed the old sheikh's hand.

“ God forgive you, my son,” said the venerable man, in a tone of tenderness, “ and may He train that fiery nature of yours to His service. Thank Him that He has given you relatives now, who will not only prompt you to high resolves, but will help you to keep them.”

Shibley turned to Amina, cursing in his heart the etiquette of his people, which prevented him from even offering her his hand.

“ Embrace my brother,” she whispered with a smile.

And Shibley, in the presence of the assembly he had convoked to support him in his rights, obeyed her mandate, and by so doing, acknowledged that the Headship of the House of Zedaan belonged to Sheikh Abdullah.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE festivities at Teraya had lasted for two days. From far and near had trooped Sheikhs and their retainers, eager to celebrate the return of the young chief. For the last twenty-four hours the firing of guns, the squealing of pipes, the drumming on tom-toms, the shrill scream of the women, the loud singing of the dancing choruses, both male and female, had been incessant. Now the last sheikh and his retinue had taken his departure, and a sudden stillness, all the more striking by its contrast with the recent discordant clamour, had supervened. The shades of the lovely autumnal evening were settling over the landscape when the party, which were so soon to leave Amina's wild home in the

mountains, were gathered on the terrace, to enjoy the first moment of quiet which they had been allowed since the startling disclosure had been made which we have recounted in the last chapter. Sebastian had adapted himself with marvellous facility to the new *rôle* which he had been called upon so suddenly to perform. Perhaps it came to him the more easily as an hereditary instinct ; but although he was unable to speak a word of the language of his people, the ease and dignity of his manner, and the art with which he acquired and imitated all their forms of etiquette, combined with his good looks and resemblance to his father, made him popular ; while the fact that he was known to possess, what to them seemed fabulous wealth, invested him with a prestige which the mystery that had attended his sudden appearance among them had been eminently calculated to augment. In the degree, however, in which he had shown *verve* and skill in playing his part, had poor Florence been bewildered and dismayed. From her the secret had been religiously kept until the day before the public disclosure, when Sautalba had revealed it to her in the presence

of her husband and Sheikh Mohanna. The idea that the cousin whom she had known as such from childhood was not her cousin Sebastian at all, but the Druse Sheikh Abdullah, was a fact so startling, that she only by degrees realised all that it implied, when she saw him, with his beard shaved off and in his national costume, struggling to kiss the hands of sheikhs, and receiving the homage of his inferiors. Then it seemed as if she had not only lost her cousin, but her husband, or else had fallen a victim to magic in some enchanted land.

“Don’t you think I had better dress like a Druse woman, Sebastian, dear?” she had said. “I don’t feel as if I was married to you at all while our clothes are so different.”

And Amina had laughingly arrayed her for the time in Druse attire,—a compliment to the feminine population of the village which they much appreciated; while her husband declared that he had never before realised the full extent of her beauty. She was now gazing dreamily over the landscape, with her hand in Amina’s, while her husband, Clareville, and Santalba, were lazily stretched near

them on cushions, exhausted apparently by the fatigue and excitement of the last two days.

“So it is settled, is it,” she said, looking at Sebastian, “that we are only to stay here two days more?”

“I think that ought to be enough to rest us thoroughly after all that we have gone through, and the longer we delay our departure, the longer will our return be delayed. Half the duties of our lives for the future lie here; and I want to lose no time in making arrangements which shall enable me to adapt them to these new conditions. Besides, Amina and Reginald have a little arrangement to make which I do not think they wish to postpone, and which it is my duty to see consummated. If I have lost a cousin, you must remember that I have gained a sister, over whom a council of sheikhs have solemnly declared I have all the rights of a guardian.”

“But you neglected them,” said Amina, smiling, “long after you knew of our relationship.”

