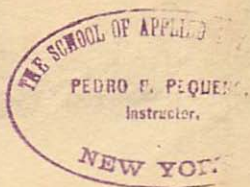


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MORIAL THE MAHATMA



BY

MABEL COLLINS

AUTHOR OF

"THE BLOSSOM AND THE FRUIT," "IDA," "THE CONFESSIONS OF A
WOMAN," "THROUGH THE GATES OF GOLD," ETC.

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MORIAL THE MAHATMA;

OR,

THE BLACK MASTER OF TIBET.

CHAPTER I.

MORNING on the mountain tops ! The sun had just risen over the snow-crowned peaks, sending a strong glow of warmth through the biting air into the sheltered valleys protected from the cruel northern winds. The lofty summits of the great range of everlasting hills gleamed brilliantly against the dark blue sky. But below the glittering line of the snow mantle all was dark and terrible ; dreadful precipices and deep ravines broke up the rugged surfaces, and no verdure existed to soften the gloom. The solitude and sense of stillness in these mountains is something beyond

expression. Mortal man has never trodden these desolate crests nor even essayed to climb to the verge of the snow.

They are impassable to the native mountaineers, and the wild goats, and the yak can find no foothold on them. These mountains, so awful in their grandeur, so appalling in their solitude, are the mysterious and wondrous Koiran chain, which stands in the centre of Tibet.

All that the Western world, the world of civilisation, as it is termed, knows of them is that their glittering peaks can be seen from the summit of Mount Kambala. But even to the most daring traveller who has had the courage to attempt the passage of the Himalayas, the grand range of the Koiran remains a mystery and a marvel.

They are inaccessible. The "old ice," as the Tibetians call the perpetual snow, which makes them so beautiful in the brilliant morning sunshine, will never gladden the heart of man or beast in the summer heats, for neither can ever reach it.

The morning sun may kiss the frozen heights, but fails to warm even the crust of the ice cap. Only

the clouds may rest on the bosom of these grim sentinels. Alone with the storm and mist, the majesty of the heavens, and the roar of the elements, they guard for ever the heart of that land of wonders and romance which we call Tibet.

A perfect fastness is this strange spot around which roam the great peoples and hordes of Asia. Was it so preserved when the world was created, that the Great Unknown might have a natural temple in which to dwell when He deigned to visit the earth? Who can say?

It was a May morning—which means, that here in Tibet, it was the height of summer. The sun had indeed extraordinary strength, and threw an almost tropical heat into the sheltered valleys. There were but few of these where the soil would admit of the sun's kindness being rewarded by greenness or colour. There was one such spot, however, which seemed especially favoured.

Completely walled in from the world by these giant mountains, and right in their very heart, a gleaming oasis shone out as the sun poured its warmth and brilliance straight upon it.

A beautiful stream fell into this lovely valley and gathered in the centre into a broad lake.

Here were the only trees to be seen in all that terrible mountain land. Here, too, were rich grass, flowering shrubs, and waving fields of grain.

On the lake numbers of beautiful wild fowl revelled in the sunshine. Flowers bloomed on every side, filling the air with sweetest perfumes. Not even the happy valley of Rasselas, filled with delights, could compare, for gorgeous beauty, harmony of colour wealth of glory, with this wondrous oasis. It was like a vision of heaven, a dream of paradise, shut in among the awful hills !

Until the sun was high in the sky it seemed as though this exquisite spot, hidden and sheltered by the stern and gloomy peaks which surrounded it, was uninhabited save by the birds of the air. But the sun soon drew forth the lizards to bask in its warmth, and the noonday hour drew forth also the one solitary human creature within it whose home was here guarded by the great mountains from the intrusion of the curious, ignorant world.

The tallest cluster of trees—most of them flowering,

and grouped so beautifully together that their appearance was as of a bouquet cast upon the black mountain side—surrounded and concealed a dwelling. When the sun was hot a man stepped out from the flower-wreathed doorway, and lifting his face towards the day god, took with delight a deep inspiration of the keen pure mountain air, snow-sweetened and scent-laden.

What a face ! Was it that this sunshine, this air, could create such marvellous beauty ?

A man of the stature and appearance of other men. shaped like the toiling millions ; yet how different ! It scarcely seemed as if he could be of the race of mankind, this superbly beautiful being. Standing in the sunshine, glorious as Apollo, he completed the perfect charm of this lovely scene. The summit of creation—the human flower, seemingly fresh from the hands of Divinity—had appeared amidst the flowers of nature.

A man in strength and vigour, his face had yet all the fresh beauty of youth. Only a light fair down lay over the exquisite curve of his mouth ; the dark blue eyes he lifted to the sunshine were calm and

untroubled, like a boy's. There was majesty and power in his bearing, such as is vouchsafed only to those who are above the common herd of men that are born and die, and leave no trace of their lives but a few bones and a handful of earth.

The glorious panorama stretched before him gave the keen pleasure of contrast to his gaze, for the hours of darkness, and even of the early morning, had been spent by this wondrous mortal in strange, unhallowed studies, and tasks that men speak of only with bated breath.

Awe-inspiring and marvellous as the great barrier that surrounded him, was he who stands revealed to our gaze, unknown and inaccessible as the innermost recess of the Koiran range, was this solitary man, magician, and seer, MORIAL, THE MAHATMA.

A smile of intense pleasure illumined his face, as he passed out on to the grass. Each summer morning, and each moment of it, was as a fresh revelation of enjoyment to him. A happy hour in this transparent air had the fulness of an eternity to this man ; so great was his capacity for pleasure that every second had its keen sensation. Magic arts were his

at command ; from afar off he controlled the feelings of many disciples, to his will even whole nations were subjected, he was as destiny to those who came under his sway. For him the secrets of nature, the mysteries of life, had been unlocked.

He had lived through centuries, through æons, accumulating pleasure, learning to intensify the joy of existence !

He moved across the grass, and as he passed from the door, a panther which had been crouching behind him, rose and followed him with stealthy step. This creature never left Morial's side save when he entered his laboratory, and then it lay, motionless, across the doorway.

He went down to the side of the water and called to the fowl, who came flying to him from far across it, as soon as they heard his voice. They fluttered about him, and he smiled with pleasure as he watched their beautiful movements.

A dark blue robe, made of the exquisitely fine cloth woven from the soft wool of the Tibetan sheep, enfolded his person. It was a simple gown, much like the coat worn by an Indian rajah, and was only remark-

able for the extreme fineness of its texture. His head was uncovered, and the sun's rays turned his hair into a halo of gold. Standing here among his favourite birds, he might have been mistaken, with his marvellous beauty for a faun or a pagan deity.

Suddenly there sounded a faint cry—a cry as of a human voice, but very far off—from among the mountains. Morial scattered the birds from him with a gesture, and they flew away over the water as if obeying his wish. He stood still and listened. Again it came—more clearly:

“Master!”

Morial turned in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and raised his right hand with a movement of command. As he did so, a gradual change came over him—his face grew set and stern, and the beautiful smile left it—he seemed to increase in stature.

Presently from out of a thicket of flowering trees, a being appeared—a strange figure, in this morning sunshine, muffled from head to foot in a black garment, the face entirely hidden in the sable folds; only the bare feet could be seen, as it advanced tim-

idly, like one blindfolded does, towards the Master.

"What is it, my disciple?" said Morial, and at the sound of his voice the figure fell upon the ground and lay prostrate before him.

"Speak!" said the Master, holding out his hand. Was the face so closely veiled to shield it from the rays of the brilliant sun, or from the much more terrible brilliance of the master's presence? For now, while he used his power, his eyes were like fire; and from the golden hair that crowned his head something rose upwards, vivid even in the strong sunlight, like a flame.

"He is lost, Master, lost in the pass of Phari! His strength has failed him."

"This is your fault!"

"I have failed, Master. The servants of the Llama Lishnoo have seized me, and I am helpless—they have taken me into the great Lamasery. They think me dead. Oh, Master, save me!"

"Save you!" said Morial. "You are a useless servant."

He spoke quite without anger, but there was no mercy in his voice. How should there be? He felt

that the Great Unseen Hand—the hand of God—was opposing him. In such a warfare, a mere soldier of the ranks was readily forgotten.

He turned away, passing his right hand across his brow as he did so. Instantly the normal appearance of his face returned—the smile of pleasure came upon his eyes and mouth again. He moved towards the house, without another glance at the dark figure.

Motionless, it lay upon the grass, like a dead thing. And yet ! before he had gone many paces it had vanished ; there was nothing there. The dark blot on the beauty of the sunshine and the verdure was wiped out more easily than a spot of ink on a painted canvas.

Turning at the doorway, Morial lifted his hand as if with a gesture of farewell to the beautiful scene he left ; and for one moment the smile in his eyes, blue with the dark blueness of the Tibetan sky he gazed at, deepened into laughter.

“ Now to work ! and the surrender of sweet pleasure for the moment. I have conquered through the ages—I shall conquer to the end.”

CHAPTER II.

WHEN he entered the doorway of the house it was as though the whole world had changed—as though he had passed from one planet to another. There were two entrances to this dwelling, and he returned by that through which he had emerged, which was quite contrary to his wonted custom. But he had unexpected work to do ; he had to repair the failure of a servant and see that that erring servant's work was properly done, therefore he returned to his laboratory.

The panther crouched down at the entrance, instinctively.

How dark ! how cold ! how silent ! Was the world dead, and the sun's light quenched in the heavens ?

Morial threw aside the blue robe, and put on in its place a white garment, most exquisitely embroidered with figures which seemed to change as he moved.

He pushed aside a heavy curtain and entered the inner chamber of the laboratory. He only glanced round. His night's work was finished, and he had no need to enter here for some hours to come. He paused to give one look at a vast map of the world which covered a whole wall. This map was a living thing—a conscious phonograph—and disclosed to him who could command it the movements and actions of the nations and of the men who led them. Morial's passing scrutiny was merely to see if any change had occurred since he had left his vigil. But, no!—there was nothing to attract his attention.

He went on, past some more heavy curtains, and through a massive doorway. And now, indeed, it seemed as though he had entered the arctic regions! The stillness was awful; the cold intense. But these things did not trouble Morial, who had the power of putting aside external sensations at his will, and was able to adapt his own temperature to that in which he found himself.

The room he entered was hewn out of the living rock; long, narrow, perfectly dark. A lighted taper in a crevice of the wall at the entrance was all the

light admitted. He advanced until he came into the complete darkness, which fell like a pall, so deep was it.

But something was now alight—an irradiated light!—a light not of the earth. A gleam came from it, like moonlight—cold and white.

It was a huge crystal, hung from the roof of the great room.

In its heart was the mystic gleam which can be seen only in earthly darkness, and which shines but for the eye of the initiated.

Morial stood before it, and gazing into its depths he stretched out his right hand towards it. As he did so, the red gold hair upon his head again seemed to lift itself. But now, in the darkness, it could be seen as living flame.

The light of the crystal clouded and grew dim. Still Morial gazed; and soon the cloud parted and slowly cleared. Then, with all the sharpness of a photograph, a scene appeared before his eyes.

The side of a vast, snow-clad mountain, the summit just visible, and along this summit a row of small flags, fluttering in the wind, fixed roughly, but firmly

enough, in rude cairns of stone. Morial knew these to mark the boundary line between Hindostan and Tibet. A long way down the dreary face of the dark mountain Sumunang was a ravine, filling rapidly with drifting snow. In this cold grave he could discern a man, wrapped in a travelling cloak, and seemingly dead. Morial knew him not to be dead. He was fast bound in the sleep of fatigue and of cold, known only too well to the daring traveller who attempts to pass the Himalayas.

“My feeble disciple!” murmured Morial, as he looked at this scene, “you must not be lost to me so readily. I have work for you to do. You, who have almost penetrated into the fastnesses of Tibet, shall not die within sight of the flags. No, I need you. You are now in the pass of Phari : you shall be brought in safety to the other side of it.”

He waved his hand, and immediately the crystal clouded. Presently, the clouds parted again, and there was revealed another part of the same dreadful pass. A great company of pilgrims was collected here, resting in the snow. They were worn out with fatigue, and all half asleep ; but with their cloaks

and camping fire were able to retain life. These, as Morial knew, were pilgrims from the borders of Hindostan to the shrine of Kiangtsi, within the borders of Tibet. He scrutinised their faces a moment or two, and then raised his hand and made a sudden movement towards one of them. Instantly this sleeper sprang up and began to cry out and declaim. In a moment he was surrounded by others, who listened to him in amazement. He issued words of command, and his comrades hurriedly prepared to obey him, for they were devout believers in the divine afflatus.

Soon a small band set forth through the snow, led by the inspired speaker, who hurried on, surmounting every difficulty with incredible strength. At last he stood still and shouted with excitement, pointing, as he did so, to the ravine below, where in the snow lay the figure he had been shown in his vision—the prostrate figure of the man he had been commanded to save.

The traveller was drawn forth from the snow, and carried back to the heat of the fire, and revived by such rude methods as the pilgrims could devise. No

word could be interchanged, even when the frozen traveller had recovered his senses, for Julian Arundel knew nothing of Hindustanee, which was the only language these men had ever heard of. But he knew that these wild-looking creatures had saved his life ; saved it by so much of a miracle, that his faith returned as he thought of it, and he believed again, not only that Mahatma Morial existed, but that he himself was destined to find him. This faith had deserted him more than once during his terrible journey ; and when at length his strength gave way in climbing that awful pass of Phari, he had given up all hope.

Morial remained standing by the crystal until again the clouds veiled its light, and then he left the dark room in which it hung. He passed straight through his laboratory without a glance around ; and putting on once more the blue robe, he went quickly out into the glorious sunshine.

CHAPTER III.

THE scene which he had just witnessed as a vision was real enough to its unfortunate hero.

Julian Arundel, although he had felt himself to be among friends for the moment, could not guess how long that friendship might last, or what it would mean.

He did not know enough of the country to recognise that he had fallen in with a band of pilgrims, and all kinds of wild conjectures filled his mind, as soon as he had fully recovered his faculties.

The strange looking creatures by whom he was surrounded, although they were kind enough in a rough way, yet evidently considered him their property. Being unable to speak a word which they understood, he could only lie by the camp fire and wonder what was to happen next.

His mind went back to London, to the home and

to the life he had left, and all their attractions, and to her who would have been his wife, ere now, if he had not followed the mysterious call which came to him.

Here, lying by the fire under the Tibetan sky, his far-off home seemed like a dream to him. He thought of his studio, where now, although he had quitted it, his last work stood upon an easel, carefully guarded and screened by a curtain from prying eyes.

That last work was a portrait of Morial the Mahatma in all the majestic beauty which we have seen.

As one does sometimes, in an enforced period of quiet, Julian Arundel thought over many of the details of the commencement of his strange pilgrimage.

He recalled that night in his studio when Daphne had been sitting to him, and he startled her by an exclamation of surprise, and almost of horror, for, suddenly, while he was working, he had seen upon the wall opposite, in letters of fire, the name "Morial." This had appeared, vanished, and appeared again,

and Daphne in her tender anxiety thought he had been working too hard, and that he was ill.

But the next day before her sitting was over, not only did the name appear, but the figure of the Master himself stood in the room. To Julian he was as real as a human being in the flesh. Daphne saw and heard nothing, but she was filled with terror for Julian's health.

However, when this vision had appeared again and again, at last she also seemed to realise its presence, and when Julian took a fresh canvas and began to sketch the figure of the Master, she was overcome with a sense of its reality.

What a splendid portrait it was that appeared upon his canvas! It filled his own mind with awe and wonder as he painted, and Daphne would sit for hours, watching him at work, lost in a kind of dream.

Before the picture was finished he had seen written across it the words, that were to him a sacred call: "*Leave everything and come to me.*"

Daphne saw this too, only for a moment, and she could scarcely tell whether it was fancy, so brief

was the glimpse ! But her mind was overwhelmed with a sense of the awful reality of the thing, and when Julian turned to her and said :

“Daphne, this is the great call, I must go,” her answer was simply :

“Yes, you must go.”

Daphne Royal was quite alone in the world, save for a distant relation in whose charge she was now placed. She was a ward in Chancery, very rich. Her father's early death left her entirely without any controlling authority. Julian and she had known each other since they were children, and she had always looked to him for guidance as well as love.

She and her auntie, as she called Miss Riga, who was in reality a second cousin of her dead father, lived next door to him at Hampstead. The young people were much together, but Julian had a great distrust of the old lady, and was well aware that she did not like him.

This was his one trouble in leaving Daphne so long and in postponing their marriage. He thought of it now when he was so far from her.

Miss Riga was, in his opinion, capable of any

duplicity for her personal advantage, but Daphne would never listen to anything against her aunt, for in her childhood she had learned to look up to her as to a mother.

Miss Riga felt that when Daphne came of age and married Julian Arundel her special occupation would be at an end. Not only was she pleased at the "call," but she felt that it would be a good thing to annihilate Daphne's affections for Julian in his absence.

This was not possible, Julian thought to himself. Daphne was as true and as certain as the stars above him. And, moreover, he reminded himself it was against the conditions of the great call that he should even think about such a material matter!

Nothing mundane, nothing of earth was to affect him any longer: he had chosen his path, he had given up the world, and Daphne in her beautiful enthusiasm had agreed with him that he should obey the mysterious power which called him to service.

Many times on the cruel mountain-side had he longed to be back in his comfortable studio with Daphne to cheer him, but he had taken a vow that

he would not give way to fatigue or illness, that he would go on until he had proved to himself whether the Master existed in the flesh.

Through the most difficult parts of his journey a guide had been by his side who had helped and befriended him. This man had sometimes, he declared, even spoken with the Master himself, and hope beat high in Julian's heart when the thought came that perhaps this man was a chosen disciple sent to help him.

But at the most critical moment, on the very border of Tibet, at the worst point of this terrible pass, this guide had apparently deserted him. In his awful peril and helplessness, when he sank down in the snowdrift, he had, indeed, cursed the enthusiasm which had brought him on this apparently hopeless journey.

But now that he had been saved, as if by a miracle, now that the night of despair was waning, and a streak of dawn was showing in the sky, he had again companions to help him on his way, and the enthusiasm which had carried him so far rose strongly within him.

Yes! he would despair no more. He would find the Master now at any cost.

He reckoned without thought of the consequences to himself when the pilgrims would bring him to the great Lamasery or Tibetan Monastery at which they made their next halt. The awful rigours of the Tibetan laws against the intrusion of strangers were, however, soon to be demonstrated to him.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIAN ARUNDEL was a particularly handsome man. Not above the average stature, but broad-shouldered, with a magnificent figure, and a head carried with a certain Lucifer-like pride. No doubt Morial, in choosing him out of the many highly cultured persons in London for his peculiar purpose, had recognised the great physical strength which would survive hardship, and the pride which would scorn to fail. This last was an essential of Julian's character. The very fact that death had so nearly seized him, and so nearly destroyed his whole scheme and programme, made him awake in the morning, after a brief sleep, doubly resolved to persevere in his strange pilgrimage.

The camp fire, made of argols, the sole fuel of the country, was dying out. The pilgrims had untethered the miserable, starved horses which had carried them so far—carried them usually in manner

unknown to Europeans, suspended to their tails. To hold on to one's horse's tail and let him climb is the only comparatively easy manner of ascending these terrible precipices, which are by courtesy called mountain faces.

Poor Julian had come hither on his own weary limbs, and he surveyed with envy these travellers with skeleton beasts of burden. The exhaustion of the animals was owing to no inclemency of their masters, but simply to that of the climate, which forbade the ground to yield them food. For many a weary day these poor creatures had only eaten grass so cruelly frozen that its stiffness cut their mouths and left them bleeding. Splendid horses at one time, they presented as sorry a spectacle as Julian himself, who, but a short while ago, a superb specimen of an Englishman, now looked like a starved mendicant.

His face and hands were literally ploughed with the cold ; his grenadier moustache, erstwhile a pride to him, was now a torment, each hair being weighted by an unmeltable icicle. He was clad in strange garments ; a sheep's skin, the wool inwards, next

his body ; over this a coat made of foxes' skins ; and over all a great woollen overcoat.

It would have been hard indeed to recognise in this bundle the *debonnaire* figure which had been the ornament of Picadilly on many a private view day. But Julian was no trifler with circumstances ; if he had to face a difficulty or hardship he faced it heroically. At the same time it is possible that if on this morning he had foreseen the amount of hardship he would have to endure, he might even then have turned back.

This would have been the case with most of us at the critical moments of our lives, and surely this is why (if there is a reason) the future is mercifully concealed from us.

When Julian attempted to rise from his bed of cloaks, which the pilgrims made for him, he found that his feet and hands were completely frozen, and that it was impossible for him to stand, much less to walk. His lips were livid and his eyes drawn backwards by the cold, and the pilgrims, who were well acquainted with the horrors of a frozen death, began to fear that it was all over with him.

The inspired one who had been guided to his rescue refused to leave him by the wayside as some of them wished. Urged on by his importunities, a little body of rescue workers wrapped the unfortunate disciple of the great Morial in some rough blankets, and forced him to take a grasp of one of the horse's tails. In this way he was taken over the actual summit of the mountain. When they came to the other side he was placed upon one of the horses. The descent of the pass of the Phari is much like that of an enormous staircase, each stair of which seems very like what a Westerner would call a hill at the least. The animal which supported Julian appeared to sink from one vast table to another below it.

He gave himself up for lost, simply clinging on to the horse's body, which had a certain warmth and friendliness, and awaited his fate. Starvation had much to do with this apathetic condition of mind. He had tasted nothing but a little barley meal soaked with a horrible Tibetan tea for many a long day, and even that had been denied him for a day and a night.

When at last the exhausted little company reached

what looked like a plain, but what was really a table-land, and there seemed some chance of an easier journey for a little while, a new danger presented itself. In the distance, on the far horizon, were seen two horsemen. Instantly the entire caravan stopped by a simultaneous movement of consternation. The distant horsemen galloped steadily at a furious pace. The inspired pilgrim, who always remained by the side of Julian, was hanging his head in an overwhelming state of abjection. Julian touched him to attract his attention.

"What is it?" he said, "why are we halting?" but his attempt at Hindustani was unavailing. The man could not understand what he said, and his answer was equally unintelligible. Julian felt he could do nothing but submit to force of circumstances.

By the time the horsemen had neared them, many more had appeared on the horizon. This was, as a matter of fact, a little band of some thirty or thirty-five in number of the Kolos, the brigands of Tibet. No one outside Tibet has an idea of the position of these men in the country. They say themselves that they are the servants of the Talè Lama, and irreconcilable

enemies of the Emperor of China, and indeed of all foreign Powers. This may be true, for they certainly protect the frontier of Tibet more effectually than any body of recognised soldiers could. Europeans will, of course describe them as highwaymen.

Julian's companions appeared to be utterly overcome with the appearance of these men. It was probably quite unexpected to them, that, poor as they were, destitute of everything but faith, they should attract any attention. Nevertheless, the Kolos were quite determined to give them a most embarrassing interview. The reason for this was soon seen.

Tibet appears to be a wild country, impassable, and without means of communication. And yet no European traveller has ever yet entered it, no traveller has ever passed the little flags, which look so innocent and trivial on the top of the great mountain, without these terrible warriors of the desert immediately arresting them, and condemning them to either death or imprisonment. What that imprisonment ends in no European can at present even conjecture.

Julian's arrival had evidently been clearly expected; all about him, whence he had come was known, which pass he would enter by, and in what company. As soon as the two emissaries from the little band reached the pilgrims, they immediately placed themselves one on each side of Julian, and then proceeded to survey him with great interest.

Awaiting the arrival of their companions, they did not attempt to speak to him, evidently being aware that there was no possible means of communication. Julian, in his turn, surveyed his guardians with great interest and curiosity. They were most terrible-looking persons, riding animals of a sort which Europeans are seldom favoured with seeing, even in a circus. A sheepskin was the only coat worn by these men, and a scrap of wolf's skin formed their caps, and long, thick black hair fell over their shoulders, a carbine was slung in the saddle-bow of each, and two long sabres stuck in the girdle.

The alarming part, however, of their appearance was the expression of the eyes, which had something ferocious and wolfish in them. Julian had enough of the artist left in him, and enough of the philoso-

pher to be able to look at them and think to himself, "What would I not give to be back in my own studio with these gentlemen as my models."

A long colloquy passed between his two guards and the pilgrims, which terminated on the arrival of the other Kolos. These men came galloping up in true circus fashion, careering wildly over the ground and then drawing up suddenly in a circle, the horses thrown back on their haunches. In a few moments the pilgrims had vanished. They appeared to have melted away like a handful of Himalayan snow taken to a fireside.

So far as the unlucky Julian was concerned, they had disappeared as easily as this, and he himself had an entirely new circle of acquaintances to deal with. He had been quickly taken off the wretched horse he was mounted on and placed on what he would himself have described as a wild beast of the desert, which belonged to the brigands. They set off at full speed, and some kind of goad applied to his own animal kept him in their midst. Presently with the greatest suddenness, a halt was called by a rough cry from the leader. Once more every horse was

thrown back on its haunches. Julian would certainly have fallen from his animal, had not the men who rode by his side been so near and kept him in his place.

A great change was now made in his position. He was quietly taken from his horse's back and one of the warriors untied a long scarf which had been wound round his waist. This was knotted firmly round Julian's neck, and by it he was attached to the horse's tail. Immediately every man mounted and the party set off again at full speed. After a space of time, the length of which Julian himself never knew, he was released from this yoke of torture and left upon the ground perfectly unconscious.

Many a long year afterwards he looked at the fragments of the scarf which had bound him, and which he succeeded in preserving, with utter amazement at the manner in which his life had been preserved. Preserved it was, but when first he opened his eyes his feeling was that death would have been far preferable under such circumstances. He found himself lying upon the ground, on the floor of a species of natural amphitheatre. When first his

eyes opened he saw the intense blueness of the Tibetan sky, a blueness which is almost black, and magnifies the beauty of the stars at night.

Now the sun was shining in the heavens, although it did not reach him where he lay, for the shadow of a great mountain fell across the ground. As he lowered his gaze he saw the mountain tops one after another, and then he recognised the awful place where he had himself been. - Yes, that was the pass of Phari, far away, looking so remote that it seemed impossible that human being should ever reach it. But he had passed it; the little flags were passed, he had descended the other side of the mountain, and he was in Tibet.

A wild sense of elation was the first feeling that arose within him. Before he had time to realize this, and believe that he was indeed in the secret country of the world, his sight was clouded, and the heavens were darkened by a dreadful shape that floated over him. What was this awful thing? Was this really not a world of the living, but a world of the dead? had he reached the uttermost regions,

and was this a ghoul sent to close out light and destroy his life slowly?

He knew that it was a living thing, because he could see a movement that seemed like wings. But the creature was close to him, and so horribly dark, so black, that he could only determine the one fact that he lived. He longed to shriek, to cry out, but he could not. He was like a man in a nightmare. But the thing came closer, the blackness settled on him. Something seemed to touch his breast, and then all the vigour of the man asserted itself.

With a wild effort he lifted his head and raised his arm, and struck the horror from him. What was it? It floated high into the air, up into the blueness of the sky. He watched it until it became so small that he could scarcely see it. Then he lowered his eyes again and saw around him, in the ghastly theatre in which he lay, millions of skeletons, and hovering over them more of those terrible black shapes—the great vultures of Tibet.

In an instant he realised that this was a physical danger, that if he could rise, if he could stand, the creatures would not come near him. But how could

he do this, worn out and exhausted as he was? How was it that he was surrounded in this way by these skeletons, these bodies long since stripped of every particle of flesh? To him it seemed like some awful dream, like some ordeal given him to see if his reason would endure it.

It was not until long afterwards when he learned something of the country, that he knew he had been simply left as one dead in an ordinary Tibetan burial ground. This was the burial ground of Phari, which lies below the pass. A deserted fortress stood on the other side of it, but Julian could not even know that there were walls to shelter him. And little use would these walls have been, for there was neither food nor fire nor any human company within them.

CHAPTER V.

JULIAN must have swooned right away. He passed through what was a blissful period of unconsciousness. When he again woke to life, his first impression was that he was in the grasp of a fearful skeleton, nothing more or less than the evil spirit itself come to claim him. This phantasy which affected him quickly passed away, and his next impression was that Daphne was sitting beside him and he was back again in his old, old room, and that he had been ill and she nursing him. How sweet it was; it brought to his troubled heart the sense of peace and of friendliness of human beings.

He stirred himself to try and take her hand, and in this effort the dream vanished. No, it was not Daphne, and his own home and his happiness were on the other side of the world. He saw himself again surrounded by the bones of the dead, and the figure by his side he recognised after a moment of

amazed contemplation. This was one of the pilgrims from whom he had been torn. He did not know the man except that he recognised him as one who had walked by his side. It was, in fact, the fanatic, the inspired speaker, who had risen out of his sleep before to save him, and who now, still under the spell of Morial's dominion, had sought him out again in the graveyard.

This man knew well enough that the stranger was not dead. If he had found him buried in the earth he would have dug him out of it. Morial's spell was strong upon him. He lifted Julian in his arms, and drawing from inside his coat a little cake of barley, tried to press some of it upon him. But this was impossible, for Julian was unable to swallow it. The pilgrim sighed, but made no further efforts. He put the cake back very carefully into the capacious bosom of his coat, which really served him as a larder. As a matter of fact he had offered to Julian what was really his own food for the next twenty-four hours, and it is little wonder that in the midst of hardships he was not sorry to think that this wretched meal had been saved for him.

After carefully putting away the cake he clasped Julian in his arms and lifted him to his feet. But for the iron physique of a strong Englishman, Julian must have been dead, and the pilgrim evidently looked upon his power of endurance as something almost supernatural. By the help of his companion's arm he turned himself and surveyed the extraordinary scene in which he found himself placed. The skeleton of a horse is not a pleasant thing. Any one who has travelled a desert has seen it. It gives one a shock ; there is something so ghastly about it. The skeleton of a human being is twenty times more horrible when it has no associations with study or science or the use of medicine, when one sees it stripped by the carrion of the sky, lying exposed to the elements in all its horror.

Julian saw this sight on every side of him multiplied a thousand times, and at last he covered his eyes with his hands, and said aloud in his own language, "Take me away from this awful place." He had forgotten in his horror with whom he was. Some strange instinct told the pilgrim what the man said, and placing his arm around him he led him

as well as he could across the bone-cumbered valley.

It was a terrible journey for Julian, who dared not open his eyes, for he felt certain his reason would desert him if he did. Having crossed the valley they passed through a narrow ravine, at the bottom of which a mountain torrent made a deep bed. At the sound of the water Julian uncovered his eyes and looked at it with thankfulness as something wholesome, although its blackness and the depth in which it moved would have horrified those accustomed to pastures and a quiet life.

On the side of this, in a sheltered nook a band of pilgrims was encamped, and once more Julian found himself amongst those who appeared to be friends. His appearance caused a great deal of animated conversation, but he did not concern himself about it. His rescuer wrapped him in a large sheepskin, and laid him by the side of a fire of argols, and soon he fell into a deep, refreshing sleep.

When he awoke, this man who had been his deliverer brought him (one great luxury of Tibet) a cup of buttered tea, which Europeans would describe as a horrible decoction made of tea siftings and flavoured

with rancid butter. Soon after he had been refreshed by this wonderful drink the whole camp started into motion.

Julian noticed that since his adventure they had lost some of their animals, and only a few wretched horses were left to assist them on their way. These, however, worked willingly enough, as anxious as the men themselves to get out of the position they were in. They went on through the ravine and into a valley where the temperature was milder. There was a deep lake here, but it was covered with ice; the supply of fuel being very small the pilgrims did not dare to stay. They passed on and attempted to cross the river of the golden sand.

Julian heard this name for it afterwards; at the time his mind was taken up with the extraordinary spectacle presented by the surface of the stream. It was completely frozen, but apparently a series of islands crossed it, and his first thought was that they could walk along these islands.

He noted, however, something that attracted a great deal of attention from his comrades, and when they came close he was utterly stupefied by the sight

which presented itself. The islands were formed simply by a troop of wild cattle which had attempted to cross the river at the moment of the concretion of the waters. They had been frozen into it—encrusted in the rapidly-formed ice. Their eyes had been picked out by birds of prey and much of the flesh had been taken as well. Their splendid heads, with their great horns upstanding, were raised up high as if in protest. Seeing this immediately after the awful burial ground the sight impressed Julian strangely. It made him feel how little life was valued in this mysterious country. He had already suspected that the Masters looked upon life as valueless, and that notable service only was what they cared for. He had been prepared to encounter this, but already he was face to face with something more dreadful.

The nation, the elements in which it lived, alike seemed indifferent to cost or loss. The ice was so strong that it was very easy to walk by the side of the skeletons of these unfortunate creatures. Although the pilgrims were now in what seemed like a valley, as a matter of fact, a very high point of Upper Asia had been reached, and the cruelty of the north

wind was something that no dweller in the West could realise. Long before Julian had crossed the river he had forgotten all about those unlucky ones whose bones he had seen lying in the valley, about the artistic results he was losing every moment, and, yet more surprising, about even himself.

All he knew was the simple fact that the cold was killing him, and his especial friend among the pilgrims, the one who had twice rescued him from death, became very excited on observing his symptoms. He was lifted on to one of the horses' backs, and a small band of the pilgrims, taking the best of the horses, went on with him.

The day was far advanced now, and it was impossible for Julian to appreciate the scenery through which they had to pass. Vague visions returned to him in after years of grassy hills where banks were formed of masses of primrose-coloured flowers. He heard the great stream rushing far below, he saw in the distance the rolling mountains which filled the background.

At the base of the hills which closed this valley were great spurs of bright sandstone, and in the val-

ley itself piles of stones were capped with flat slabs of white marble. At the first glance these white tops had the appearance of English bell tents, and Julian for a moment half expected to see some dear familiar red-coats pacing among them. But it was not so indeed. As a matter of fact, they had arrived at the great Tibetan Lamasery. Although it appears to be in a valley it really stands higher than the summit of Mont Blanc. Though Julian's sight had grown dim with the fatigue, he observed a pile of stately buildings arranged as if in imitation of the mountains, amphitheatrically.

The highest building of all, which was also the largest, was surmounted by an extraordinary roof, which in the rays of the now setting sun seemed to be composed entirely of gold. Julian fancied, however, that he could detect some figures upon it, and even in his extreme state of weariness resolved within himself that he would endeavour to find out what these were. The detachment of the body of pilgrims which had made itself into his especial escort, passed rapidly down the ravine through the valley, along a path which passed straight across the great valley of

barley, and up to the very entrance of the great Lamasery.

Here Julian got a vision of a number of persons, tall, severe-looking, with an ominous expression, dressed in white, with big yellow girdles clasped about the waist. These men approached him, and in a few moments he found himself lifted from his horse by strong arms. In a few moments more all the horrors of cold, of ice, and of the bitter journey had disappeared. He was in an interior, a strange one indeed, but for the moment he was sheltered, he was warmed, and he was fed. For a little while these facts were enough for him.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS RIGA had been one of the advanced teachers of the Woman's Rights movement many years before she took charge of Daphne. Her relationship with Daphne was a very remote one. She was the second cousin of Daphne's father, but when poor Daphne with all her money and with all her beauty strayed into Chancery, Miss Riga was the nearest relation to be found who could take charge of her.

It had been a great trouble to her for a long time, that she had seen and felt Julian's distrust of her. She saw that when Daphne's majority was attained, and when Daphne had become his wife, she would once more herself be at the mercy of the world. Such a prospect was unsupportable to a woman of her ambition. Miss Riga in her experience of life had learned to look upon attractive women as creatures of another sphere. She had never been loved, more than that, she had never been liked. She had

simply held to her rights as long as she had any, and after that fought her way. In Daphne's inheritance and in Daphne's present wealth all her opportunity now lay.

When Julian left England to obey the mysterious call, he left Daphne reluctantly enough in charge of this woman. He could not object to such a guardian, since Daphne had been guarded by her since childhood. At the same time it annoyed him because of his great distrust. But very soon after his departure both Miss Riga and Daphne were in high spirits. Or, to speak more correctly, were in a remote kind of elation. Communications from a far-off world do not so much raise our spirits as change them. Daphne's beautiful face and figure seemed to be petrified into a statue expressive of all wonder and amazement; while Miss Riga, sitting in her big arm-chair, laughed to herself, rapping her hands the while. She had an odd little trick, this weird old woman, of rapping the knuckles of her left hand with the palm of her right when she was delighted about anything. And she was very delighted now, for on the very day after Julian had sailed for India

Daphne had received an extraordinary communication. She awoke in the morning with an idea that someone had been with her, that a paper had been given her, that something had fluttered over her head. And when broad awake, sure enough, a paper lay close to her hand, a morsel of paper torn out of Julian's favourite manuscript book. Daphne took the paper to Miss Riga, and asked her what she thought it meant. Miss Riga looked at it, took off her glasses, put them on again, reflected, then said: "My dear, this is in no language known in this part of the world. It must be a message from Julian's Master. I suppose it is in Sanscrit. Shall we go to the British Museum and see if anybody there can tell us what it means?"

But there was no necessity for them to go to the Museum. Long before they were ready to start, a knock at the door announced the arrival of one of Julian's friends—a Mr. Gray. Miss Riga, who was in a great fuss ready to depart (for it always took a couple of maids to set her in motion), immediately informed Mr. Gray of the matter in hand. "Well,

well," he said, "you need not go to the British Museum ; I can read Sanscrit."

At this the message was shown to him. He looked at it, he read it, he stroked his beard, a long brown silky one, and then again he looked at the message and read it. Then he looked at the ladies, and said :

"Prepare yourselves."

"Oh," said Miss Riga, "we are ready for anything ; have we not suffered from losing our dear Julian?"

"Very well, then," said Mr. Gray, "The message is simply this :—

Throw these two houses into one, and make a great lamasery in London. Obey my orders, and I, the Master, will visit you and guide you."

(signed) MORIAL.

The two women looked at each other ; Miss Riga rose from her chair—she was a very small woman, very attenuated, with a drawn look peculiar to some faces when success has not enlivened them.

"Daphne," she said, "this is the great moment of your life and a great moment of mine. We must obey. Child, what right have we over Julian's house?"

"None that I know of," said Daphne, "but if it is an order from his Master, I shall obey it at any hazard."

Miss Riga, putting the glasses on her face again, took up the paper with the message written on it and looked at it very seriously.

"Have you the slightest idea," addressing herself to Mr. Gray, "what a Lamasery is?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Gray, hesitating and laughing at the same time, "it is a monastic establishment of the Buddhistic religion."

"A monastic establishment!" said Miss Riga; "are we to found one here?"

"I have no idea," said Mr. Gray; "this matter is getting altogether beyond me. Do you know, Miss Royal," he said addressing himself to Daphne, "that you promised, when Julian was at home, you would sit for me for the picture of the Tragic Muse."

Daphne roused herself with an effort. "Yes," she said, "I remember quite well. Do you really want me to sit?"

"Should I have ever asked you," he said, "if I did not?"

"Mr. Gray," said Miss Riga, in an impressive manner, "these trifles are out of place; Julian, Daphne and I have all alike been called to a great life of renunciation. By it we shall pass through the golden gates of sacrifice into the glorious hereafter, and every interest and every selfish thought has to be surrendered; we live now only for our Master's bidding."

She said this very solemnly. Turning presently to Daphne she asked in a different tone, "Which room could we use best to break an archway into Julian's house?"

Daphne was a little startled by this sudden question and hesitated a moment. "Well, Auntie, dear, his studio joins our drawing-room."

"Yes, yes," Miss Kirton said; "that will do very well. What a grand hall it will make if we can throw the two into one for meetings of the faithful."

"What do you mean?" said Daphne, looking at her in amazement.

"Don't you see?" said Miss Riga, turning suddenly around. The old lady looked like a witch now, if ever a woman did. Her black hair, streaked slightly with grey, was usually thrown decorously over her temples, but she had pushed it back in her excitement. Her eyes were of a peculiar grey-green, and glittered like stars. When she was excited her shrivelled face and attenuated body appeared to be mere accessories to this peculiar brilliance of expression. She fixed her eyes on Daphne, and the girl's answering gaze was at first full of steadiness, but afterwards faltered and grew dim.

"Julian would never object to what you do," said Miss Riga, and "Why of course not," said Mr. Gray, rising and taking up his hat, "Julian is much too devoted a lover to make any difficulty where Daphne's wishes are concerned."

"That is all right," said Miss Riga with a winning smile, intended for Mr. Gray's benefit.

She held out her hand as a cue for his departure.

"I think myself," she said, holding his hand in

hers, and fixing her queer eyes straight on his, "I feel myself, that whatever Daphne does, specially under the direction of his Master, Julian will approve of. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Gray?"

"Why, yes," he said, "have I not already said so."

Arthur Gray having once got out of the house and a little way on the road, stopped in the street, lifted his hat, looked into it, and fell into a profound reverie. Probably if a brilliant policeman had found him he would have been taken into custody for some reason or other, for he certainly could not account for himself at that moment. All his thoughts were of Daphne Royal. "What on earth is that old woman up to!" he said to himself. "I hate her, so I came away; and I was a fool to do it, for if I had stayed I might have learned what her little game is. That silly fool, Julian, has gone away on a wild-goose chase to the North Pole, or some other salubrious region, and left this dear girl to take her chance. She is not fit for it, she is no match for that money-making hag. I must keep up to the old lady's game, and I must fall into it whether I like it or not, for

I will not leave Daphne alone in her clutches."

Daphne, sitting in the chair into which she sank when Gray read the translation of the Sanscrit message, was now looking earnestly at Miss Riga, and studying her face with an anxiety worthy of a better cause.

"Dear auntie," she said, "are you convinced that this message came from Julian's Master?"

"Have you any reason to doubt it?" asked Miss Riga, turning round fiercely, lifting her glasses and staring at Daphne.

"I have no reason to doubt it," said Daphne, "but at the same time I cannot see what proof there is."

"Why, my dear," said the old lady, "who else should send you messages, fluttering in the air in the middle of the night? Who else should take the trouble to tell you what to do? Julian has been selected for a great mission. Julian himself, his mere body and his purse are at the service of his Master in a remote country, of which we know nothing. We, my child, are custodians of his wealth in the meantime, and his wealth is to be used in the service of the Master.

Don't you see that? Do you doubt the existence of this Master, whose simple order has made you sacrifice your lover, your peace, your comfort, and your home? If you could let Julian go on such an enterprise without a protest, surely you could obey the orders of his Master in trivialities, which have only to deal with party walls and money matters."

"Yes, yes, dear aunt, you are quite right," said Daphne. "To part with Julian was a great trial on my faith. If I could believe so far, nothing else should be difficult; but it is so hard to decide anything when he is away from me."