“That was my fault,” interrupted Saint-alba; “and I am glad of the opportunity of

explaining much that must have seemed unaccountable to you all during our stay at The Turrets. When Masollam discovered Sada, and announced his intention of bringing her to England for the purpose of restoring her son to her, I received a shock which, while it produced an unpleasant impression, did not arouse my suspicion as to the purity of his motives. Sebastian's father had left it to my judgment, and not to that of Masollam, when the revelation of his origin should be made to him, if ever. When he did so, however, he believed that Sebastian's own mother was dead; and I felt that Masollam might fairly feel a responsibility in keeping a mother wilfully in ignorance of her son's existence. Moreover, I was accustomed to regard his intuitions in all matters of importance as derived from so high a source as to partake very much of the character of a command. At all events, he did not wait for my consent, but appeared with Tigranuhe and Amina one day in Paris, with the intelligence that Sada had already preceded him some months before to England with Carabet. Then, as you may remember, Amina, it was arranged that you

should go over to London and spend a few days with the Cottrells, and, if possible, see Sebastian and his great friend Reginald Clareville, whom I had felt from the first day I saw him was destined sooner or later to be one of us. You ask how I could have known this on so slight an acquaintance," he continued, turning to Reginald; "I can only answer, that your nature was suddenly presented to my inner consciousness as an image, revealing what you really were in the depths of your character, and not in that external presentation of it by which you were yourself deceived, and by which you deceived the world. Society forces us to wear masks, to which we become so accustomed, that we begin to regard them as our own moral features, so to speak, when, in fact, they are assumed to protect the most precious and divine parts of us from the rough contact of the civilisation in the midst of which we are compelled to live. And this is why, doubtless, Providence has provided us with a retreat here, to which we can retire when the outside pressure becomes insupportable, and in the intimacy of our own circle, remove our masks and be ourselves, each a

protection to the other, and all encouraging the growth of those tender shoots which the process of a divine evolutionary growth is putting forth in us, sheltered from the blasts of the social tempest.

“Amina had not been more than three days in England when we received a telegram from Carabet, whom Masollam had settled in Tong-sley to obtain information in regard to the Hartwright family, that the Charles Hartwrights were suddenly about to leave the country. I had already explained to Masollam the relations which existed between Sebastian and his cousin; and he felt that his whole project of winning Sebastian to our cause would be imperilled if he failed to avert a marriage which he saw to be imminent. I still had too much faith in the Master to imagine that he had any designs over Sebastian's fortune for his own private ends. I believed he was working from the same motive that I was, and with the same object in view, which, under God's providence, has been achieved, and which was to identify him with the effort of our lives, and enlist him in our cause. I gave him a letter of intro-

duction, therefore, to Charles Hartwright; but he soon found himself unable alone to cope with the difficulties of the situation, and, as you remember, telegraphed for us. But even had this summons not arrived, I should not have delayed my departure for England, so thoroughly had my suspicions been aroused by Tigranuhe of her own honesty, not merely of motive, but of act. Whether Masollam was her accomplice or her dupe remained yet to be discovered. I hoped the latter might be the case, because I discovered that she was carrying on a private correspondence with Carabet unknown to the Master, and had even gone so far as to tell her brother of the existence of Sada's son. This knowledge I turned to account on the occasion of our first interview with Masollam after our arrival at The Turrets, and from that moment Tigranuhe and I became uncompromising foes. I soon found, however, to my deep distress, that her influence had completely sapped the moral character of him whom I was accustomed to call the Master, the first evidence of which was the reproach with which he greeted me on finding that I had

been left heir to all Richard Hartwright's property by will, and had, in obedience to the verbal request of my friend on his death-bed, transferred it all intact to Sebastian on his coming of age. Masollam had heard of this for the first time from Charles Hartwright, and insisted that such a request was not binding in the presence of the far higher interests to which, if I had handed the money to him, he could have applied it."

"Why did Mr Hartwright leave the money to you, and not directly to Sebastian?" asked Amina.