"Well, well," said Miss Riga, contentedly, taking a comfortable chair by the side of the fire, "you should have thought of that before you let him go. Having let him go you must do your best in his absence, and consider yourself, so to speak, vice-president of this great movement.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Daphne went up to her room that evening, she was filled with a very curious feeling of terror and anxiety. She had a large bureau standing between the two windows. In it she kept all her treasures, and these treasures were of some value, she being a young woman of property. She had her jewel-case here, she had her bank-book, and she had a great many other papers and different documents of importance. But none of these amounted to anything in her sight, compared to a certain paper which had been put inside this desk and locked on the night before Julian went away.

This was a paper very quickly drawn up by his solicitor, meaning a very great deal to her, and it was simply a power of attorney over the whole of Julian Arundel's property given to her. It, of course, remained in abeyance until her twenty-first birthday. But that was close at hand, only a few days off. All

her life, since she and Julian had talked of love, she had expected that that day would be her wedding-day, instead of which it had been made into a day on which she had complete control over all his property while he himself seemed lost to her for ever.

But this was not troubling her so acutely for the moment ; she was very well aware that Miss Riga knew that she held this paper. She was very well aware that whatever Miss Riga decided should be done with regard to Julian's possessions could be done by herself, and she had a terrible certainty that Miss Riga's will was so strong that whatever she decided to be done would be done. What then did it all mean?—that is what Daphne wondered as she sat down, her bureau unlocked and this paper before her. By its side lay another paper which she had placed there, and this was the mysterious message from the Master—a message which bore no conviction to her heart, which seemed to her nothing but a scrap of Julian's note-book, and scrawled hastily in a disguised hand.

No doubt Daphne was naturally an incredulous person. Some people would have been convinced

by the fact of this message coming to her when she was alone, but Daphne was not convinced ; she was very doubtful. She thought it was some freak of one of the maids, and she would have thought it had been a dream if the paper had not been actually there.

But she could not believe that it came from a supernatural power. Nevertheless she saw that her duty lay plain before her. This message had one word in it which she could read. It was written in Sanscrit, but it was signed by a single name, and that name was Morial. Against this signature she could say nothing, she could do nothing, for the name of Morial was the name always given by Julian's Master. A message signed in this way she must obey. Having arrived at this point of decision she locked up the papers and got up with a deep sigh from the bureau.

As she did so, a strange thing happened. When Julian had been painting Morial's portrait, and talking to her about it, and telling her what a beautiful figure and what a lovely face the Master possessed, she came by degrees to realise the presence of this unseen being. She had acquired a vivid idea of what

he was like, and when she saw his counterfeit presentment on Julian's canvas, she recognised the face of her fancy, and the figure of her dreams. Now she rose from her bureau and turned to the room, it appeared to her that the door opened and this same figure entered. It advanced towards her, not near,—she felt as if its presence would have killed her if it came too near.

It appeared to her that scorching rays emanated from it. It paused in the centre of the room, extending one hand towards her, and then words entered her mind, though she heard no voice, "Child," said this figure, "obey me ; do not allow your foolish reason and your weak intellect to stand between you and the great life. I will guide you if you will obey me."

Daphne hesitated in silence, but a moment after the words reached her, it appeared to her that now Julian's own Master had spoken to her. She clasped her hands together, she fell on her knees, and a moment later she fell forward on the floor, and in the attitude of subjection which a disciple always adopts.

Daphne was very ill all that night. Her maid and

old Miss Riga were up with her, tending her carefully, for she seemed to be in a fever. The old family doctor was sent for, but could not tell what was the matter with her, except that she was feverish and quite prostrated. In the middle of the morning Miss Riga came to her and said, "Now, Daphne, tell me, shall I obey the mysterious orders, or shall I act according to the dictates of common sense?"

"Obey them," said Daphne, very decidedly, "but it does not seem to me," she went on, "you have very clear directions. What are these orders?"

"I have them," said Miss Riga, very positively, "The message came to me last night. We have to found a great school of divine teaching in this country. We have to kill all the false religions of the earth. We have to plant the pure spirit of Buddhism in their stead. Is not this a great mission, dear child? Have we not work to do that any women would be proud of?"

"Indeed, yes," said Daphne. "Do as you like," she said. "You must attend to all the details."

Miss Riga leaned over and whispered into her ear, "Child," she said, "it will cost money, but this

money is all given to the Master, and for the great work. You will pay it, you promise me, if I obey his orders."

"Why, yes," said Daphne. "Of course, if you obey his orders, I shall obey mine in giving you what money is necessary ; but, dear aunt, let me see these orders--let me know what you have to do."

"Not yet," said Miss Riga ; "you are not strong enough. I am quite capable of learning the full effulgence of this inspiration. You know, my child, that in my family we have had second-sight for more than ten generations. It is natural to us to see the unseen, and to hear words that are not spoken. Let me, therefore, listen to the mysterious utterances that come to me and obey them. You know very well that I am working only according to the wishes of the Master, who has taken Julian from you. And, my child, you must know that the more rapidly we fulfil his behest, the sooner he will give Julian back to you."

Naturally this argument had great weight with Daphne, who in her present state of complete acquiescence and surrender of her own judgment was

very unhappy. She fully realised that if Julian had been with her it would have been possible to make a more critical analysis of the situation. She was not strong enough alone. Once or twice she thought seriously of asking Mr. Gray whether that really was the interpretation of the message, whether it was really written in Sanscrit, and whether he really could read it. Then, when she made up her mind to this, the memory of the vision she had seen checked her. That was real ; therefore, she had nothing to say any more.

She decided that her best and her most righteous course was that of obedient submission. She felt that she was in the midst of great mysteries both of earth and heaven. She could understand nothing, she could not see what object was to be gained for Julian by his being taken from his right work and being lost to the world as he was, nor could she understand how she and her old aunt were to found a great religion. Lost in these perplexities, she resolved to wait till circumstances gave her some new guidance, and in the meantime to sacrifice whatever she could for what appeared to be the great cause.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Julian Arundel opened his eyes after his first deep sleep of exhaustion he was so surprised at what he saw that sleep fled from him altogether. He lay gazing and wondering whether he was still dreaming or not. But his imagination had never conjured up a scene like this even in his most excited moments; and so he was fain to believe it real.

He himself was laid on a low couch which was covered with sheepskin, a large wolfskin had been thrown over him, and the warmth was an absorbing delight in itself after the agonies of cold he had endured. The languor which held him in a quiet which seemed like that of a trance was simply nature's way of making recovery a pleasure. And what a pleasure it was, with such a sight to look idly at as he lay half dozing! His couch was placed at the far end of a large and lofty room; the walls and ceiling of this room were gilded; and Julian noticed immediately the splendour of this gilding. He had never seen

anything to equal it; and though the Tibetan gilding never shows to such supreme advantage as in the open air, lit by the sunshine, and set off by the snow, still its beauty in a lamp-lit room is wonderful. The passion of the religious Tibetans for gilding is so great that a race of foreigners, the Pebonans from Bontan, are tolerated in the country solely because of their skill in this labour. Julian's love of light and colour was excited to the highest degree by the glow of this rich gilding, illuminated as it was by the light of a number of coloured lamps. The mystic Buddhist "mani" was written over the door. "Om mani padmi noum," in dark blue letters. Julian was familiar with this sentence, as every dabbler in occultism must be, and like every one else had made his own individual guess at its meaning; so that it seemed like a friendly spot in the scene. The air was laden with an intensely sweet scent, an odour which afterwards became a positive passion with him. The sweetness of the aromatic Tibetan pastilles is unlike any other fragrance in the world. But all these delights were forgotten, when at last Julian was sufficiently aware to realise that the room was lined with

figures. Lined literally, for the lamas were ranged round the walls like statues. All wore the yellow robe of the higher grades. They knelt, immovably, as if fast locked in eternal prayer. No movement was made, except that sometimes a gaunt hand would touch the rosary which each one held—and sometimes a face was lifted a little, and glance thrown round the room.

The faces fascinated Julian, so that he could only look from one to the other, studying them intently. They looked as if carved out of rock ; severe, cold, forbidding, and, in some instances, savage. But the glances of those fierce eyes, when lifted !—glances such as wild animals on the watch might throw upon their prey !—covert, fierce, menacing.

“And these,” said Julian to himself, “are the lamas of Tibet ! the priests of the greatest religion in the world ! I would as soon be Daniel in the lions’ den as a peaceful European in this lamasery ! They look like committing any kind of cannibalism. But how I wish I could take a sketch of them, kneeling there as immovably as a row of Egyptian mummies !”

Julian had one treasure which he carried slung

round his neck by a chain ; the only piece of luggage he had succeeded in bringing into Tibet. This was a sketch-book. He knew it would be madness to attempt to use it until he had ascertained whether his formidable gaolers were friendly or not ; yet the longing within him made him stir a little and move his hand toward his breast, where this treasure was hidden.

Instantly there was a stir among the lamas ; they rose to their feet, slowly, as became men roused from their devotions. They approached him, and in a moment Julian was surrounded by these men, who scrutinised him with great interest, and talked together in the soft Tibetan tongue. It was the first time Julian had heard it, and he listened with a keen delight and interest, wondering whether he should ever master its meaning. It was strange to lie there like some exotic animal, and know that these men were discussing him—and possibly his fate !—and yet be unable even to conjecture what they said. He could guess nothing from the expression of their faces : the stoniness of the features did not alter when they talked. Only the occasional flashes of the fierce, small eyes, indicated

(as he thought) the vulture-like spirit repressed by monasticism.

“I would as soon be on the mountains or in that dreadful graveyard as here, in spite of the warmth and comfort,” thought Julian, dejectedly, as he surveyed the crowd about him.

“How am I to get out of this place?” was his next reflection, and he half rose on his couch from the mere instinct of flight. The effect of this was rather startling. The lamas all closed together immediately in the direction in which he moved. It was done so instantaneously and without any word of command, that he recognised very plainly that he was in close custody.

“Not much use thinking of escape,” he reflected grimly. “I must wait and see this out. If I am to be saved, I suppose I shall be saved.”

Here spoke the true spirit of the disciple, who hoped to succeed according to the preaching which is called Esoteric. Julian lay down again, resolving simply to wait and watch. Very soon he was rewarded by something happening which concerned himself. A panel or gilded wall close to him moved; he saw it

was a cunningly contrived secret door. An inferior lama entered, closing it behind him, and, advancing to the others, addressed them. What he said appeared to cause some discussion among them, but before long they evidently came to a unanimous decision. As a result of this one of them approached Julian to motion to him to rise. This he did with great alacrity, feeling himself quite recovered and decidedly curious to know his fate. His magnificent constitution had stood him in good stead during his recent ordeal, and the long rest he had had—for, as a matter of fact, though he did not yet know it, he had lain in a profound sleep for hours in this warmed and scented room—had entirely restored him. He felt now ready to face any enemy, prepared to encounter any danger that stood in his path. The lamas motioned to him to proceed to the great door of the room over which was the mystic inscription. He advanced, guarded among them as though he was under an escort of soldiers. The door opened into a vestibule white-washed both on the walls and on the ceiling. The doors were outlined and decorated in red and yellow with a quaintness that pleased Julian's artistic fancy,

even in this moment of uncertainty and suspense. He was in a darkness of profound ignorance ; he knew not, he could not guess, where he was being taken, or for what purpose. They led him through several corridors, all whitewashed and decorated in the same manner, and presently emerged into the open air. He saw then the wonder of the night which arrested his attention so completely that he really forgot his own danger, and perhaps for the moment even his mission. The sky was a black-blue colour, lit by the stars which seemed so large that he fancied that he was almost in another world. The moon was at its full and shed a flood of white light all over the valley, lighting up the gilded domes of the lamasery, and giving to them a strange cold brilliance. He saw at a second glance that this lamasery was like a township, so large was it. It was composed of a number of buildings all arranged one above another. Away on the other side of the valley was the fortress. He could just distinguish it, although it looked dark and gloomy. But here in the home of the great religion everything seemed to glitter. His delight in this scene was so evident that the lamas noticed it, and seemed mo-

rosely amused. Probably they looked upon him as a poor heathen who had never seen anything decent before. He was not given long in which to satisfy the pleasure he felt ; they passed one or two of the buildings, and then paused before the door of one. It was standing open ; to Julian's surprise—in fact, amazement—two Chinamen were in charge of the door, one on each side of it. These gentlemen evidently expected the great body of visitors who arrived, for they simply bowed with all celestial politeness, and ushered them in. The building which Julian now entered appeared to him to be composed of a vast suite of rooms, all whitewashed, and very simply furnished. None of the splendour he had left was here. At the same time, there was abundant comfort. The large room into which he was first taken was occupied by a whole crowd of Chinese, who seemed immensely interested in his appearance. The lamas, however, maintained a species of human wall around him. Evidently they considered him a sacred charge, whether for good or evil he knew not. Passing through this room, they entered another, somewhat more luxurious, in which a few Chinamen, evidently

of superior grade, were busy talking together and looking over papers. They, too, were interested in him, but in a more civilised fashion. Two more rooms of this character were passed, and then they entered one which was fully furnished in the Chinese manner. Its aspect appeared to him most fantastic and delightful, for Julian had never been to China, and knew nothing more of its charms of decoration than can be learned in Regent Street. A young Chinaman, most beautifully dressed, received the company at the door of this chamber, and, with many bows of the elegant sort, ushered them into the room. At the far end, upon a kind of a throne covered with a red cloth, was seated a Chinaman, who appeared to Julian to be a man of some sixty years of age, and who had great dignity of appearance. Before him was a little table of elaborate lacquer work, on which was an inkstand, some writing materials and a little silver vase containing snuff, which Julian looked at with longing gaze, only wishing he had it at home as a studio property.—But he had now reached a time when it was impossible any longer to gratify his artistic sensibilities. He had at last realised the posi-

tion in which he was placed, and clearly this was the guest house or Lamasery ; clearly also the guests now occupying it were nothing more or less than a Chinese Embassy. This fate—the awful fate of falling into the hands of the Chinese—Julian had seriously hoped to escape. It was the one thing he had dreaded, in spite of all his heroism, for dreadful are the tales told to enterprising travellers of the tortures inflicted by the Chinese on those whom they think may be spies, or who may possibly in any way afford them information. Suddenly, without a moment's preparation, he found himself in the face of this danger. What was to be done he knew not. Having entered the room of the ambassador, the lamas withdrew from their prisoner, leaving him standing alone in the centre of the floor, they themselves ranging against the wall in the quaint fashion of most of the Oriental races. The young Chinaman who appeared to be master of the ceremonies, and who certainly commanded every grace possible, now held a long conversation with the Ambassador, who during the whole of it surveyed Julian with the greatest curiosity and interest. The result of this, after some time, was a

course of interrogations in various languages. The young Chinaman advanced, and with a deep bow addressed Julian in Tibetan. In reply to this Julian adopted the simple expedient of shaking his head and saying, "I don't understand you."

The ambassador then addressed him in Hindustanee, and to Julian's regret he had to make the same reply in the same manner. After this, the ambassador evidently tested him in several Indian dialects. All this was perfectly hopeless, and it was very evident to Julian that, if he chose to hold his tongue, no cross-examination could take place, for these men would never think of addressing him in their own language. As a matter of fact, he did know a little Chinese, having met some Chinese ambassadors who came to London on a visit, and who made themselves most charming at many of the Piccadilly and Grosvenor Square receptions. Their sweet manners and bland expressions had so delighted him that he had fraternised with them a little, and had persuaded them to teach him a few sentences of their language and some of its fundamental rules. He was perfectly aware that if he chose he could explain quite intel-

ligibly to the ambassador that he was an Englishman who wished to penetrate the interior of Tibet, with no political or ulterior object. But would it be wise to do this, or would it be better to be silent? How was it possible for him to tell; his mind was torn between the two alternatives, and he looked wildly around, searching for something that would give him an idea of what to do; and this something came. The walls of the chamber were hung with sombre draperies of black silk, embroidered in dull gold. Right across these he suddenly saw some characters which instantly attracted his attention, not only because they were of vivid crimson, of blood colour or of fire, but because they came and went while he looked. He then suddenly remembered that he was no ordinary wanderer, no ordinary mortal at the mercy of an official, but that he was a disciple of Morial, and if he was worthy to be a disciple, he would be guided. Standing, therefore, in the midst of these crowds of enemies of two nationalities, he recovered his calmness, and waited to see what the mystic words would be which he presumed would convey to him his order.

CHAPTER IX.

DAPHNE also was looking at the stars on this moonlight night, and wondered why, if they looked down upon Julian and herself alike, they could not give her any message from him. For Daphne was one accustomed to question the dictates of Providence and to attempt to scale heights which never could be compassed. She was standing on the balcony of her London house when she looked at these same stars which Julian saw flaming like suns in the clear Tibetan sky. To Daphne they seemed, in all their splendour and beauty, very impotent and pale and small. Hers was the old cry just now—"Is there no mercy in the pitiless sky," for she was troubled and harassed beyond words, and it seemed to her that for Julian to leave her with such great responsibilities and to face such great dangers was no right thing for any just Master to have ordered. The balcony on which she

stood was outside the windows of the drawing-room of her house. It was covered in with trellis work over which a Virginian creeper was trained, and many a time when they had had parties here in the summer evenings of the season, Daphne had sat out among these creepers, and talked and laughed, like the light-hearted girl she had been. Now she wondered whether she ever had been such a girl, whether these merry parties, so common in every-day life had ever taken place here. It was late in the night, indeed it was nearly morning, for just now when Daphne stepped out on to the balcony Julian had entered the room of the Chinese Embassy. Perhaps in her sympathetic nature she felt the trouble he was in, or perhaps it was her own troubles that made her so restless, but at all events she had not been able to sleep. She had never liked her own room since these mysterious missives had begun to float down upon her in the night, and when she could not rest she had a habit of going into the open air. The wide balcony outside the drawing-room window was a delightful and quiet spot. She was sitting here, like a ghost wrapped in a white cloak, and thinking, too, more

like a ghost than an ordinary girl who should have had every hope and comfort in life.

"What can it all mean?" she was saying to herself. "Why is everything so eerie and unnatural just now, and, what is more, so horribly uncomfortable. Not that I should mind this. I only wish I was away with Julian on his dangerous journey, for then I should feel I was doing something real. But why should we be worried out of our lives about what seems like nothing? I suppose it is all right, but how can I tell? I shall never know until Julian comes back."

Having come to this conclusion for the hundredth time, she rose up and went back into the drawing-room, and then paused on her way, as she always paused now, to look at the great change which had been effected in it. In one wall an immense arch had been made, heavily curtained, for the work was now quite completed. Neither money nor trouble had been spared to get it rapidly done. Why, no one knew, only these were the orders from the mysterious source whence all the new orders came. The curtains were looped back after the manner of cur-

tains on the stage, drawn up in the centre. And through this great space Daphne could see the dim, shadowy interior of Julian's painting room, his old studio. This very night the room, as well as the drawing-room of her house, had been thronged with visitors—people whom she had never seen or heard of before, and most of them people she did not like, even when she saw them. It annoyed her that this crowd should be in possession of Julian's sanctum in his absence and without his leave, but what could she do, or what could she say? At the far end of the studio stood Julian's largest painting easel, and on it was a picture framed most splendidly in a frame which had doors and a strong lock. These doors were always safely fastened, except at special moments when Miss Riga herself would place a little golden key in an elaborate lock, and with much ceremony open it. The mystery then revealed was Julian's portrait of Morial the Mahatma. On the previous evening this portrait had been shown to a select few. Daphne thinking of it again began to walk from end to end of the two great rooms, pondering in her mind what it all could mean and what was right for

her to do. She thought over all that Miss Riga had said to this select few who had remained after the others had departed. Miss Riga had made a kind of little speech to them, which she had evidently thought over and rehearsed beforehand, and for which Daphne was wholly unprepared.

“My friends,” said Miss Riga, “the Master has greatly distinguished us. He has chosen this spot as the centre of the new religion, which is indeed simply the oldest religion in the world and the only true one. He has chosen those who dwell in this house as his disciples to do his will. The strongest he has taken away ; for the time being we have lost the one whom we ought to lean on. Julian Arundel has gone, at his Master’s call, into Tibet to meet his Master face to face and receive his teaching, so that he may bring it back fresh from the fountainhead into this country. In the meantime, we women, who, because we are women, never can become disciples of a high grade, are yet distinguished as women have never been before, and perhaps never will be again. This is not because of our own merit, but because we are needed. This is to be a great movement in this

country. Its present religion will fall and give place to that of which it is a mere offshoot—a mere babe. The light of the true Esoteric teaching, that which is not mere Buddhism but inspired Buddhism, is to spring up here in the midst of London, the capital of a Christian country. And we, Daphne Royal and I, are the poor weak creatures chosen to carry out this great work until stronger ones can join us. We must fulfil our task nobly, looking for the end. Think of the great moment when the Master, who appeared in this very room to the inspired artist who painted the portrait, shall be able to enter it bodily; think of the great moment when we have made this place sufficiently purified for the Master to enter it in the flesh. That is what he wants; he wants this place made fit to be a true Lamasery, and a place in which he could find a home if he needed it. We cannot do this altogether alone, for there is much to do. Already we have received orders that would tax our strength beyond what is possible. We must have a little band of devoted workers to surround us and support us—support us in the true spirit of pure religion, for the world is a very hard place to live in, and never

so hard as when one is trying to fight one's way to a higher life."

This was the sum and substance of Miss Riga's memorable speech, with which she celebrated the occasion of the founding of what she called a "Lodge." Daphne had confused ideas, gathered from reading novels more than anything else, of the system adopted by the Freemasons which they had borrowed from the Rosicrucians, and it was clear to her on reflecting over it that Miss Riga had been reading up the system of Freemasonry and was proposing to adopt an imitation of it.