"Because he would have been compelled to state in his will that Sebastian was not his son, and he did not wish to deprive him of the power of concealing his origin if he chose. The painful discovery of the utter extinction of all moral sense on the part of the Masollams, revealed to me a danger in the pursuit of truth, even for the highest motives, at which I was appalled, and by which, for the moment, I felt paralysed. It opened up the old problem which some of the Churches have settled to their satisfaction, and the solution of which in their sense has justified the horrors of the Inquisi-

tion, the foulest tyranny, the bloodiest wars, and the most relentless persecution. In conversation with Masollam, I found that he believed that he had reached a point of purity and excellence where he was the supreme judge of right and wrong. Because the world's standard was low, he had substituted one of his own manufacture, by which any means were justified by the loftiness of the aim in view. As murder ceases to be crime when it is committed in self-defence, so nothing could be criminal which was done in defence of the divine and humanitarian interests with which he believed himself to be intrusted : hence all that the world esteems wrong was sanctified by the moral pinnacle upon which he had perched himself, if it became expedient for the protection of the destinies of the human race, of which he believed himself the sole divine custodian ; or if rendered necessary by experiments made in the pursuit of truth. The fallacy of this reasoning lies in the fact that no one Church can dare to assert that it is the sole repository of divine truth, and, *a fortiori*, this is still more true of a man. Such an assumption opens the door to unbridled licence

under the loftiest pretexts, until—unless the practice be checked—the world would be full of religious teachers, more corrupt than the society they professed to reform. In Masollam's case, I believe that he was more deceived than deceiving, and that he would not have fallen into the depths of treachery and dishonesty, from which he has now so providentially been rescued, had it not been for the insidious manner in which Tigranuhe pandered to his instincts of avarice, and fostered his spiritual pride. As it was, I found myself suddenly placed in a new and altogether unexpected position. It became necessary for me, without a day's delay, to endeavour to counteract the machinations which I had been myself innocently instrumental in assisting to contrive. Masollam's calculation had been, that the moral effect which would be produced upon Sebastian by the sudden revelation of his origin, and his introduction to his mother and sister, would so completely crush him, that, under our united influence, he would abandon England for ever, surrendering his purse for the great work which Masollam would propose to accomplish spiritually among the

Druse people, and come out here as his humble disciple. But combinations more powerful than any which Masollam, or the influences behind him could form, were at work to thwart these designs. Our friend Reginald here had introduced a new set of complications," and Santalba glanced sily at Amina, "upon which Masollam had not counted. Through him, and her he loved, the foe made a secret entrance into Masollam's citadel, and roused within him passions which controlled his judgment; and the battle began, which ended in that strategic movement to the rear, which left Masollam master of the field topographically, but spiritually routed at all points. In the course of this battle, it became necessary for me to tell Sebastian of his relationship to Sada; but there were reasons why the time had not come for either his sister, or his mother, or his wife, to be enlightened upon a point, the premature knowledge of which would have disturbed their mental balance at a time when each had as much to bear as she could endure. That is the reason, Amina, why Sebastian seemed to have neglected his duty of guardian to

you, after he had become aware of his relationship; and, after all, you had Reginald."

"And," interposed Amina, with tears in her eyes, placing her hand in Santalba's, "our dearest friend, to whom we all owe everything."

"But who is only a weak instrument in God's hands. Never did I feel so utterly weak and impotent myself, as in those critical moments, when God was putting forth His greatest power through me. Nor could I have supposed it possible, knowing what Masollam once was, that I should ever have been able to free myself, much less to rescue others from his magical influence. It seemed a miracle at the time, but since then a greater miracle has been performed in him and through him."

"How so?" asked Reginald.