"But what are these people to do, what are they to be?" Daphne questioned and questioned. Although it was very late when the little group of the elect left the house, Daphne had learned before she went to her room that several of them really proposed to enter the mystic lodge. This meant much more than might seem apparent at first sight. Daphne had heard with much surprise that two of these persons proposed to take up residence in the house on the very next day. They were enthusiasts, fanatics, who thought themselves doing as great a deed in surrender-

ing their home ties as was Julian in his terrible pilgrimage. What most troubled Daphne was the fact that Miss Riga refused now to take her into her confidence. She assured her, as she assured the other devotees, that she was receiving letters from the Master. She told her that she could not for the present show them to her or to any one else, but promised to do so later. In the meantime she demanded from her trust and obedience. Daphne, who had plenty of courage, would have refused this if it had not been for that vision which she had herself seen of Morial himself. The entanglement was one which she was unable to see through. Nevertheless she was very unhappy in realising the tremendous change that was about to be made in her home life. For, on the very next day, the houses which had been one her own, and one Julian's, were to be made into the strange thing which Miss Riga called a Lamasery. Miss Riga's definition of it was a place in which people dwelt who had given up ordinary life, with all its claims and its attractions, and were ready by discipline to become true disciples. Walking up and down, Daphne pondered very seriously

over the whole position, and spared herself no painful criticism. She brought before her mind's eye the two new disciples, the two original members of the "Lodge?" of Eastern wisdom in the West. One was a Mrs. Flite, a lady whose acquaintance Miss Riga had very recently made, with whom she had struck up an ardent friendship, and whom she habitually spoke of as a true soul, "the same as myself." Mrs. Flite was one of those peculiar wrecks left after a youth of extreme prettiness. She was small—*petite*—with a tiny face highly rouged, lit up by dark eyes full of arch meanings. At the first glance she seemed like a woman of thirty, for she wore a fair, curly wig which reached her eyebrows, and carried herself with much of the gaiety of a girl. This lady, who had hitherto cared for nothing but parties and social gatherings of any sort, had now become an earnest neophyte in the new faith, and was ready to take any vows or to make any sacrifice in the cause. The other new disciple, Mr. Foster, was an exceedingly tall young man, who appeared to possess immense accumulations of learning. He seemed to be so profoundly acquainted with every

science and art that Miss Riga and Mrs. Flite both assured him that he must have passed innumerable incarnations in order to be so wise at such an early age. He also announced that he was willing to give up the brilliant career before him in secular life, and endeavour at any cost to learn how to become a Mahatma if Miss Riga would but accept him. He also was accepted. Daphne thought over the scene with a keen feeling of rebellion. She did not want these people in her house. She did not know them, and she did not like them. What did it mean? Why should they come? Within her breast had risen a feeling of strong protest.

She was on the eve of going to Miss Riga, rousing her, and telling her she would have her own way. The thought of doing this had come to her, and she paused in the middle of the great drawing-room thinking what she should do, when suddenly she gave a faint shriek and fled to the door. Then taking her courage in both hands she turned round, walked back into the room, and looked through the arch into Julian's studio. Yes, she was not mistaken, it was no illusion. There was the writing on the

wall—the blood-red characters—they came and went like lambent gleams of fire. A message was written there for her, and it was the same message that Julian read on the wall of the room in the lamasery of Tibet!

CHAPTER X.

THESE were the words which Julian saw written upon the wall at the same time as Daphne, although these two were separated by the great span of the world. That it was no ordinary writing was only too evident, for it came and went just like letters of fire, that might be blown out and then burn again. Julian stood regarding them in wonder and awe, but presently his attention was attracted by hearing the ambassador and his secretary talking together. Although he knew very little Chinese, he knew enough to follow their conversation. To his horror he gathered that they had decided to claim him as a prisoner and take him to China, right across Western Tibet. Not even the possible tortures he might have suffered if at once treated as a spy alarmed him so much as the idea of this journey. Eight months of

wasted, useless travelling, and then to fall into the hands of Chinese officials, and be practically as far as ever from his Master, and far, indeed, from his own home. This must be prevented; what should he do? Again the letters came flaming out, and he instantly concluded that here must be his guide. Where was the crimson star? What was it? He looked all round the room hoping to find some tangible symbol, obeisance to which might win him favour in sight of the officials. But there was nothing of the sort anywhere. A deep dejection fell upon him, he had no idea how to act. He stood still, having thoroughly examined the room, looking at the ambassador and trying to hear all that he said, for he knew very well that his fate lay in this man's hands.

And, as he stood there, silent, hopeless, and horror-stricken at the condition he found himself in, he suddenly saw something which electrified him. As the ambassador sat there making some notes, and speaking the while to his secretary, over his head, in the air that a moment since was empty, appeared a crimson star! perfectly clear in outline and brilliant in colour. Julian could trace it plainly. It was formed by the

double triangle with the point downwards. Here must be his chance, his safeguard ; the supernatural again was leading him ! His confidence returned ; he flung away his own judgment, and obeyed the mystic guidance. Instantly he fell on his knees. The ambassador and secretary looked at him in the utmost amazement.

“What is this man kneeling for ?” said the ambassador.

“I cannot guess,” replied the secretary.

Julian resolved now to fling aside the caution which appeared to be useless, and to speak to the ambassador.

“I am kneeling,” he said in Chinese, speaking with some difficulty, but clearly enough, “to the Crimson Star.”

The ambassador rose with a start from his seat ; he was seized with a sudden and powerful agitation, which evidently perplexed the secretary as much as Julian’s action had done. Ki-Chan, the ambassador, came hastily from his place and advanced to Julian, his face working with a strong emotion which he could not conceal. Indeed, he did not seem to make

any effort to conceal it; he was too entirely overcome. The secretary advanced to him and touched him on the shoulder. This recalled him a little to himself, and he immediately gave a gesture of command, dismissing all who were present except Julian and the secretary. The secretary, however, appeared to Julian to stay of his own accord, and Ki-Chan evidently did not like this. Recovering himself sufficiently to speak to him with politeness he asked him to go also.

"Now," said the ambassador when they were quite alone; "rise, the star has been recognised and has acknowledged the recognition. Who are you, tell me, and whence do you come?"

Julian looked at him in the greatest doubt and perplexity. Should he tell him—was it not madness to talk of his Master to a Chinese official? to tell such a man as this that his aim was to penetrate into the interior of Tibet, a region that the Chinese officials themselves had never succeeded in entering? But a kind of despair fell on him at the thought of being, as he was, so completely in this man's power. If he did not find a friend in him what hope had he? None; he

would simply be taken a prisoner across the steppes of Tartary into China. He had just come to this conclusion when Ki-Chan, who had been observing his doubt with keen anxiety, approached him and spoke with great earnestness :

“You could not see the Crimson Star, you could not recognise it if you were not a servant of the great Morial. That you see the star above my head shows you that I am one of his trusted servants crowned by his special mark. Surely then you need not hesitate to trust me ?”

This argument decided Julian ; he hesitated no longer. In lame and halt Chinese, but with sufficient clearness to be understood, he began to tell the ambassador the simple facts which brought him into this strange situation. Ki-Chan listened as to a wild and thrilling romance. At the same time Julian noticed that he was not so much overpowered by the supernatural part of the narrative as he was by the fact that this new disciple was an Englishman, who had come straight from London. Ki-Chan had met Englishmen at Peking, and had heard a great deal of their wonderful country. But he had never yet seen

an Englishman within the borders of Tibet, a fact which evidently had singular importance with him, and interested him in a way which Julian could not then understand.

“You are the Master’s servant,” said Ki-Chan. “I bow to the name of the Master as you bow to the Crimson Star. You are my charge from this moment. When Morial permits two disciples to meet, it is with an object, and he thinks us poor fools if we cannot guess what we are to do without being told. I presume that my task is to send you under safe escort as far as I can into Hither Tibet. That is the one thing I can do, and, therefore, it is evidently what I have to do. You shall go on your journey as early on the morrow as I can have your escort arranged. It will be a terrible journey, even as far as I can give you protection. For there are no halting places for caravans, there are no great Lamasaries like this, and, worse still, there are no roads. Riding in the desert or across the steppes, as you will have to do for many a long league, will be nothing as a matter of difficulty compared to getting over the rocky parts of the mountains. I myself once made

the pilgrimage, and I know how awful it is. You had better ride a yak, which goes slowly but surely. Horses, in leaping over these rocks, often stumble, however sure-footed they may be ; and camels die in the rarified air. Does not this account of what you have before you intimidate you?" he asked, looking curiously at Julian.

"Nothing will intimidate me now," replied Julian, "after what I have passed through. I am young and strong, and have but one object—to find the Master."

"But one object," Ki-Chan repeated after him ; "is that really so? I cannot doubt your word, as you have recognized the sign of the order, and therefore I will believe all that you say. But I must tell you that you stand in greater danger in this country, being an Englishman, than if you belonged to any other nation in the world. The Tibetans have an idea that the English is the one conquering race. No Englishman has been permitted to enter the interior except poor Moorcroft, who, after studying the country and its traditions for twelve years, hoped to go back and enrich the West with his knowledge. But although they had allowed him to live here, he was really only

a prisoner, although he did not know it. When it was found that he intended to go back to the West, he was murdered without hesitation. If you penetrate into the interior you will never return, unless, indeed, the Master thinks you worthy of protection. He has never thought it worth while to protect any man yet who has gone to him in his solitude."

"Is that so?" said Julian, somewhat doubtfully.

"Yes, that is so," replied the ambassador; "for you must know, of course, that those disciples who determine to leave the world and actually go to the feet of the Master, are idealists, fanatics, and it is only once in a century, perhaps not so often, that such men have the stamina in them to be of any use."

"Then you think," said Julian, "that even if I reach him, I shall be no safer there than here?"

"Not unless you are that one aloe of a century," replied the ambassador, with an inscrutable smile. "You will never know until the moment of your fate; but I warn you that if you are protected now it may not always be so. And if the Tibetans, in those districts where the English have been heard

of, discover you are an Englishman, your doom is sealed."

"But why?" said Julian, "they are already conquered : they have nothing to fear."

"Conquered !" answered Ki-Chan. "That, my friend, is one of those appearances which are entirely opposed to reality. The world itself is ruled by Morial. Is it likely, then, that another nation could conquer his native country ?"

"What does the Chinese rule in Tibet mean, then?" inquired Julian, much surprised at this new aspect of the matter.

"It is simply nominal," replied the ambassador ; "or, to speak more correctly, it is useful in a simple way. The Chinese officials and soldiers keep the lower class of Tibetans in order and save the high class a great deal of trouble. The pure nobles in Tibet are magicians and they much prefer to hold their country without claiming it, being always engaged with much larger affairs than the government of a district of Asia. The one serious matter to them with regard to Tibet itself is that it should be for ever protected from incursions of any sort. The English

have never been permitted to come here, because they are credited with great powers, perhaps correctly, I know not; therefore conceal your nationality if you can."

"Tell me," said Julian, returning to a subject which interested him much more deeply, "how shall I know when I reach my journey's end? That has always troubled my mind a great deal more than any of the hardships by the way. For I am not like a person who is going to a certain place, the name of which can be found on the map, or at all events asked for; I only know that the Master is hidden in the depths of this great country."

The ambassador fell into a deep reverie, walking about the room and thinking. Presently he roused himself, and, coming back to Julian, began to talk once more.

"After a certain part of the journey is over," he said, "it is impossible to give you any directions, as it is impossible to give you any escort, because neither my Chinese soldiers nor the ordinary Lamas will be permitted to go any further. You will enter a great region in the very heart of the country where

the protection of man no longer exists ; the Great Ones keep it protected by their magic powers. I cannot direct you, although I have passed over the ground once—and once only. How could I direct you? There is no township to stay in, there is not even any dwelling to pass. I have been thinking in my mind of the great rocks I noticed, of the marvellous fountain which is said to give death instantly to the thirsty one who drinks, of the great pillar of gold, within which they say a spirit dwells imprisoned, which cries out for help to all who pass, or rather to the one who passes now and again in the course of long years. I have thought of the mystic tree, which stands alone in the desert, on every leaf of which there is a word written in blood. I have thought of these things, strange enough in themselves, and land-marks by the way, but I know not how to tell you to go from one to the other. I suppose if you are to reach your journey's end the Master will find you some mode of guidance."

"Did he give you guidance?" asked Julian.

"Yes," replied the ambassador.

"And what was it, who was it?" asked Julian, eagerly

"I cannot tell you," replied Ki-Chan, with a look of awful fear coming on his face, "don't ask me to speak of it."

"Well, suppose I have passed all these things and found my way, still I want to know how shall I guess that I need go no further."

Ki-Chan began to speak in a very quiet voice, very quickly. "The Mahatma Morial dwells in a beautiful house in the most lovely spot on the whole world. It is like Paradise, full of sweet air and flowers, and everything delightful. There is grass, there are trees, there is water, and all more beautiful than any you have ever seen."

"Then I shall easily recognise this place," said Julian.

"If you are allowed to see it," answered Ki-Chan, in the same low, awestruck voice. "But when the Master does not choose to let it be seen by some poor wretch who has fought with hardship and danger in order to try and reach it, he simply veils it in a magic mist and it becomes invisible."

CHAPTER XI.

THE strange conversation between these two lasted until dawn, but at last fatigue compelled them to rest, and the ambassador dismissed Julian with a promise that he should be sent on his way as early in the day as was possible. He kept him as his own guest, and gave him one of the little guest-rooms in the house occupied by his followers. Julian fell asleep from utter weariness, although he was in a state of great excitement. It was a deep and contented sleep that came to him; he felt that he was being taken care of, and that he was really accomplishing his difficult task. He did not awake until the ambassador himself came to rouse him. "My friend," said he, "you have so much fatigue before you that I let you rest as long as possible. Rise now and breakfast. Your escort is ready, and the animals are waiting at the door."

A breakfast was brought in to Julian, which was

an odd mixture of Chinese and Tibetan diet. He rather preferred to the Chinese dishes some rolls sent him by the Lamas, stuffed with sugar and meat. They also sent him a great jug of the buttered tea which is the one drink of the country. Julian began to think it really very nice, but he altered his opinion later on, when compelled to drink it in its primitive state day after day in the desert. This was the delicious buttered tea of a rich Lamasery. As soon as he was ready, the ambassador and secretary escorted him out of the guests' building into the narrow lanes that ran between the houses forming the Lamasery. The Lamas were standing on every side, waiting to see him depart. Evidently all the circumstances of his arrival and departure aroused the greatest interest and curiosity among the Lamas and the Chinese retinue. This of course was not surprising as no one but himself and the ambassador knew the meaning of his journey. They passed, as they walked, a yard full of the great Tibetan dogs who howled furiously. Julian, who knew what these animals were kept for, looked at them half with admiration and half with a shudder of thankfulness to think

that his body had not been thrown to them to form a meal this day instead of his being allowed to depart in safety. A little lower down was the place where the animals stood ready for his journey. They were a number of rough long-haired yaks, the strong bulls of the country. Half a dozen Chinese soldiers and half a dozen of the Lamas from the monastery constituted his escort. Julian was placed upon the yak which was to carry him, and the others, mounting, immediately surrounded him, and in this manner they started. The ambassador coming up to him for a second, said in a low voice, "Be of good courage, my friend;" but Julian saw that he was afraid to speak before the others. He contented himself, therefore, with giving him a hearty farewell. The strange little cavalcade started with considerable difficulty, for yaks do not like being driven, and take some little time to get into order.

For many days, the journey, although intensely interesting to Julian, was, comparatively speaking, eventless. They wended their way in among the hills, over grassy slopes at their base, making the journey as smooth as possible as long as this could

be done. It seemed to him dull and weary work riding these bulls, which take so much longer getting over the ground than either camels or horses, and once or twice he observed to the leader of the Chinese guard, who always rode beside him, that it would have been much better to have used any other animals.

"Wait," said the Chinaman, "till we get to the Burkhan Bota. If we had camels with us we should only leave them as corpses on that pass, and horses are perfectly useless when we come to making the descent."

Julian made no inquiries as to the horrors which lay before them. He thought he should find out quite soon enough what they were like.

The time passed without his being able to keep any record of it. Night and day succeeded each other, and that was all he knew. He was unable to ascertain exactly how long this journey took, not having taken the precaution of making notes of the nights and days that passed from the commencement. It was certainly some twenty days, but it may have been more, before they sighted a tremendous range

of mountains, which the Chinaman told him was the Burkhan Bota. And he explained to him the quaint meaning of this name. Burkhan is the Mongol for Buddha, and the Abbé Huc's interpretation of the name, which he gives in his travels, is the one commonly accepted by the Chinese, and is simply "Buddha's kitchen."

"What in the world does it mean?" said Julian.

The Chinaman explained to him that this name, which sounded so funny, was really very ominous, as it originated in the mephitic gases which rise all over these mountains, and which make it a terrible task for anything living to cross them. However, it had to be done if Julian wanted to enter Hither Tibet. They reached at sundown one day the foot of the nearest of these mountains. The pass, as it was called by courtesy, lay across this. Julian looked up in the dim light and saw that some twenty miles of climbing lay before them on the morrow. He desired very much to sketch the outline of these most barren and ghoulish mountains, which appeared to him to express in their shapes the very abstract idea of desolation. But he was too weary and worn out,

and resolved that he would make a sketch when they reached the plains on the other side. There is very little choice on such a journey as this as to whether one will work on arriving at the end of a day's travel, or sleep, for sleep comes suddenly like a trance. Julian had only a blanket of felt for his bed, laid upon the ice-cold ground, but, nevertheless, he slept every night with a deepness which he had never before thought possible.

A start was made the very next morning directly after dawn. Evidently his escort looked forward with much dismay to the next part of the journey. Julian was at first so fascinated by the barrenness of the scene that he forgot everything else in contemplating it. The slopes which the yaks slowly and patiently climbed were of clay, out of which rose great rocks of porphyry. No vegetation was to be seen anywhere, except some small bushes of yellow kurile tea. There was very little snow, which is a peculiar feature of this range. A warm wind from the South plains passing over it continually drives the snow even from the heights. Julian thought when he saw these hills without the familiar snow-

cap, that there would be very little hardship, comparatively speaking, in crossing them, and the ascent too was exceedingly gradual. But in a very little while a strange feeling came over the whole party. The animals staggered and swayed as they walked, and Julian began to have a strange sensation of acute headache and intense languor. Soon a feeling as if he could not draw another breath came upon him. "It is impossible to go on," he said, "unless we rest. I am too tired."

"Oh, no," said the Chinaman, "you are not tired. We are in Buddha's kitchen. We must suffer the discomfort of crossing over the vapours which rise from his cookery. Now you may be glad that Ki-Chan had sense enough not to send us upon camels, for they cannot breathe at all in this terrible air." The exertion of movement became each moment more intolerable, and Julian looked in surprise at the dogged obstinacy with which the others urged on their animals, and slowly continued the ascent. Once or twice he begged them to pause, but these men, accustomed to the hardships of the country, knew very well that if they paused, they would never go on again.

No doubt, if he had been the only person whom they had to please, they would have turned back at once; but, as a matter of fact, they knew very well that they could not return—either the Lamas or the soldiers—without having fulfilled their orders of taking him a certain distance into the interior of the country. The fatigue and giddiness which overpowered him became so great that when they neared the summit, he was unable even to appreciate the scene. In the whole string, five isolated peaks only were crowned with snow, all the others were barren alike of this mantle and of anything softening either of verdure or coloured earth. The scene resembled what one imagines the dead side of the moon must look like. They had to camp in this exhausting atmosphere, being perfectly unable to continue marching, and Julian when he thought of his journey afterwards, concluded that the night he passed here was the most dreadful experience of all, for although he lay down on his accustomed bed the fatigue he suffered was of such an extraordinary character that sleep for the first and only time deserted him altogether. He had a sense as if he was not upon the earth, as if he was

being carried through the air, and a dreadful terror oppressed him—the kind of terror that we suffer in a nightmare when experiencing one of our dream journeys. It appeared to him as if the air he breathed must be full of carbolic acid or some other noxious gas. This could not be, as a matter of fact, in spite of the dreadful sensations he experienced, or else he must have been dead before the morning. The descent on the other side of the mountain was comparatively easy on yaks, especially as every yard they traversed took them further out of Buddha's kitchen. The animals recovered some spirit, and riding them became less of a torment; but, nevertheless, the journey which lay before them was enough to intimidate the boldest soul. The vast desert stretched right away as far as the eye could see in every direction, a hideous desert of clay and sand, with an efflorescence of salt upon it here and there, as white as a snowdrift. No vegetation was to be seen, but a tuft occasionally of a grey lichen and a little grass, growing about half a foot high, and so parched by the constant wind that it fell to powder when touched. Yet the animals attempted to eat this dreadful stuff,

and Julian pitied them ; but on such a pilgrimage as this the very capacity to pity dies out in time. One grows accustomed to see the creatures fall every now and then from sheer exhaustion and hunger.

When they came to their second halt in this dreary scene, Julian had recovered a little from his extreme exhaustion, and he determined to seize the first opportunity of making a sketch of the outlines of Buddha's kitchen. He was too tired at night, but resolved to rise early and make a sketch in the morning before they started. This he did, and while the felt tent which they slept under was being taken down and packed up, and the animals got ready, he went a little way from the others and took out his sketch-book. It was the first time he had done anything of this sort since he had started, and it delighted him to feel his pencil in hand once again. He worked on very busily, anxious to complete his task before he was called to mount, as he knew he could not delay the start even a few moments. One can imagine his surprise, therefore, when on looking up he saw that he was surrounded by the Lamas, who had all left their animals standing in order to observe what he

was doing. A second glance at the silent group round him showed him that they were full of rage, and that they directed furious glances at him ; but it appeared they had no intention of interrupting his work. They allowed him to finish it in silence, and then Julian fastened up his sketch-book and put it back within his dress with a feeling of great satisfaction. To his amazement the moment he had done this he was seized by one of the Lamas and another took off the scarf or khata that he wore and bound Julian's arms so that he could not move. Having bound him up very safely the Lamas withdrew from him again and formed a circle around him. Julian looked about for his Chinese escort and saw that these were all mounted and ready to start. Presently the leader observing this group, which showed no signs of getting ready, goaded his yak and rode up to them. Before he could speak Julian addressed him.

"What does this mean ?" he said.

The Chinaman spoke to the Lamas in Tibetan and one of them answered him in a few sullen words. The Chinaman seemed greatly disconcerted and startled at the answer he received.

He dismounted and entering the circle came up to Julian. "Is it true," he said, "that you have been making a map of the country?"

Julian looked at him in surprise. "A map," he said, "no; I have been sketching the mountains."

The Chinaman shook his head. "I don't know what you mean," he answered. "The Lamas have been telling me that you have been drawing, in a book which you carry inside your dress, a map of the country. If this is so I cannot save you. They have always wished you to be killed, believing you to be an English spy, drawing maps for the use of the English army. Ki-Chan knew that this was so; only because of his lofty position did they release you, but now they say that they have proof positive that what they suspected you of is true. Their dread of the English is something extraordinary. If this is so, these men will kill you, and I have no means of saving you."

"What am I to do?" said Julian.

"Let me see," said the Chinaman, "what this drawing is you have made."

"Take the chain that is round my neck," said

Julian, "and you will pull out the book from my dress ; it is attached to it."

The Chinaman did so, drew out the sketch-book, and opened it. When he saw Julian's sketch, he gave a little cry of dismay, and a low ominous murmur came from the Lamas.

"Your fate is sealed," said the Chinaman. "They will kill you. How could you be so mad as to expose yourself to this danger?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE morning after this curious experience of hers, Daphne was quite worn out with the excitement and the hours of thinking which she had devoted to the difficult position she was placed in. It was evident to her that some great power was at work in her life for which she could not account, and yet she could not render up her judgment altogether, because she was too sensible to be entirely credulous. Nevertheless, the sign she had seen appeared to her so strange and so inexplicable that she felt she had no choice but to obey it. There was nothing to be done but watch and wait till she understood the meaning of the mysterious words. She was so little disposed to talk to Miss Riga or to any of the members of the fraternity, who might be in the house, that she did not leave her room until the middle of the day. The consequence was that a little before noon, Miss Riga

came to look for her, carrying in her hands some note-paper of different sizes.

"I want your opinion, Daphne," she said; "you do not seem to take any interest in what is going on."

"Indeed I do, auntie," replied Daphne, "but there is so much! I am tired of thinking!"

"Don't stay to think, child," said Miss Riga; "there is so much to *do*, that there is no time to think; we have real work before us now. Two nights ago I had an order to get this special stamp ready for use. I want you to tell me what you think of it, and which of these specimens you like best."

With this matter-of-fact remark Miss Riga handed to Daphne some sheets of paper of different sizes and styles, and on all of them there was at the head a double triangle with the points downwards, stamped in crimson ink.

Daphne said nothing, but remained gazing at the paper as if petrified.

After a moment Miss Riga noticed this and said, "Why, Daphne, are you ill? What is the matter?"

"There is nothing the matter," said Daphne, with

an effort, "only there is something very strange going on. I, too, have had an order given me about the Crimson Star?"

"No doubt, no doubt," cried Miss Riga with an air of great triumph. "You have had an order to yield it obedience, I feel sure."

"How could you guess that?" exclaimed Daphne, breathlessly.

"Because I too have had the same order," said Miss Riga. "'Tis simple enough. I have yielded my obedience absolutely. Shall you yield yours?"

As she said this she fixed a curious questioning gaze on Daphne, but directly the girl looked up the old lady pretended to be concerned with the stamp on the note-paper.

"I have no choice," said Daphne, "but to yield obedience."

She got up from her chair uneasily, and said with a sigh, "How I wish Julian was here."

"Then you have *not* yielded obedience," said Miss Riga emphatically. "The disciple of the true religion knows no regard, feels no desire, considers nothing but the Master's will."

"How do you know this," said Daphne, pausing in her walking about the room and looking very earnestly at her aunt.

"I know it," said Miss Riga with a sudden change of manner; "I know it because I have been chosen, and I have had my orders explained to me."

She had dropped the quiet observant manner and put on one which was very impressive, a manner which she was wise enough to use only occasionally. It affected Daphne very much, for she had only heard her aunt speak in this tone once or twice in her life.

There was a moment's pause, during which these two who had known each other so long exchanged a regard like that of strangers. "What does she mean?" was in the mind of each. Then Miss Riga rose abruptly from her chair, holding some of the stamped paper in her hand. "This star," she said, "is the same in the Mystic Brotherhood as the sceptre of royalty is in the world. It has been given me straight from the Master to use for mystic purposes, and from every impression of it a mysterious power emanates. By it I command—by this I am

made the Master here.—He chooses to give his orders through me, now that Julian has left us.”

The old woman spoke with a curious dignity an air of dominance and strength—and she looked every inch a witch as she spoke.

“Now, child,” she said, “I have told you the position ; you have received your order, and if you mean to obey it, you have to obey me.”

Miss Riga then went out of the room, taking the paper with her, without saying another word.

Daphne remained standing where she was like one stupefied. After a few moments, a servant came to the room to tell her that Mr. Gray wished to see her. She felt quite undecided whether to see him or not.

“What is the use?” she said to herself ; “I cannot talk to him about these things, and there is nothing else I care to talk about.” And then she suddenly realised that his cheerful presence would be a very pleasant relief to the mood she was in. She therefore said to the servant, who was waiting for her answer, “Yes, I will come down and speak to him.”

Mr. Gray had asked to see her alone, and had therefore been shown into a little morning-room on the ground floor of the house. Daphne looked for him first in the drawing-room, which had now become a species of chapel, used by night and by day. Miss Riga was there talking to Mrs. Flite, and evidently exchanging very confidential remarks, for they both stopped talking when Daphne looked in. Mr. Gray, not being there, she went downstairs, and found him waiting for her in the little room.

"Miss Royal," said he, speaking at once, in an earnest manner very unusual with him, "I believe I have taken a liberty in asking to see you alone, but I have been thinking all night over the extraordinary occurrences of yesterday evening, and I determined to speak to you and risk your displeasure. Do you realise the tremendous pace at which Miss Riga is setting to work? Do you realise the position she is placing you in?"

Daphne looked at him, and meeting the troubled gaze of his honest eyes decided to speak out.

"I think I realise it fully," she said in a low voice, "but I too have had commands laid on me so

strangely that I have no choice but to obey them."

Gray sat looking at her with the most perplexed expression on his face. "Are you all going mad?" at last he said.

"I don't know," said Daphne, "I am torn between faith and incredulity." And then she told him of her experience in the night.

"This is very serious," said Gray, "and I don't see how you are to get out of it without a strong hand to help you. Have you any objection to my becoming a member of the Society, that is, of the inner circle?"

"I have none," said Daphne, "but I must own that I doubt whether you will be accepted."

"That is true," said Mr. Gray, stroking his beard. "Miss Riga does not like me. Never mind, I will find a way to propitiate her; I won't waste a moment now that I know you have no objection." He took up his hat as if to go and then hesitated. "I want to ask you a business question, Miss Royal, if you won't resent it."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Do you know who Julian's heir is?"

"I am," said Daphne. "He made a will just before he went away."

"Merciful powers!" said Mr. Gray, "what a position—well, good-bye for the moment, I must go and prepare my plans."

Daphne returned to her own room lost in thought and speculation, but very soon she was summoned downstairs again by the lunch gong.

At the table she found Miss Riga and also Mrs. Flite who had already taken up residence. They both seemed as if full of some portentous news, something from which Daphne was excluded. Mrs. Flite was much given to chattering, but now she was quite solemn and silent.

"We shall have our rules very soon," remarked Miss Riga in the midst of a dead pause, "all our rules for working the Lamasery. Everything, even diet, is a matter of rule, and in every detail obedience must be given unquestioningly whether in a small matter or a large."

Mrs. Flite cast up her eyes and shook her head from side to side. "Who could refuse it," she said rapturously, "when taken by the hand as we are,

and led on the path to perfection—honoured are we to be chosen out of the world—no self-denial could be too great, no sacrifice too heavy.”

“And yet,” said Miss Riga, “there are many things which it is very hard to bear. It was very hard to have Julian leave us; suppose Daphne should be chosen next to go out of the world into those awful solitudes, could we bear it?”

“Oh! what a dreadful thought,” said Mrs. Flite, applying her lace handkerchief to her eyes. Daphne had been keeping her gaze riveted upon her plate waiting in great anxiety for what might come next. What did come next was enough to startle anybody. A crimson rose fluttered gently through the air and descended upon the plate right under her eyes.

Daphne started and pushed back her chair as if prepared to get up and run away.

“Child!” cried Miss Riga in an excited awestruck voice, “don’t move, the Master must be here. This is some special message from him.”

Nothing further happened, and they all sat silent looking at this rose, which was a large and very beautiful one, of the deepest colour.

"Take it up," said Miss Riga, "perhaps there is something inside it."

"I don't want to touch it," said Daphne.

"You ridiculous child" said Miss Riga. "Are you afraid?"

This was said in such a tone that it stung Daphne. She put out her hand and took up the rose, and as she did so a small piece of paper fluttered out from the petals and fell on the white cloth.

They all sat and looked at it as if it was something which would bite. Presently Daphne, realising the absurdity of the situation, picked it up. It was a very tiny bit of thin paper, and on it was a crimson star evidently traced by hand. A few words were written upon it in a very peculiar handwriting.

"What is it, Daphne, may we know?" said Miss Riga after a few moments of silence and wonder.

Daphne looked up and met her aunt's curious observant gaze. Miss Riga and Mrs. Flite were both leaning forward watching her. She handed the paper across to them. "Read it," she said. "I don't understand it—perhaps you do."

"Dear child," said Mrs. Flite, "how is it likely

I should understand it if you don't, for to you is given the direct inspiration ; I am only a poor believer, though a true one."

Miss Riga slowly read out the words written on the paper :—*If you can be perfectly unselfish and sacrifice all your life for the great truth, to you will be given a great mission.*

"It is signed 'Morial,'" said Miss Riga—"signed by the name of our Master. This is his writing. Oh! Daphne, what can it be that lies before you—how greatly are we honoured in this poor house!"

Mrs. Flite lifted up her hands and eyes to heaven, and echoed the sentiment with "How greatly indeed!"

Daphne got up from the table, and, taking the paper and the rose in her hand, she left the room. The others followed her immediately, and Mrs. Flite, putting her hand on her arm as they went upstairs, drew her into the drawing-room. Daphne had not intended this—she wanted to go away alone to think, but Mrs. Flite would take no excuse.

"You must not shut yourself up, Daphne," she

said, with a purring manner. "All this will be too much for you to bear if you do."

"It is enough to take one's reason away," she added, giving a deep sigh of ecstasy. Daphne agreed with her, but did not say so.

Miss Riga had just come into the room after going upstairs to collect some important papers which she carried in her hand, when a servant announced Mr. Water.

"Is this your friend, Mrs. Flite?" asked Miss Riga.

"Yes," said Mrs. Flite, "it is the Mr. Water I told you of—you will find him a precious friend. He is very earnest, and I am sure that he is inspired. He does but need the right guidance to be of the greatest value to the world. I know that he is unselfish that he would give his life, his time, his money to the great cause, if once convinced."

"His life will be accepted if he is worthy," said Miss Riga very solemnly; "but money,—no one wants that. Have I not been accepted—have I not been honoured by special guidance and direct orders, and I am poor, obscure, penniless. A miserable old woman with nothing of her own, dependent on

others, dependent upon the charity of those who love me."

"Oh! Auntie," said Daphne impulsively, "do not speak like that," for she had never heard her talk in such a way before.

"But it is true, my dear," said Mrs. Flite, "very true, for I also, have nothing. I can give nothing but true service, yet I also have been accepted—is it not wonderful?"

By this time Mr. Water had entered the room. Daphne looked up at him with a faint curiosity. He was a very fair young man, with large, prominent eyes; it is difficult to say anything more about his personal appearance. His manner was both eager and hesitating, and struck anybody who heard him speak for the first time as curiously vague. There now followed a conversation which bewildered Daphne very much. In spite of the absorbing interest of the message which she held in her hand, she could not help listening with a feeling of fascination. Miss Riga led the conversation, and talked like a priestess or the teacher of a great school. Something of the two combined she maintained in her manner. She

talked openly and freely of the Master—Mahatma Morial—as of a person with whom she was positively acquainted. She talked of his intentions—of his vast scheme for the reformation of the religions of the world, and the social life of the world, which he was initiating. She spoke with awe and humility of their own modest house being chosen as the starting point, and themselves as the first disciples and the pioneers!

Daphne had never heard this speech before, although she had heard Miss Riga deliver some of the sentiments it contained. She became very familiar with it afterwards, for it was repeated to every new inquirer.

When Miss Riga had done talking, Mr. Water asked very humbly what qualifications were necessary to enter the fraternity.

“Oh, Mr. Water,” said Mrs. Flite, here interrupting for the first time the conversation, “with your special gifts and your noble aspirations you have every qualification. Dear Miss Riga, I only ask you to look at some of the inspired verses which Mr. Water has produced.”

Mr. Water, blushing with modesty or perhaps

pleasure, produced a roll from his pocket—a ponderous roll of manuscript—which he handed to Miss Riga.

She took it and turned the pages over, just glancing at them. “These are very wonderful,” she said, “I can see that you have direct inspiration. I wonder whether our Master can inspire you—would you like to try?” Mr. Water blushed more deeply still, and stammered an unintelligible assent.

Miss Riga rose with great dignity, walked down the room beckoning Mr. Water to follow her, and unlocked the doors which hid Julian’s portrait of his Master. Mr. Water trembled visibly as he stood before this splendid figure and gazed at it. As he stood like this, Mrs. Flite approached him, and stretching out one hand, directed it towards him, and uttered the word “Sleep.” He turned his eyes helplessly towards her, and she, taking him by the arm, led him to a chair, into which he sank.

“What a wonderful subject!” exclaimed Miss Riga in a whisper. “Oh wonderful!” said Mrs. Flite, in the same tone; “you can have no idea what he is!”

She took a paper and pencil and placed them in his hands. Very soon he began to write in a helpless, mechanical way, and after covering one or two pages, sank back in the chair as if exhausted. The two old ladies snatched up the pages as they fell, and read them with whispered ejaculations of awe and wonder. Presently Mrs. Flite awoke him with some of the "reverse passes," as the mesmerists call them. He looked round blankly and anxiously.

"What has happened ?" he said.

Miss Riga put her hand on his arm and said very solemnly, "I think you will be accepted. I shall call a special meeting to-night at eight o'clock—if you will be here then, I will give you your answer."

The young man felt that he had received his dismissal, and, dazed though he was, found his hat and took her departure. Daphne was about to rouse herself and ask some questions, when another visitor was announced, who must have met Mr. Water on the stairs. This was Mr. Gray.

With a passing glance of intelligence at Daphne, he went direct to Miss Riga, and said briefly enough

that he wished to see her alone. Miss Riga took him away with her. She returned in about a quarter of an hour, looking very pleased and contented. During her absence, Mrs. Flite had been maintaining a species of cooing soliloquy, Daphne meantime sitting still lost in thought, and forgetting to answer her. Miss Riga came up and took her seat between them.

"Another serious candidate already—Mr. Gray has asked to join us." This interested Daphne.

"Shall you accept him, Auntie?" she asked.

"I!" said Miss Riga; "it does not lie with me. I have to ask the Master for him as well as for Mr. Water. I have promised them both their answers to-night. I must go now to my own room and seek inspiration."

All the rest of that day there was a deep solemnity over the house. When dinner came, the meal was conducted as if it was a funeral feast, and Daphne felt herself growing more sad and depressed with every passing moment. The atmosphere of solemnity and mystification was almost more than she could bear. Immediately after dinner the members

of the little lodge arrived ; there were only two already accepted and chosen besides Mrs. Flite, Daphne, and Miss Riga herself, so that the meeting was soon convened. Then came Mr. Gray and Mr. Water. Mr. Water trembled as he crossed the room in front of the portrait, although it was now concealed behind locked doors. The easel was dressed like an altar, with candles lit on each side, and on a little table in front of it a great bouquet of white flowers. This last, it appeared later in the evening, had been sent as a humble offering by Mr. Water. He trembled at the very sight of his own offering in so august a place.

Miss Riga immediately went to business with all the dignity of the Grand Master of a Freemasons' Lodge. She made her preliminary speech, which was much the same as that of the evening before, and she then announced, in the most solemn manner, that Mr. Water and Mr. Gray were both accepted.

"We have now a good working body. With a strong band of outside workers under us, we are enough to influence the whole world. Great work

has been begun already—Mr. Water is evidently one of those pure, translucent mediums that can be used by the Master without difficulty.

“The first few pages of a book which shall revolutionise thought and change the whole aspect of religious life, have already been written by his pen, under the influence of the Master’s portrait. This book is to be a history of the world since the first thought of it dawned in the mind of the Infinite!”

“Oh! how wonderful!” ejaculated Mrs. Flite; “how marvellously are we honoured!”

“Honoured indeed!” said Miss Riga; “we are chosen, that is more! We shall have to suffer—we shall have to sacrifice all—but, in recompense, we know that we are chosen. It will be one of the rules of the Lamasery that wherever we meet for business or discussion, some little study of the great laws of occult life, as our Master will give them to us, shall always be done, for we have much to learn. We cannot do better than study this book which is to be written through Mr. Water’s mediumship, as it is being produced.” To this there was a universal murmur of assent.

"Let us begin at once, then," she said and, taking up the papers, she handed them to Mrs. Flite, asking her to read aloud. This the lady did in a high-pitched, monotonous voice.

"In the beginning of all things there was nothing.

"There was less than nothing, for there was no mind to realise the nothingness.

"In the beginning there was not chaos, for there was no consciousness with which to know there was no chaos.

"In the beginning there was neither light nor dark nor heat nor cold nor shape nor form.

"Nor yet was there any knowledge that these things were not.

"In the beginning there was not the spirit of the world, which has created and built it up.

"Nor was there any intelligence to know that this spirit was not.

"In the beginning there was neither sun nor moon nor stars.

"Nor was there any fire, nor anything of which chaos could be made.

"In the beginning there was neither movement nor stillness.

"Nor was there anything which could move or be silent."

Mrs. Flite paused from want of breath. The company sat still, as though overcome by awe. In the midst of this religious silence, Mr. Gray's voice was heard. "Dear me!" he said, "where was Moses when the light went out?"

CHAPTER XIII.

JULIAN ARUNDEL looked around and saw no succour. He gave himself up for lost this time—there appeared to be no hope whatever.

The Lamas were not only hostile but terribly enraged. One glance at their faces showed him that intercession even of the most powerful sort would be useless with them, and now his Chinese friend acknowledged himself helpless. When Julian looked round he noticed the other Chinamen, standing together and observing the scene with great interest, and then a doubt crossed his mind whether, as a matter of fact, these Chinese were not just as hostile to him as the Tibetans, and simply playing into their hands.

This awful doubt cast out the last vestige of hope.

Mechanically, rather than with any object, he glanced round the horizon. Nothing but desert. Nothing but sand and clay except in one direction, where the high peaks of the Koiran mountains were visible against the sky. What use was it to look round on such a scene as this with any hope of help? But as Julian looked, his attention was for a moment attracted by what appeared to be a black speck moving rapidly towards them across the desert. His sight was sufficiently practised now to tell him that this was a horseman. Only for a moment did he feel any interest in the circumstance, and then it was such an interest as a dying man feels in watching the movements of a fly. A horseman in this desert could be nothing to him—a native mountaineer, or, perhaps, one of the terrible Kolas.

His eyes came back to study the faces of the crowd that watched him. His doom was written there. The word "Death" was as clearly conveyed by their glances as if spoken. All that remained to him was to know of what character that death was to be. He expected torture, and he knew that an European's imagination in such matters is weak. He

tried to check this dreadful train of conjecture, and having resigned himself to the fact that his pilgrimage was over, that he would never cross that desert, and never learn what he came to know, his mind reverted to thoughts of Daphne and of home. His head drooped on his breast and he stood there silent and motionless, hardly conscious of the ominous murmur of the voices of the men around him.

They were arranging or discussing some detail evidently, and he thought it was lucky that he could not understand their discussion. He determined to die like a stoic, and think as little about it as possible. Ah, but Daphne would never know,—would never know,—that hurt him most of all. She would never know how far he had fought, and how much he had suffered. His head drooped lower, and the scene he was in faded right away from his sight. He was back in his studio with Daphne.

Suddenly he was startled, and roused out of this sad reverie by a tremendous thundering sound. It was the noise made by a great horse approaching at full speed. He did not trouble to raise his head even, so completely was he occupied in facing his

fate,—another enemy made but little difference to him now !

The furious rider dashed straight up to the group and into its centre, the men all backing right and left away from the hoofs of the great horse. It was an immense creature—black, and fire seemed to come from its nostrils. Julian's artistic eye noticed the size and beauty of the horse in spite of his trouble, for it was brought to a standstill right in front of him. What a size it was ! It seemed to fill the sky.