"He has done what I failed to do; he has freed himself. Not altogether unassisted, it is true; the passion which was once so fatal to him, was used again to thwart the designs of the woman to whom he was in bondage. It impelled him to an act of violence which broke the spell; and now she is chained and bound, impotent for mischief, though un-

softened within. There is nothing changed in her morally, but she is deprived of all faculty of operation : she is like a caged wild beast ; her evil passions beat in vain against the bars of her physical organism, but are powerless to express themselves. There is no reason, so far as I can see, why she should not linger in her present state for years ; and the one torture of her life,—but he must never suspect it,—will be to be waited upon by Masollam. And this, he himself knows, will be his only duty. He is sane, and in his right mind once more, but those wonderful gifts which he misused are taken from him ; his marvellous faculty is blighted. He will make a tender and thoughtful sick-nurse, and find a melancholy pleasure in soothing to the end the pillow of the poor creature to whom he is bound for life, and he will live a pure and blameless life, for there will be no temptation to him to live otherwise. He is a charge given to us to cherish and protect, for he has been a faithful and a valiant servant of his Master in his day, and we all owe him much. He was placed in the forefront of the fight, and if he has been overcome in

the struggle, which of us can assert that in the same position we should have done better?"

As he spoke, Masollam, leaning on Sheikh Mohanna's arm, approached.

"I have been explaining to Daoud Effendi," said the sheikh, "the proposal which Amina and her brother have made, with regard to his taking up his home here with me permanently, and we have been examining the fall of the rock, with the view of seeing whether the terrace cannot be extended, so as to enable an addition to be made to the house for his accommodation. I find that it is quite practicable, and I have succeeded in overcoming Daoud Effendi's scruples in the matter. He consents to remain with us, with his wife, as our guests."

"I do more than consent," said Masollam, with a smile, "I obey. Whom should I obey, if not the man to whom I tried to do the greatest injury that one man can do to another, and to deprive of his personal liberty, and who offers me in return a home for life?"

"We none of us know what we owe to the other," said Sebastian; "the greatest services men render to each other are often those of

which at the time both are unconscious. I feel that you have done more for me indirectly than I can ever do for you directly. And now," he continued, turning to Sheikh Mohanna, "what have you arranged with Shibley?"

"He too accepts your offer. We are to make all the arrangements for the purchase by you of the village of Ain Ghazal at his own terms, and with the proceeds he, and all those of the people who desire to accompany him, will emigrate to the Jebel Druse. The Khateeb and his family have expressed the desire, if you will purchase their property, of accompanying him."

"Certainly," said Sebastian; "and to-morrow we will all ride over to Ain Ghazal to fix upon the site of the new house, which is to be the future haven of refuge, not only for ourselves, but for those who, one with us in aim and in endeavour, seek a shelter from the storms of the world—not to rest in permanently with peace and comfort, but in which they may refit and re-equip themselves preparatory to issuing forth again to encounter them."

"Thus it is," said Santalba, "that Providence

provides conditions appropriate to the service which He calls us to perform ; and that in the degree in which men are capable of receiving and putting forth a higher quality of divine force, will the sphere of their operations be enlarged, and opportunities furnished for applying it to the most divers sorts and conditions of men. Hitherto the religious instinct of the world has found expression in creeds and forms of dogmatism more or less appropriate to the local conditions by which the religious teacher, who was its exponent, found himself surrounded ; or at all events, it speedily adapted his teaching to those conditions. But the new and higher religious instinct which is awakening in humanity finds its expression not in creed or in dogma, but in service for the neighbour, inspired by love for him, which is the Divine love flowing through the human instrument who has prepared himself to receive it ; and this is irrespective of country, race, or social surroundings. Thus you, Amina, as the future Lady Clareville, and your brother, as Sebastian Hartwright, will have precisely the same work to do in the centre of the world's

civilisation, that will claim you in the wilds of Syria as the heads of the Druse family of Zedaan, and in each case you will be so placed socially as to be able to exercise a very considerable influence in both the spheres of your operation ; while it is certain that London and Paris stand as sorely in need of a new moral impulsions as Teraya or Ain Ghazal. There are social, theological, and scientific barriers which impede the flow of the new divine life into the human organism in the modern Babylons of the West, which have no existence in these more primitive regions ; and it may be that once again, as of old, the scene of its first operation will be in this ancient land of Palestine, within the borders of which you are about to build your new home."

THE END.