The others all shrank back terrified, but Julian stood still. In an instant something inexplicable happened. Before he had time to realise that the horse had a rider, he was snatched up as a child might be, by a hand that gripped like iron, and found that he was himself upon this horse. He knew not who else rode it, or who guided it, for it was carrying him across the desert at the same terrific speed at which it had come. He was blinded, breathless, helpless, only able to cling to the long thick mane, and keep his seat. There was some one sitting behind him, that he well knew, but it was impossible to look round. His sight was blurred and bewil-

dered by the tremendous rapidity of the pace at which they went. It seemed to him that no animal ever bred to the desert could keep up such a pace as this. Surely it was not natural !

They fled across the great expanse straight in the direction of those mountain peaks, which he had so long looked at with weary desire, and which now seemed to come visibly nearer with every moment of this extraordinary flight.

Was this thing a horse on which he rode ? he asked himself, or was it some great bird ;—or was he dreaming ? At last, strong though he was, nature gave way, and he swooned on the neck of the great horse as a woman might have done ; but he did not fall. He was held in his place by a strong hand. A great blank of unconsciousness followed. He fancied afterwards that he came to life once or twice during this dream-like flight, falling back again into a stupor. He remembered vague glimpses of some strange experience, such a one as comes to us in delirium.

When he woke to any clear knowledge of life he was lying down in great comfort on soft pillows,

but he was not indoors. His wakening faculties soon told him that. He looked up into a low canopy of embroidered cloth and fine woven curtains were drawn round him. He was being carried, and after a little while he recognised the movement, and knew that he was in a litter. He was resting—he was refreshed—he could feel that he had been taken care of, and that some cordial had been given to him to restore his strength. He was profoundly comfortable, and these curtains so prettily embroidered with an arabesque of flowers shut him in from all the world. He conjectured from the slant of the litter that he was being carried up a very steep incline.

A fever of curiosity rose in his mind. "Where can I be?—what can have happened to me?" he kept saying to himself, and then he longed to draw the curtains apart and look through. And then he dreaded to do so, and the dread was so much greater than the longing that he lay still—he knew not how long—it seemed to him for hours—without making any efforts to satisfy his curiosity. But at last the longing conquered, and very cautiously he raised one hand and drew back one of the curtains a

very little. All that he saw at first was that he had left the desert, and that he was being taken up a very difficult pass. "What mountains are we crossing?" he asked himself in the greatest perplexity of mind, "surely I am not being taken back again. No—this vegetation is new, I see some tiny shrubs!"

When he saw these little plants his heart gave a leap of delight, for he knew that he was not being carried back across the dreadful Buddha's Kitchen, where nothing but parched grass grows anywhere.

"No—this was something different. Was it possible that he was being carried across the Koiran Mountains? If so, he was indeed helped on his way beyond his wildest hopes! But who was doing this? Into whose hands had he fallen?"

When he came to this conjecture he tried to look through the curtains more fully, though very cautiously, to see who his bearers were. A glimpse of them showed him that their aspect would not enlighten him in anyway. Evidently they were simply native mountaineers, peasant Tibetans of the shepherd order, who are accustomed to climb the passes just as the goats and the yaks are.

He sank back on his pillows more exhausted with thought and perplexity than with the fatigues of his strange journey. He determined that his best course was to keep still until some event should take place. Very soon something did happen. A halt was called, and as soon as the litter had been put down, some one came and drew apart the curtains. Julian lifted himself upon his elbow, and looked with intense eagerness at the figure which stood there.

It was tall and commanding, the figure of a warrior, but the face was hidden—hidden by a mask. Julian felt more terror at the sight of this mask than he had experienced during any of his previous adventures, for he knew not what it meant. Who was it that was thus silently regarding him? After a moment of this silent inspection, the figure turned to some one standing by, and putting out one hand took a glass, which he then offered to Julian.

Julian lay still, half hesitating ; he remained gazing at the figure, and then at the glass and the hand—such a beautiful hand he had never seen before ! It had not the special beauty of a woman's hand because it was so full of strength, but it was more exquisitely

shaped than any woman's he had ever seen ; and in this hand was held a glass, of a kind which he had never seen before or ever heard of. Its shape was as exquisite as that of the hand which held it, and it was so thin that the golden liquid within it seemed like a sunbeam unconfined.

Julian understood after a moment that he was to drink this—this sunbeam. He still hesitated—was this the refined and subtle manner in which the Tibetans had chosen to kill him ? While he reflected on this, a strange thing happened—in the very body of the liquid flamed out a crimson star. Julian took the glass instantly, and drained it. It was taken from him again with something which seemed almost like a caress, and the subtle magnetism which came from that touch affected him more than any words could have done. A chain appeared to have fallen upon his spirit. It was formed of a delightful series of sensations—it might have been a chain of roses, but yet he knew that it *was* a chain. He tried to analyse this feeling, and tried to keep the curtain open, but his mind sank under the instant influence of the wine—of the touch—he knew not which, and the curtains

were drawn together from outside close and firmly. In what seemed less than a second to him Julian was again unconscious. This time his sleep, or swoon, or trance—he never knew what it was—may have lasted a few hours or it may have lasted a few days for all that he could ever tell. When he tried to recall what had happened he remembered that it was daybreak when he made that fatal sketch of Buddha's Kitchen. When next he was able to take any intelligent survey of the scene in which he found himself it was the evening. It did not occur to him just then to wonder whether it was the evening of the same day, but afterwards he often speculated as to how many suns he had lost sight of in crossing the Koiran Mountains. For he *had* crossed them. He knew enough of their outlines—he had studied them sufficiently, to recognise them, and when again he looked round he saw a horizon bounded by them. They hemmed in the landscape on every side. So amazed was he when he realised this that he started instantly to his feet and looked again. Not until he had done this and fully convinced himself that he was not dreaming, but that what he saw were the real mountain-peaks did he look down

upon the scene close at hand. He drew a deep breath of amazement. Never even in his wildest fancies had he pictured anything so beautiful as that which he now saw !

How he had been brought here—how he came to be here alone now—were things he could not even stop to puzzle over. He only knew that he was standing on the green grass of a velvet lawn and that he must have been lying on it when his consciousness returned so suddenly. The sun was just setting and a marvellous rose colour flooded all the sky, while a golden haze, almost like gold dust, lay across the valley in which he stood.

For the first few moments of delight he absolutely forgot himself—his mission—everything. Julian Arundel—Daphne—and the Master, were all alike swept out of his mind by the intense pleasure that he experienced. A great throb of delight passed through his whole being as he looked round from side to side on this wonderful scene. We know something of what it was like, for Julian stood upon the lawn that lay outside Morial's home. He looked at the beautiful surroundings which Morial had gathered about him,

but he experienced much more than that. He actually breathed the same air as Morial, for Morial's power was so great that he altered the atmosphere in which he lived.

His first breath of air drawn in the fastness sacred to Morial gave to Julian the first moment of real pleasure that he had ever known in all his life. His only conscious thought was, "Have I ever lived before this? Am I only just born; and was all that dreary time a mere nothing? Oh! what a marvellous thing is life if this be it."

And yet Julian had the advantage of being a strong man who could enjoy all the ordinary pleasures of life, and of having the high-strung artistic temperament to give him keen enjoyment as well. He had always supposed that he was one of those specially gifted to enjoy, but this awakening in Morial's garden showed him that he had been, as it were, asleep hitherto. He found, moreover, every sense intensified. He could not tell whether it was in the intrinsic beauty of the scene or in his keener faculty that the delight lay which he found in looking round him. "If I were to die now," he thought to himself, "I

would willingly take all the suffering I have been through for the sake of these few moments ! ”

A wakening curiosity led him to turn round and look behind him. A great rock formed the background, rising straight up into the sky. Against its darkness stood out the beautiful flowering trees which sheltered Morial's home.

Only a little way across the velvet grass Julian could see an open door framed with a perfect wreath of tropical flowering creepers. The sight of this struck him with amazement. He could see through the doorway that it admitted immediately into a large room. This room was lit by a very soft silvery light, and moreover, the rays from the setting sun fell across the threshold. He could see that it was furnished in the greatest luxury and with every sign of what we usually call civilisation. A table near the window was covered with books and papers. Further back in the room he could dimly see another table laid as for a meal, spread with a white cloth lace-edged, glittering with glass and silver and brilliant with flowers. Great divans heaped with silken cushions

went round the walls, and above them the walls were lined with books.

Julian stood transfixed with amazement as he studied these details. What a hermitage was this to chance upon in a savage country ! Surely, it must be a dream—a mirage. Presently he saw something move across the room, coming from far back in it, and approaching the door. Nothing human this—and, as he recognised instantly, something terribly savage ! With a stealthy movement it came out and stood on the threshold, and then Julian saw that it was a panther.

While the creature stood there he waited once again for his fate. To move was useless.

He knew that if it sprang on him he could not escape.

It *did* spring, and there flashed across him that moment of excitement amounting almost to unconsciousness in which a man gives himself up for lost and yet determines to fight hard for his life.

But simultaneously with the panther's bound came the sound of a voice.

"Edoné !" cried this voice. That was all—but

the tone of command was enough. The creature crouched and drew back, and Julian stood breathless, but at ease again, knowing he was saved. Something else crossed the room in the same direction as that in which the panther had come. It was a human figure this time. A young man dressed simply in the ordinary blue robe with which Julian was now familiarised, came to the window and stepped out on to the grass. He raised his hand as he passed the panther and it shrank away from him. He approached Julian, coming quite close to him, and with a smile addressed him immediately in English.

"I am afraid Edoné startled you," he said, "but you need never fear him again now."

Julian was very much more startled by this apparition than he was by that of the panther.

He saw before him a young man of his own age, of the most wonderful beauty, and with the most charming manner.

That was all he realised in the first moment, and he tried to speak and answer this friendly address in his own language which was the very last he expected to hear spoken, but found his powers of

speech failed him. He was overcome by a sensation perfectly new to him—a sense of attraction, so strong that it seemed to pull his very heart-strings, drew him towards this wonderful being—a feeling of devotion inexplicable because it sprang so instantly into life—seized upon him. No woman had ever affected him like this. His love for Daphne was child's play beside this feeling. He wanted to fall on his knees, or do something which to an Englishman appears absurd, but he controlled himself, and after a slight pause which appeared nothing more than that of natural astonishment, he succeeded in speaking.

“I am more startled by hearing you use my own language.”

“That is very likely, but you must get used to being surprised here. No doubt you will be astonished, having come from a very matter-of-fact country where I believe you are dependent upon the post and telegraph, to know that I quite expected you, that you are here as my guest, and that I shall be very glad if you will come in to supper.”

With this speech the young man turned and led

the way through the open door into the lighted room.

Julian looked to the skies and the earth to see if there were any more miracles about, and then quickly followed his mysterious host. He did not know until he entered the room and sat down to the perfectly appointed table that he was quite tired and quite hungry. But so he was, and the rest and refreshment of the beautiful surroundings were most delightful and cheering. He was very surprised (or rather that is hardly correct, for his power of being surprised was worn out ; I should rather say he was very much relieved) to find the supper a delicate meal, such as an epicure of any nation would appreciate. This was a great change from the raw meat, the barley cakes, and the dreadful buttered tea, to which he had been so long accustomed.

And his host, who talked lightly and easily to him, just as if they had been two college friends meeting in his rooms, sat opposite, and poured him out from time to time wine in a glass like that from which he had drunk on the journey.

The first time the glass was handed to him he was

so wrapt in admiration of the beautiful face opposite that he did not notice it. The second time his eyes fell on it he recognised its peculiar shape, and he recognised also the hand that held it.

This, then, was his masked guide across the mountain ! And the wine, *was* it wine ? or was it fire and light ? It seemed to flash into Julian's brain and give him new intelligence and new powers. He could not bring himself to ask any question which might break the charm of this ideal supper. He prized the moments which passed by in the delightful intercourse with this stranger, who entertained him so royally, who laughed with him like a boy, and talked of all things in heaven and earth. Well, if not of all, of strangely many !

It struck Julian suddenly with amazement that this man, whom he found in the inaccessible fastness of Tibet, was talking to him of the politics of Europe, and showed an infinitely greater knowledge of the events of the day than he himself possessed.

This thought having once entered his mind, he could not banish it again—a kind of intellectual terror seized him and chased away the freshness of his

pleasure. A wild craving to solve the mystery of the place he was in, and the person he talked to took possession of him. Like everything else he had experienced since he had been in this strange place, his emotion was keener than anything he had ever felt before. It overpowered him—it was uncontrollable.

He started suddenly from his chair, and stood a moment looking at the beautiful youth who sat opposite him with a smile of amusement on his face.

“Who are you?” said Julian, “I cannot rest till I know. Who are you that talks like this of the affairs of all the world, though you dwell in a hermitage? Who are you that talks of men’s minds and hearts, as though you read them?”

“What?” was the answer, uttered with the most delicate inflection of amused scorn, “what?—the disciple with the clairvoyant vision—the disciple that can read that which is not written! Can you not answer your own question?”

Julian leaned across the table and stared at the brilliant young face which fascinated him as he had never been fascinated before.

"What?" he said, in his turn, "is it you?"

"My name is Morial," said the other, and laughed his exquisite musical laugh, as he watched Julian's face.

"Have you not painted my portrait!" he went on, "do you not recognise your model?"

"I recognise my own incapacity," answered Julian; "I recognise the blindness of my sight and the feebleness of my hand! I know you now, but, God! I never dreamt that a man could have such beauty! and when I saw you from the other side of the world I suppose I was half blindfolded."

"That is not altogether the explanation," said Morial, lightly, getting up from his chair, "partly it is, but I am in my youngest humour to-night. You would not have known me at all had you seen me when I came on my good horse, Agape, to save you from those murderers; I looked very different then. Is not Agape a good horse? Did not he carry you well across the leagues of the desert? Agape is one of my oldest friends and the next is Edoné. Imprisoned souls both. My best prayer for you is that you may never earn their fate!"

Julian did not attempt to understand him.

Morial was moving about the room, and Julian stood watching his movements, fascinated absolutely by their beauty, and absorbed in his own amazement. "I fancied our meeting so different!" he said. "I have often tried to picture it. I thought I should fall on my knees and ask you to teach me."

"Well," said Morial, with a laugh, "you wanted to. Don't doubt yourself; you *did* recognise me, but I wished for an hour of amusement. I do not often entertain a nineteenth-century Englishman in my hermitage. To speak correctly, I have never entertained one before. I liked talking to you for a little while, and let me tell you that I never lose a pleasure unless a duty compels me to. Life is too precious to waste the value of one moment of it. Now," he went on, altering his manner to that easy one of the host, which he had worn at supper, "you had better rest. You have had no natural sleep for some time."

"Ah!" said Julian, "I thought I had been in a strange state."

"Oh! I could never have got you here if you

had been awake," said Morial smiling, "you are such an excitable creature, and an Englishman is so obstinate. Besides you would have died under the fatigue. Now, I want you to sleep, but only for two or three hours. You have come here to work and to learn, and you must begin your apprenticeship. I shall rouse you at midnight, when you will have slept off the effects of the long journey and all this excitement. I must preserve your physique, it is a fine one, and youth is more valuable than gold or learning in the path you have chosen. Come."

He lifted a curtain and went through an archway and Julian followed him, much too bewildered to be anything but submissive. The corridor they entered was full of the same silvery light as the room they had been in. The impression produced on Julian's mind was that they were in a great house. He had just sense enough to be surprised at this, because on the outside the house had appeared very small. He knew afterwards that most of it actually lay within the rock, and he found out, but this not until long afterwards, that the room he rested in was within the rock and just below the hall in which the great

crystal hung. His bed was actually beneath the crystal, but to-night there was nothing to make him guess this. The walls were covered with embroidered cloths, the floor was hidden by skins. The dim light which came from no visible lamp, was pale and soft. The bed struck him with instant admiration. It was of ivory, and shaped like a boat, and it swung very lightly as he laid down in it with a delightful soothing motion. The couch was so soft that to his tired frame, so long accustomed to lie on the hard ground, it seemed like a bed of rose leaves, and it smelled like one too.

But a stronger scent overpowered this fragrance, the scent of a burning pastille, which faintly filled the room. It was a different scent from that of the pastilles of the Lamasery—more subtle and more intoxicating. It appeared to him to affect his brain as the wine had done.

Morial said no "good-night." He led him into the room, and, with a wave of his hand which brought upon Julian a deep sense of sleep, turned, and left him.

What rest that was which came to Julian!—as de-

lightful—as full of keen enjoyment as his sensations when he first woke to life outside Morial's home.

His last thought as he sank off was : “What a marvellous thing life must be when one has really learnt to live, if I can find such pleasure as this so soon !”

CHAPTER XIV.

JULIAN was awakened by a light touch on his hand—a touch as light as the fall of a roseleaf, and yet it went so straight to his brain that he was wide awake in an instant. When he fell asleep the light in his room had been silvery and bright, although very dim. Now, when he opened his eyes, it was much stronger, but it had a kind of coppery tinge, like one sometimes sees in a sunset, but more often in the light of a fire. That was what first attracted his attention, but in the next instant his whole mind was occupied by the figure which stood beside him. He knew immediately that it was Morial, although without a certain amount of intuition he would probably not have recognised him. The face had changed so completely that it seemed as if one or the other, must be a mask. The same features were there, but the brilliant creature of supper-time had given place to a

stern and cold ascetic, more than stern and cold, hard and repellant. A shiver passed through Julian's frame as he looked at this face, which seemed to be made of iron. The cold blue eyes looked down on him with a fixed, steady gaze, which he felt compelled to answer ; he could not look away.

"It is time to rise," said Morial. "Come with me."

Without hesitation Julian obeyed. How could he do otherwise with that unwavering gaze fixed upon him. Wait, you who think it is possible to repel any such gaze as this, till you have been swayed by a powerful hypnotist, or taken half out of the track of reason by some half maniacal soul, that desires to influence you !

The singular gaze which Morial fixed upon Julian, brought into his mind immediately that dreadful thought of insanity. He had only seen such a look as that once before, and that was in the eyes of an inmate of a solitary cell at Bedlam. But there was no resisting it.

He rose quickly out of the ivory couch in which he lay. Even this had changed its appearance perhaps

merely from the change of light, but it no longer looked so white or so beautiful as when he entered the room. Morial was dressed in a scarlet robe, which fell in straight lines from neck to feet. He carried on his arm another garment of the same kind which he gave to Julian.

"Put this on," he said. "Come with me."

Julian, who, though he had studied the mysteries and beauties of colour, had never studied its meanings, dressed himself in the robe of the Duppa, and gowned as a novitiate of the Black Order, he followed his Master in curiosity and awe.

The keen feeling of pleasure which the first meeting with Morial had given him was gone. He did not feel now that this man was a friend, as he had felt a few hours ago. Then it seemed to him as if he had met the dearest one of all in the world, the one who would give him the most pleasure, and whom he could trust absolutely, as he could trust no none else. All this was gone, the cold glitter of those steel blue eyes had dissipated the delightful fantasy. But Julian did not distrust his Master, he only feared him; he had learned enough of occultation to appre-

hend that the master is regardless of his pupil's welfare for his own sake, the master's one thought being the good of the world. What he felt, therefore, as he followed Morial along the corridor was that now he had indeed met with his master, one who would judge him without favour, and compel him to show all the strength and value of his character.

They went up a long flight of stone stairs, and in a few moments passing the crouching figure of the panther, they went together into what we have called Morial's laboratory. Julian had no conception of where he was, for the room was perfectly dark, and from the moment he passed the threshold of the door, there was no evidence to any of his senses that any other living was there. He only felt that he was in darkness and silence. Perhaps this state of things only lasted a moment, or it may have lasted hours, it was impossible for him to tell. He had just begun to feel that he must shriek aloud, not from fear, but from a horror which this blank darkness brought upon him, when his attention was arrested by the sudden appearance of a faint grey cloudiness just in front of where he stood.

Immediately a great contentment took the place of the horror. If his clairvoyance was to be developed by this ordeal, then he was well pleased to bear it. The greyness grew larger; then formed itself into shapes. Very dim shapes these were at first, but presently he fancied he could see the pillars and archways of a great hall. By degrees the outlines became more definite, and he felt that he was *in* this Hall, though only just within the door, still really within it, and the door was closed behind him.

There was a great altar at the far end, a strange altar, not decked with flowers nor lit with candles, and yet offerings were placed there. Shadowy figures slowly moved towards it through the dimness of the hall, and put upon it vessels which they carried. This went on slowly but continuously, and Julian strained his sight to the utmost to try and understand what it meant. Presently he saw that all these figures were blindfolded; more than that, they were swathed, bound, wrapped, like Egyptian mummies, with scarcely any freedom, even of the limbs, save just enough to move with difficulty, and just enough to carry the vessels which they all bore. They could

not see nor hear, nor speak, and it came to him as a most strange thing, that so completely were they swathed and bound, that, not any one of them could guess who their companions were, not even those who stood on each side of them. What a mysterious isolation it seemed of the members of the silent crowd ! And what were these vessels that they all carried ? Each one as he with difficulty reached the altar, lifted his arms and placed the vessel which he held, upon the very altar itself, and then, after a moment's pause, turned and moved away in a strange, wandering, helpless way, like something lost and without aim.

Some of those who had been to the altar came very near Julian, and he looked at them with an intense curiosity. It was useless to speak to them, useless to touch them ; they were more effectually separated from him and from each other than if they had been creatures of a different planet. Some power which was not his own seemed to awaken in Julian. Did it come from Morial ? was he still standing by him ? He did not know, he could not guess, but presently he found that, not his own volition and with most

unexpected ease, he had himself reached the altar. He stood where he could look into these vessels; and what was within them? Only a few ashes—just a few ashes at the bottom of each. As soon as he had seen this, a dreadful oppression, a sense of deep despair came over him, and it seemed as if the place that he was in was no longer supportable. Immediately, he appeared to be carried rather than led, to the doorway. The door was opened and a breath of more natural air revived him. Morial stood beside him, still looking at him with that cold, glittering gaze. Julian feared him now, but his curiosity was too great for him to remain silent.

“What have I seen,” he said; “what were those ashes?”

“You have seen,” said Morial, “the ceremony of sacrifice. Those ashes are the ashes of the heart. Each human creature that enters the Great Life, must first burn out his heart and offer it willingly. That is what now lies before you. It is useless for me to ask you whether you are ready, but I shall soon know. Follow me.”

Julian followed his Master, as he called him now

in his own mind, as obediently and as mutely as a dog would have done, but at the same time he was plunged in profound and terrible thought. What did this thing mean? He had hoped that the hardship had quickened, not killed his heart, and he resolved to wait and try and discover the true meaning of this mystery before he entered upon it.

Morial took him through a darkened arch-way in the great room where the crystal hung. There were many other things in the room to attract attention, and Julian did not at first notice the great mirror of the soul. Indeed, he did not realise at all that it was there, or what it was that he looked at, when at last he saw it. All he knew was that he was looking straight into his old studio back in London. How home-like and how pleasant it looked! It was perfectly real to him, and the revulsion of feeling, after the terrible gloom and despair with which the masked figures he had seen had inspired him, was so keen as to make him entirely forget his present surroundings. A figure moved across the studio, and so completely was he carried away by the illusion that he started forward and cried out "Daphne," and the figure

paused and turned, and Daphne's face was lifted towards him! Surely she had heard him.

If so, the sound of his voice brought her no pleasure. A look of anxiety, even of despair, came upon her face. She was dressed in white, and as Julian noticed this, and how dark the room was otherwise, it suddenly struck him that this was the night, and that Daphne was wandering about the house really as if she was a ghost.

Why was she so restless, so anxious, so nervous? And he saw that she looked from side to side as if in terror at some possible apparition. He uttered her name again, almost unconsciously, and with the idea of reassuring her. She started violently, and then suddenly turned and fled, and the crystal relapsed into darkness, for it seemed that it was the lamp in Daphne's hand which had illumined it. How changed she was! how altered! Julian stood lost in amazement and distress. Then suddenly he again felt that light touch which awoke him from his sleep, and, turning, saw Morial standing by his side.

"It is nothing to you," said Morial, "if that beautiful girl became mad with trouble or dies of trouble

and grief. What should it be to you? There are many beautiful girls in the world, but in the fierce fight of the great life they are nothing. They amount for no more than the midges that buzz round you on a summer's day; if the life of one of these is snuffed out, what matters it?"

"What makes you talk like this?" said Julian; "surely you do not wish me to be heartless? If Daphne is suffering I must return to her."

"Do so, then, quickly, my friend," said Morial, "and do not waste my time. That which you have first to offer on the great altar is the vessel containing the ashes of your heart. I have shown you this once very plainly. Make no mistake: the neophyte sacrifices all that the ordinary man is bound by; the ordinary limitations of preference or liking can easily be conquered; but let me tell you that he who loves is utterly useless in the life which you wish to enter. We are compassionate, but we cannot allow ourselves to *feel*, the stakes at issue are so great as to enter into the realm of abstractions, and we should fall from our high duties if we allowed the thought of any one person or of any number of indi-

viduals to affect us. Until you have learned this lesson it is useless to think of going on."

Having so spoken the Master turned away as if to attend to something more important than a neophyte's educational welfare. And he left upon Julian's soul the same awful sense of dreariness and desolation which had been given to it by the vision of the Ceremony of Sacrifice. To his imagination it had always appeared that the life of the neophyte would be more intense and much fuller than the life of the ordinary man, and that the life of the Master would be a glory of warmth and of love. The keen pleasure which Morial had imparted to him when first he arrived seemed to warrant this hope and make it a justifiable faith, and now this crumbled to ashes.

He remained standing without desire to move, and thinking deeply over Morial's dreadful words. The light about him was very dim and grey as his own thoughts, but suddenly he was startled by a brilliant flash straight before his eyes. It was in the crystal, and in a moment the whole of the great mirror was one glow of light. He did not realise this. All that he realised was that the light in front of him was his

studio again, but lit now as if for a great entertainment. All the wax candles in the silver sconces, which he himself had placed upon the walls, were burning, and soon he saw that the room was full of people. They did not come in, he did not see them enter, but they slowly became visible to his sight, and the walls were lined with chairs, and all the chairs were filled. And then he saw, too, that the room was altered. For a long time he could not understand it. He saw the great archway which had been opened between the houses. He saw that there were people in the further room ; he saw his portrait of Morial standing upon an easel in its accustomed place, but in a new frame and hidden behind locked doors.

Just when he took in the whole scene, Miss Riga entered the room, and walking up to the easel unlocked the doors and showed the splendid portrait of Morial in his crimson dress. Julian drew his breath as he looked at it. Yes, that was Morial as he painted him as he first saw him in the mystic vision, and that was Morial as he was to-night—cold, heartless, cruel, inexorable. But immediately his attention was

distracted from the picture by the sound of a voice which penetrated to his ears. It was Miss Riga's voice ; he recognised it, although it appeared to come from a great distance and sounded as if carried to him through a kind of tube ! Still, he could hear every word of it plainly ; and he listened in the utmost amazement to a speech which she delivered standing there in front of the portrait.

“Surely this is some fantastic dream,” he thought to himself. “This is never Aunt Riga standing there addressing these people?”

But it was true ! and its truth was made clear to him as he watched this scene.

CHAPTER XV.

HE stood spellbound, listening to these words uttered on the other side of the world. To him everything that was said was perfectly novel, and he could not understand it. Miss Riga delivered the speech with which Daphne was now familiarised ; just a little learned and a little elaborated for her larger audience. Perhaps it would be hard to enlarge the idea of founding a religion which is to oust Christianity from the face of the world, but it is not so hard as it seems, with such a creed as Buddhism to fall back upon, and this was Miss Riga's position. She was a very clever woman, and she knew exactly how to use her opportunities.

Julian listening to her, separated by the surface and centre of the globe from her actual personality, yet stood amazed, and indeed appalled by her power.

If all she said were true, it was she that was the Master ; if all she said were true, she knew more of Morial than he did, and yet he was close to the Master, able to speak to him if he wished. What could this mean ? All these people who sat surrounding his familiar room were spellbound, listening to her words. Who were they ? What were they ? What had they to do with himself or his mission ? It seemed to him that he ought to interfere, to speak to Miss Riga, and to tell her that he did not understand her authority for such words as she uttered, for they were the words of a high priestess ; in fact, in what she said she absolutely claimed to be this ; and how was this ? For when he left London, surely but a short time ago, Miss Riga had looked upon his mission as the enterprise of a madman, as the vagary of a half crazed painter !

She talked and talked, and at last when it seemed she had said enough (as perhaps she stopped only for lack of breath, he could not tell which, but at all events she stopped), she crossed the room and sat down in her accustomed chair. The people in the room remained silent for a moment, but soon a dark,

tall young man rose, and advancing to the place Miss Riga had occupied in front of the portrait, addressed the others. He talked of the Great Life, of the Higher Life, and the Great Cause, of something which transcended all ordinary life, and which swallowed it up absolutely, in what he called a super-human motive. Julian listened to him in amazement. Who was this man who stood and talked like the master of the house in his studio?

He could not understand it, and this possessiveness, so characteristic of an Englishman, almost crowded out of his mind for a moment the consciousness that the greatest stakes were at issue. He felt an intense irritation at the idea of a man whom he had never seen and did not know speaking like one in authority in his own house. But his thoughts about this were soon interrupted by something more vital to the man himself which stirred his whole being to its depth, and this was the sound of a familiar voice. It was the voice of his old friend, Arthur Gray, and how strange was that sound, perhaps more strange than even the voice of Daphne herself would have sounded, had he heard it away here in these

mysterious surroundings and in the heart of this extraordinary country into which he had penetrated.

"I should like to ask," said Mr. Gray, "if it is not being too practical, what definite position we are to take up in this Christian country? Perhaps Mr. Foster will kindly answer me, as he seems perfectly aware of what we are intended to do."

The tall dark young man, who Julian presumed to be Mr. Foster, looked at Arthur Gray who had risen from his chair and stood facing him, just as a panther might look at a lion, or to speak more in nineteenth-century fashion, as a cat might look at a dog. He surrendered the position after a moment's thought by appealing to Miss Riga, and taking refuge under her standard.

"Madam," he said, addressing her, "this surely is beyond my powers and scope. Will you please answer this inquiry if I retire?"

Miss Riga rose to the occasion and looked regal as she did so, little though she was in person. She had the peculiar quality which makes the Queen of England great among monarchs. Our Victoria is a very little lady, but she looks taller than anybody else on

occasions. And so it was with Miss Riga now when called upon. She grew taller as she rose from her chair. She seemed to expand and enlarge in her majesty and dignity.

"The position that we have to assume," said Miss Riga, facing her audience with perfect confidence, "in a country which owns Jesus Christ as its Saviour and teacher is simply this :—we are the apostles and disciples of the parent creed. Buddhism is as much the father of Christianity as the parent is the father of the child. Christianity is a mere offshoot of that religion upon which we found our daily lives, in which we find our aspirations and our hopes. What we have to do, in fact, is to found a great centre in London, where the poor creatures who have hitherto followed a mere off-shoot religion shall become the children of the great parent stock. In this centre everything can be learned ; here actual truth can be studied. More than that, here we get the words of a master of to-day, now living on the earth, the benefit of his teachings and his guidance."

Julian's amazement at these words can possibly be better imagined than described. When he had left

London Miss Riga had not developed any of these tendencies. He had not then heard that she even recognised the Master as a personality with which she was familiar. How did she come to know anything of this Master, with whom he himself was practically a stranger in spite of his terrible journey.

There was a buzzing of general conversation in the room into which he was looking, and during the distraction he felt a touch upon his hand—the magic touch again. It startled him intensely; it brought him back from the commonplaces and simplicities of London life, to the awful reality that he was—whatever might be going on in London—in the deserts of Tibet alone with this inexplicable creature, the Mahatma Morial.

Turning, he saw Morial's beautiful brows bent upon him, full of interest.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of this?"

Julian answered his gaze very earnestly. "I think," he said, "it is both sad and terrible, unless you will explain to me something that I cannot even guess at. Tell me has that old woman orders from you to say these things?"

"Indeed, no," said Morial, "I have never communicated with that creature. She has nothing to do with me except as a tool that I do not care to even handle."

"Then how can she speak as she does?" said Julian, still looking at him fixedly.

"Because," said Morial, "she is a tool and a useful one."

"But," said Julian, "if you had not communicated with her she is telling lies."

"Certainly," answered Morial, "she is telling lies, I am aware of that."

"And you permit it in your name," said Julian.

"I not only permit it," said Morial, "but I approve it; it saves me a world of trouble."

"Why does Daphne look so sad?" said Julian still looking at him but not conquering the intense gaze which he met.

"Daphne looks sad," replied Morial, "because she has met at last with the realities of life. She is much better off than if you had married her and made her happy. She will become a candidate for the higher life in time, and she may attain eminence

before you do, because she has some very high qualities. Her clairvoyance is extraordinarily pure."

"That may be," said Julian, "but I love her, and I want to know why she looks so unhappy."

"I take no interest," replied Morial, "in the happiness or unhappiness of the persons who have become my instruments. If you wish to enter the life for which you have become a candidate, you must conquer these foolish notions. Happiness and unhappiness are convertible terms. Learn this as the first truth, and then offer up that heart of yours, which is at present leaping like a wild beast, at the great ceremony. When it is done you may perhaps learn the truth."

He was alone again, Morial had left him, but the sense of solitude only lasted a second, for again he saw this crowded room before him, and the eager faces. "You can tell us the truth," said one. "You can guide us and tell us what to do," said another, "and you can order our lives, and tell us what is right to say, and even to think," said the third; "why, then, we are your slaves, this is what we have looked for, what we have waited for!"

Julian looking at the scene before him, saw Miss Riga, whom he had known as an unfortunate and helpless old woman, surrounded like the high priestess of a temple, by a crowd of earnest neophytes. Very earnest were they. They were ready to surrender their lives or money—everything, if only they could know *the truth*. Watching, Julian went through a terrible experience, for he found that looking at them through this crystal medium he could see their very thoughts, and that they were in earnest in what they said. What was it to which they rendered their homage? Was it a true altar or a mock one? How could he tell after Morial's last words? He had doubted Miss Riga very naturally, but he had been prepared to trust his Master. Now everything seemed swept away from him—heaven and earth alike. The crystal clouded and grew dark, and Julian's soul clouded and grew dark with it. None who have not suffered as he has suffered, can know the solitude and despair of that darkness and doubt.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERY soon after the actual sunrise, indeed as soon as the sun had reached the valley, Morial threw off the peculiar garment which he wore during the night, and, dressed in his blue robe, went out into the air. His was one of those marvellous faces of which in every-day life we sometimes see faint reflections, in which youth appears to grow stronger day by day instead of age. Nature was to him like a playmate, and the smile of pleasure always came upon his face when he threw aside his cares and looked up into the brilliant sky. He needed no companionship in order to find pleasure as less perfect mortals do. In the deep recesses of his mind memory had stored so much and thought had created so much that no other being had power to supply him with amusement. Certainly he had found amusement in the few hours spent with

Julian on his first arrival, but that was not found in Julian himself. He simply used this young Englishman fresh from the centre of civilisation, to reawaken by his talk and manner memories of his own life long ago ; for in the far past he had saturated himself with the intellectual and social life of every country. There had been a time when he had been very much what Julian was now, only more intellectually cultured and with an overpowering knowledge of his own future and destiny.

That future and that destiny had been so gigantic and so full of romance that ordinary life was lost sight of beside it.

Long since had he renounced all the pleasures and passions of every-day humanity, putting them aside for something which utterly blotted them out from his consciousness. But at times it gave him a passing gleam of amusement to touch on old chords, and fancy himself a boy again in the old-fashioned sense. He had immortal youth—not the transient youth which has to be snatched and enjoyed before it flies ; but at what a cost had he not obtained it ! what lives had he not sacrificed, what hearts had he

not broken, what minds had he not clouded by despair and insanity !

Going on his way triumphant, a monstrous intellectual hero, the whole decalogue of crimes, and even more (for some defied description in words) had been committed by this exquisitely beautiful creature who stood here now in the sunshine, greeting it with as innocent and beautiful a smile as any saint might have worn. His difficulty (a faint momentary difficulty which had commenced when the disciple whom he sent to bring Julian across the pass of Phari failed) was now conquered. Julian was in his grasp, and through this man's magnetic touch with the home and country he had left, Morial held a telephone agency of the sort he needed. Julian was, in his eyes, a tool, though not just as he had called Miss Riga a tool—this was a very valuable one, because highly strung, and in connection with the centre which he desired to touch. And why did he desire to touch this? Not from a caprice or a fancy, but because that thing we call fate, and which is stronger even in the will of a Mahatma, ordered that at this time knowledge of

many strange things should come to the Western world. An hour of unfoldment had arrived, and Morial, who well knew that a stronger power than himself existed, knew that he, too, was a tool just as were his creatures ; but he had learned the supreme art of wresting from fate fruition and reward for himself. He intended to hold the reins of this Western development, and not to permit the opposing power which continually met him through all his hitherto triumphant life, to take from him this great opportunity. Power was to him the one good, the one desirable thing, and he worked for that, to increase it and maintain it, as some work for a great cause and others for a selfish one.

For perhaps two hours of the fresh, dewy morning, Morial wandered about in his garden, perfectly happy in the pleasure of the movement, and taking the perfect rest which he had learned to obtain at will. But at last he was disturbed. A faint sound reached his ear, like the tinkling of a very sweet, silvery bell. He started, and paused, and then in a moment the mystic change came over him, which

transformed him from a beautiful youth to the mysterious being we call a magician.

In all this world there were but two other minds with which Morial the Mahatma ever held what we call conversation, only two other minds ever approached the level of his own, and these were the minds of men who had lived his own life, and who now had secluded themselves, as he had done, from the disturbances of the outer world in order to preserve the altitude which they had reached. These three, almost brothers, had not met in the ordinary sense for more than a thousand years, but from time to time they communicated with each other, by methods peculiar to themselves.

The signal which had reached Morial's ear came from one of these friends.

It was the note struck by Kuthumi, the nearest and closest to him of the two. It was unusual to receive a signal of this kind at such an hour. Late in the afternoon a time was appointed for their conversations and therefore Morial was surprised at receiving the signal now. He answered it instantly.

A moment later the sound of a voice as sweet as

the bell penetrated to his ear. It appeared to come from a great distance, and was faint but perfectly clear.

"May I give you a warning," said this voice; "will you listen to me now if I do?"

"I know, Kuthumi, what it is you have to say," replied Morial, "for although I am daring I am not blind. There is danger, there is terrible danger, in what I am at work upon now."

"Be warned by me," said Kuthumi, "rest upon that which you have, and desire not to take that which the Opposing Spirit covets."

"I have always conquered," said Morial, "and I shall conquer to the end. My spirit is indomitable."

"That is true, but the Overruling Power wins when it is least expected," was the reply. "Do you know, have you observed, where your danger lies now?"

"My friend," said Morial, "I listen to you, speak and tell me what you have to say."

"It is with that young creature whose soul is as white as she is pure herself that your danger lies. She is so immaculate that she cannot be soiled in

spite of every evil thing you throw about her. If she were not there in the very midst of your tools, you would win without difficulty, but as it is, her very innocence and simplicity combined with her courage threaten you with an overwhelming danger."

"Now I do not understand you," said Morial, "explain yourself more fully."

"Can you not see," said this quiet voice, "that the Opposing Spirit itself can control an individual so unspotted by the world as this? Right in the very heart of your machinery you have one place which is not your own and which never can be."

"I understand you now," said Morial. "Well, a frail thing like that shall not stand in my way, nor prevent the great development I see before me. I will crush her!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN the curious community now dwelling in the big house at Hampstead, Miss Riga had only one absolute confidante. It is much better for a person in such a position as hers to have no confidante at all ; but this is difficult, indeed practically impossible. The greater the autocrat, the more necessary is the one trusted servant. Miss Riga had found it beyond her powers to do everything herself, and as soon as the great ideas of the new religion and the lamasery had entered her mind in their practical aspects, she looked about her for an ally who would play into her hands when necessary. Just at that time Mrs. Flite, an old, but hitherto not much valued acquaintance, met her by accident. Mrs. Flite had been a very pretty woman once upon a time, in a certain sickly, faded, gushing style, and being entirely without intellect, had found all the pleasures of life in society and admiration. But with the loss of her youthful

beauty, which not even her yellow wig could preserve, she found these pleasures harder to get. She was a widow, with an income which was a mere pittance for a woman of her tastes ; and for many a long day had she been looking about her for some easy and agreeable means of adding to the comforts of her life.

In Miss Riga's new religion Mrs. Flite beheld a happy hunting-ground for herself. It was long since she had been able to get into a set of rich people ; and at the first glance she saw that if she embraced this creed, it would admit her to the society she wanted. Then she must look out for opportunities—some rich old lady, perhaps, a fanatic in the latest fashion, might want a companion to humour her follies. She looked with a keen interest at the members of the fraternity, with an eye to business. But before she had hit on any scheme of her own, an accident brought her good fortune. Being absolutely incredulous and sceptical in all matters supernatural, she was, as a matter of course, on the look out as to how these strange things happened in the house. An incautious word dropped by Miss Riga put her on


the right scent ; in an innocent mind like Daphne's it would not have roused suspicion—but to Mrs. Flite it brought not only suspicion but conviction. She laughed from genuine enjoyment ; a glance of intelligence and appreciation passed between the two women ; and from that moment Mrs. Flite found herself established as the factotum of the high-priestess. The post was better than she had expected ; and she was well content. She had to learn a few conjuring tricks ; she had occasionally to visit a certain Sanscrit scholar whom Miss Riga had discovered, by inquiring at the British Museum, and get sentences translated ; and she had to talk a great deal on subjects about which she understood nothing. But all this was very easy to her. In return she had a comfortable home, and sums of money from time to time. And when the rules of the lamasery were given to its members, and they found themselves deprived of all amusements and fed upon gruel and water, she and Miss Riga had many a little supper together, and sometimes some mysterious little outings. It is such an advantage to have one really confidential friend !

The great amazement of Mrs. Flite was, that people could be so easily duped as they were. She told herself twenty times a day, that if she had had any idea there were so many fools in the world, she would have made her fortune long ago.

Having made the great discovery that the credulous form a large class, she determined now to make the utmost out of it.

She acknowledged in Miss Riga a greater person than herself—a true general. If Daphne could have heard them talking together, it would have been a revelation which would have shaken her reason. Neither of these two had seen anything genuine at all, and looked upon Daphne and Julian as only a different kind of lunatics from the others whom they deceived so easily. But they very carefully concealed their views from Daphne, whom they instinctively felt could not be trusted—as they would have expressed it. It would be hard to say what they thought of Daphne's own visions, which so mysteriously confirmed all that happened. Probably if they thought about it at all, which is doubtful, as neither of them were intellectual questioners, they

imagined all these things to be self-delusions, for in this little centre of work, the mysterious duality of the true and the false was to be seen distinctly, the two running side by side; and this duality is more mysterious and terrible even than that of good and evil. To the ordinary mind the tricks played by these old ladies would be enough to destroy all faith in the supernatural and the unseen. And yet the supernatural and the unseen were at work all the time. The unintelligible power which Morial exercised, not only created the genuine phenomena, but utilised the false ones. Once granted such a power as his, it is quite as easy to allow natural incidents to play the game as to create special ones. Mercifully for Daphne, her own visions were becoming so real and vivid, that she was losing the sense of trickery, with which the letters had at first filled her. She was one of those idealists to whom the mere transcending of the laws of nature amounted to little, while great issues to which most people pay but slight attention occupied the first place in her mind. She wanted to know whether the cause was a true one, whether it would be good, whether it



would really benefit humanity. Once convinced of that, and her life was readily offered up to it. She was not yet convinced of that great fact, in spite of the visions which came to her, and showed her that the supernatural was reality. There is a great difference in the way in which people receive the facts of supernaturalism ; to many they are of no interest, whether true or false. To some, when once they are seen to be real, a profound faith comes, a kind of divinity hides in the medium's table which tilts and tips and spells by the alphabet ; and Daphne belonged to the third class, a small one. She was readily convinced of the supernatural, being highly impressionable and naturally clairvoyant ; but she was as anxious to distinguish between right and wrong in that domain, as in any other, and it was impossible for her to be blind to the strange and supreme selfishness which ordered this little lamasery. Here, where unselfishness was talked of from morning to night, the very opposite was practised by those in authority.

She thought little about the money matters which seemed to impress Mr. Gray so much. She did not

realise the difficulties which these might lead to, nor the dishonourable conduct which is possible in connection with money.

To her it had never appeared of very great importance, but she did realise that the eager disciples were taught nothing, or allowed to talk a great deal of innocence, or to impose upon themselves as well as to be imposed upon, and she failed to see, in spite of the excellent ground-work which Miss Riga, by a little clever reading up had built up out of the old religions, what benefit was to be done to the world by the new system. For among them there was no one, as yet, to seize the essence of the beautiful thoughts which were imparted wholesale into their conversation, and convert them into reality. There was a general idea that something which was called the higher life was being led in this little establishment. As a matter of fact, a kind of despotic rule was being exercised by Miss Riga, which gave great benefits to herself, and caused greater deprivations to others. Of course there was a great deal of talk about the literature that was to be given to the world. Daphne gathered by degrees that Mr. Gray had obtained his

ready admission by depositing a fairly large sum of money to be used for the benefit of the cause. This, it was understood, was to be used for the publication of books to disseminate the wonderful doctrines of the new sect. So far, there was nothing more being done in the way of literary production than Mr. Water's inspired volume, of which we have had a specimen. He continued from time to time to produce these remarkable stanzas, and he was duly worshipped for his extraordinary gifts. Daphne studied them carefully, and tried very hard to make out whether they had any meaning ; but Mr. Gray's critical remarks too often showed up absence of ideas in them for her to be able even to put any in herself. So far she saw the whole thing to be a bubble, nevertheless, she was kept in very strict order, in a special state of preparation for the great work, that which had been foreshadowed by the message given her in the crimson rose.

At last one day Miss Riga told her, point blank, that she intended to send her with Mrs. Flite to America to form a centre there, and, as she expressed it, to "spread the truth and extend the work."

Daphne was so startled at the idea that she received the information in silence. It seemed to her so utterly ridiculous that she should be set up to teach that which she did not know, and of which she had learned, as yet, practically nothing, that she thought it to be merely a passing fantasy of her Aunt, and that it would not be mentioned again. But in this she was quite mistaken. She soon found that actual preparations were being made for the journey. Mrs. Flite had all this in hand, and told Daphne, quite as a matter of course, what she was doing. Mr. Gray was sitting in the room at the time when Daphne made this discovery, and it gave him a great deal of food for thought. "What can the old lady's object be in this," he conjectured. And seeking Daphne out he begged her to tell him everything Miss Riga should say. "There must be some reason in her own mind, Miss Royal," he said, "or she would not select you for such an impossible task. Why does she not send two of the men? Foster would go directly and do all the talking. You will never talk to drawing-rooms full of people as the old lady does."

"Impossible," said Daphne, in the greatest distress of mind. "I cannot, and I will not. No doubt I should be willing to do it if I understood the subject, but as yet I know nothing. I cannot go; I must insist on having my own way in this. And so saying, this rebellious spirit went to interview the high priestess.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Nothing came of Daphne's interview with Miss Riga, who remained inexorably fixed in her resolution to send the girl to America. And neither Daphne nor Mr. Gray could discover her motive. One circumstance gave Mr. Gray much food for speculation, and that was that Daphne was not to sail until just after she came of age. This struck him as curious. It would seem as if then Daphne should surely assert her authority over her own life, and refuse to go on this unpalatable journey. But Gray saw that before that time came either she would be dangerously ill or her spirit would be broken.

Miss Riga and her confederate subjected the girl to that sort of slow daily torment which wears out the proudest spirit. She saw no one from the outer world, but dwelled always in this curious mental hot-bed, where excitements and emotions of an un-

natural kind were constantly being worked up. The rules of the lamasery being now in working order, long hours of solitude were enforced, and diet of the very lowest was made a law. Daphne was of the ideal temperament which takes little notice of circumstances such as these—but her physique was very delicate and the strain began to tell on her. It only augmented her beauty ; she grew more fragile and ethereal with every passing hour.

Gray, reflecting over these things, concluded that the object of the rules of the lamasery was to weaken the will and break the spirit of the unlucky disciples. He himself conformed to them very thoroughly to all appearance, while in reality taking excellent care of himself. He considered this quite in the light of an altruistic duty, for if he did not keep his wits about him who was to take care of Daphne in her lover's absence?

And as the days went by, and no word came from Julian, and Daphne visibly faded away before his eyes, Gray determined to take heart of grace, and forbid his conscience to call him a traitor to his friend if he asked Daphne to marry himself.

What else could he do? Loving her so dearly and devotedly as he did, was he to see her die, because of her lover's neglect, and the heartless selfishness of her guardian? No, a thousand times no, exclaimed Gray after arguing the question with himself through a whole night. It was impossible for him to decide what her feeling for him was ; he knew that when Julian left she cared for him and for him only ; but of late she had seemed to turn to Gray for counsel, and lean on him. Gray told himself that if Julian had written to her, or if she had not been in such a terrible position and so much in need of someone to help her, he would have kept silence ; but now surely he might speak.

And so at last he brought himself to do so. He had sat watching her through the solemn comedy called lunch, and had come to the conclusion that if something was not done soon it would be too late. He stayed indoors that afternoon, contrary to his usual custom, and waited patiently for an opportunity of being alone with her. And then, afraid of losing a moment of this rare chance, and afraid, too, of losing his courage (for at

heart his conscience was not perfectly satisfied), he began to speak instantly.

“Miss Royal,” he said in a very low, earnest voice—they were in the window of the drawing-room, and though alone in the great room, he never felt quite sure that the very walls had not ears in this house—“you know Julian was my dearest friend, and you know, too, I hope and trust, that I feel a sense of honour towards him in his absence. God forbid that I should wrong him in any way! I have loved you since I first met you, but I should never speak one word if I were not so uneasy and anxious about you. Why has Julian left you alone, without a word, among these crazy people? Don’t be angry with me, if I dare, now that you are in such a terrible position, to ask you if you will give me a right to help you. It will be needed very soon!—I implore you don’t misunderstand me or think I am making a treacherous use of the friendship you have honoured me with!—But, indeed, indeed you cannot fight through the difficulties before you unaided.”

Daphne shook her head mournfully.

“I will try not to misunderstand you,” she said,

“though I think, as Julian’s friend, you should not have said this. But let us forget it—there are such dreadful things to think of. Oh, Mr. Gray, it doesn’t matter about me—but I am breaking my heart about Julian. Where is he—what has become of him? I can’t think about anything else. And when I ask Aunt Riga this she says I am showing disobedience to the Master. Oh, Mr. Gray, I do wish Julian would come home.”

And this was all the result of poor Gray’s casuistry and the stifling of his conscience. Daphne burst suddenly into tears, and sobbed in such a heart-broken way about Julian, that Gray was silenced, and never dared to mention his name again. Very evidently Daphne’s heart was away in Hither Tibet, and Gray was sensible enough to know that it is of no use to ask for what is not to be had. So he made up his mind, like a man, to face the situation. If he could not have the best, and take Daphne away from this wretchedness, and keep her safe from it all, then he must be content with the second best—accept her friendship, and do what he could to help her. He

knew he could not complain, for she had been engaged to Julian when first he knew her.

And so this was the end of it. He stood by her, trying to comfort her, listening to the passionate outburst that gave her so much relief after her long reticence, and trying to conquer the dreary sense of disappointment which made him feel as if he wanted to go away, and leave her even in her pain. But he conquered it, and stayed with her, till someone else entered the room and they were interrupted.

Then he went away and tried to think.

Daphne had told him, all in one rush of confidence, how her heart was breaking for Julian—how but a night or two since she had twice heard his voice calling her name, distinctly, and had conceived the idea from this that he was dead—how the vision of Morial had several times visited her, and always commanded obedience—how she received letters and messages which also always commanded obedience—how she doubted and dreaded and feared, and yet could not resist the potency of these mysterious visions of her own.

“Then you believe in these visions?” said Gray,

very sadly and solemnly. "They are real to you."

"Oh, yes, they are real," exclaimed Daphne with a shudder.

"If this thing is true," said Gray reflectively, "if there is a supernatural life—if there are Masters in knowledge, surely a pure soul like yours can find the truth. Why not demand it and ask for it?"

The suggestion quieted Daphne—she seized upon it, in all its force and beauty, instantly.

"I will do it," she cried with fervour, "oh, thank you, Mr. Gray, for the thought; surely I can insist upon knowing the truth. If there are Masters they will answer my appeal! And if there are not, and I am sincere, surely God will hear me!"

All this, Gray found, required a good deal of thinking over afterwards. He went to town and dined at his club.

It was a pseudo-artistic, pseudo-aristocratic club, and at the next table to Gray, also eating a solitary dinner, was a young peer of the realm, who came here because he found a little Bohemianism and a great many new ideas. He was one of those unfortunate persons to be found in life more frequently

than they should be, to whom their natural surroundings bring no final satisfaction. Being enormously rich he cared nothing for money, and only respected brains. Being born a peer he had thought himself into a tentative sort of socialism. As he was isolated from all the common hardships of humanity he was led (probably by some emotional law of re-action which we do not understand) into suffering these sorrows vicariously, and wishing there was some way to relieve them.

Such, briefly, was the character of the handsome youth, a nobleman in thought and deed and in appearance, who was so nearly caught last season by the new modern religion—Theosophy.

It first touched him that evening at the club, when he sat next Arthur Gray at dinner.

Notices of the mysterious doings at the Hampstead Lamasery had begun to creep into the papers; courteous interviewers had been to call on Miss Riga, and had been politely received. For Miss Riga saw very plainly that the name of the credulous is Legion, and that to the catching of them there is no end.

Morial the Mahatma, in his mystic retreat, saw very plainly, too, this early work could as well be done by an impostor like Miss Riga as by himself. When he chose, he could, with one touch of reality, take the inquirer to himself, if it were worth while, as a devoted disciple, as he had done with Julian. The preliminaries of finding those who wished to enter the path could as easily be done by a common tool like Miss Riga. It would not be an effort for him to stretch out his destroying hand, even from far Tibet, and silence her forever when the right moment should come. And so, for the time being, she had her own way, as it seemed. Vistas opened before her which seemed limitless, visions of wealth beyond any dreams she had ever had, and her head was almost turned by it. What might wait for her in the future she could not guess, when such unexpected good fortune had come already. But she determined that she would lose nothing of what fate, in its generosity, bestowed on her. She, therefore, saw the newspaper reporters, and told them just such pretty little tales as she wished to see in print about herself and her new religion.

"Theosophy" was, therefore, quite a well-known name already, and it was merely as a subject of general conversation that Lord Ferdinand introduced it in his desultory talk with Gray. But when Gray answered him by saying, "Great Heavens, Ferdie, I can think of nothing else to-night," then Lord Ferdinand, scenting a new sensation, promptly moved himself and his half-finished bottle of wine to his neighbour's table.

"Now, Gray," he said, "I can see you are in this business. Now just tell me all about it."

Gray shook his head.

"I could never tell you all about it," he said, "because that's beyond the power of mortal man. I can tell you what I know. It's a grand idea being run, I feel sure, to her own advantage, by an unscrupulous old woman. But the thing is so difficult to describe that if you want to know anything about it you had better come and see for yourself."

"See for myself! What, will you take me right into the mysterious headquarters where the old witch dwells? Oh, please do! When shall we go?"

"To-morrow evening, if you like," said Gray,

solemnly. "It's what the old girl calls a visitors' evening. I've never taken anyone yet ; but, upon my word, I think it might be a good thing to take you, as a dispassionate critic and a sensible man of the world."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day Mr. Gray's first appearance at the lamasery was at lunch-time. He was very quiet until the meal was nearly over, when he addressed Miss Riga, and said that he wished to bring a visitor to the meeting in the evening.

"Certainly," said Miss Riga, showing very little interest in the matter.

"I have never used my privilege yet," said Mr. Gray, speaking very slowly, "of bringing a visitor to these open meetings; but yesterday evening I went into the club, and Lord Ferdinand Abchurch, who was sitting next me, asked me if I knew anything about Theosophy. He is a dear boy and an old friend of mine, so I told him all I knew. He seemed so very interested in the matter that I offered to bring him here to-night." While speaking, Gray had never taken his eyes off Miss Riga, and had been fully rewarded by a change in her countenance.

"Lord Ferdinand Abchurch," she repeated, in an

awed voice, and then, suddenly recovering her spirit, she exclaimed vehemently, "see how the power of our great creed is working."

"Well, yes," said Gray, drily. "Ferdie is certainly a fine recruit, if you can get him."

"Get him," said Miss Riga, "that is not our affair. If the Master wants him, he will claim him and take him for his own; and he is coming to the meeting to-night, is he?"

"Yes," said Gray, "he is coming to the meeting." He was trying, but without much success, to interpret the meaning of some swift glances exchanged across the table between Mrs. Flite and Miss Riga. Evidently they understood each other, but he found that he could not interpret the language of the eyes which they used. He had promised to meet Lord Ferdie at the club at dinner, and drive down to Hampstead with him afterwards, which he rather regretted, for he had a kind of idea that some special sort of preparations were going to be made for the reception of the august visitor. However, he could not stay to watch, for he knew that Lord Abchurch would not come if he did not meet him.

Daphne shut herself in her own room that afternoon, hoping that in the excitement of a titled visitor, which she knew would please her aunt very much, that she, herself, and her great mission in America might be temporarily forgotten. But not so; her quiet was soon disturbed by the arrival of Miss Riga and Mrs. Flite in company.

"Daphne," said Miss Riga in a very decided manner, "the Master wishes you to make the preliminary speech to-night."

Daphne was lying on a couch reading. She put down her book and sat up with a sudden expression of defiance on her face which was new to it.

"I cannot do that, Aunt Riga," she said; "you seem to know all about the subject, but I know nothing."

Mrs. Flite lifted her hands and eyes to Heaven, as if in horror of this statement.

"How can you talk like this, Daphne," said Miss Riga. "I only want you to repeat what you have often heard me say; but it would be more effective from you than from me, and how you can say that you know nothing of the subject when you yourself

have been the special recipient of the Master's messages, I cannot tell."

"I cannot help that," said Daphne. I have seen visions, certainly, and there are strange things going on that I cannot explain. But I am not fitted to speak as you speak to strangers, because I have not been taught, and therefore cannot teach."

Something in Daphne's manner showed Miss Riga, who knew her very well, that on this point it was useless to do battle. Daphne was very yielding up to a certain point; but when her mind was made up she was as immovable as a rock. Miss Riga, having exchanged a glance with Mrs. Flite, got up and left the room. Mrs. Flite then fell into ordinary conversation, and being a chatty and pleasant sort of person, well practised in ordinary wiles, she soon succeeded in distracting Daphne's attention, and amusing her a little. She did not leave her until Daphne had dressed herself for the evening, and the girl never noticed, or perhaps never realised, until afterwards that it was Mrs. Flite who had dressed her hair, and that Mrs. Flite had selected from her wardrobe the very dress she wore, and quietly put it ready for her, and

had put finishing touches to her toilet. While doing this she had kept Daphne's mind off the distressing subject, which harassed her so, and the consequence was, that when she took the girl down with her into the drawing-room, it was a Daphne very like the brilliant one of old that made her appearance there. Miss Riga looked up at her and nodded an approval which her confederate well understood.

Daphne was not allowed to have time for thought, for the two old ladies contrived to amuse her or to see her amused until the moment when Mr. Gray and the new inquirer walked in. Lord Ferdie was one of those charming men who win all hearts at once, and there was no necessity for the schemers to pretend they liked him, for that was such an easy thing to do.

The business of the meeting was commenced within a few minutes after his arrival. Miss Riga delivered the preliminary speech as usual, but with some little embroideries for Lord Ferdie's benefit. While this was going on Mrs. Flite came to Daphne, and whispered a few words into her ear.

"There is a message from the Master for Lord Ferdinand Abchurch, and you are to deliver it to him."

"Give it to me, then," said Daphne.

"You are to say," said Mrs. Flite, "that——"

"What do you mean," said Daphne, "I do not understand."

"If I tell you the words," said Mrs. Flite, "will you repeat them to him as a message from the Master? This order has been given to Miss Riga."

Daphne turned and looked Mrs. Flite straight in the face, and the woman's eyes fell before her gaze.

"No," she said, "I will not; I must be convinced of the reality of the message before I can do such a thing as that."

"Oh, Daphne," said Mrs. Flite, "you will bring a terrible punishment upon yourself by this disobedience and incredulity."

She said no more but got up and left her, and Daphne, sitting alone, became plunged in thought. Terrible suspicions were beginning to work in her mind, and the horror of them rushed back upon her now with redoubled vigour. Gray, who was sitting opposite, watched her ceaselessly, and had taken careful note of the little play enacted before his eyes. He understood very well that she had been asked to

do something and had refused ; but what could it be ? Seeing that she was left entirely alone, he devoted his attention to Mrs. Flite, who went about the room with an air which convinced him that she had some plan to carry out. Further stanzas from Mr. Water's wonderful book, depicting the creation of the world, were read, and a discussion upon these was commenced. Gray noticed that while this discussion went on Mrs. Flite devoted herself to reaching Lord Abchurch's neighbourhood by easy and scarcely noticeable stages. No one would have guessed what she was doing, who had not been as keenly on the watch as he was. Presently he saw Lord Ferdie start, and then look at some small thing which was in his hand, and then quickly close his hand upon it. What was this ? That he decided to find out from Lord Abchurch. In the meantime he observed that Mrs. Flite now quieted down, and presently took her original place with an air of having accomplished her task.

Lord Ferdie's private cab was waiting for him, and when the meeting broke up he asked Gray to drive back to town with him. Gray agreed, for reasons of

his own. As soon as they were in the cab Lord Abchurch said to him : " Now tell me, what does all this mean ? "

" I brought you here," said Gray, " that you might tell me."

" I suppose you know," said Lord Ferdie, " that I have received a Mahatmic missive—a letter from the Master himself—in the course of the evening."

" I guessed as much," said Gray.

" It appears," said Lord Ferdie, " that I have all the characteristics of the neophyte of the first water, if I choose to go in for the higher life. I may become a Mahatmic within a reasonable and measurable time. Awfully nice that, dear boy."

" Well, what do you think of it ? " said Gray.

" I want to know," said Lord Ferdie, " what position Miss Royal occupies in the whole business. I would stake my life on that girl's honesty and truth. They are to be read in her face. She, surely, is not hypocrite nor conjuror as she is depicted."

" Now," said Gray, " you come to the *crux* of the whole matter, you get beyond me. Miss Royal is what spiritualists call clairvoyant. She sees visions

and dreams dreams. I have had them from her own lips, and they are so strange that it is no wonder that she is entangled in this network. On the face of the thing the whole fabric appears to be mere charlatany, but my knowledge of Miss Royal and of Julian Arundel convinces me that there is something else in it, something else which cannot yet be explained."

"Then you cannot enlighten me," said Lord Ferdie.

"Not yet," said Gray.

"Well, in that case," said Lord Ferdie, "I will investigate for myself. Miss Royal's face induces me to do that. I shall go down to-morrow, and talk the whole day. Perhaps I shall become a member, I don't know."

"And this," said Gray, "this trouble you take because Miss Royal is beautiful?"

"Yes," said Lord Ferdie, "but, not only that. Her face has the light of truth in it, and I want to understand the situation."

CHAPTER XX.

THE next day Gray found there was a mysterious atmosphere about the house. There seemed to be some important business on hand, of which he knew nothing. He soon detected that Daphne occupied a different position on this day from any she had occupied before. She was interviewed by one person after the other, much as a queen might be interviewed by her ministers. Hitherto she had always been treated as a child that was to obey, and therefore he saw there must be some change, for which he had not been prepared. He took an opportunity as early as possible in the day to ask Daphne what it meant. He did not get this opportunity until quite late in the afternoon, for all the morning Daphne stayed in her own room, and no one saw her but Mrs. Flite and Miss Riga. In the afternoon, however, pale and exhausted, she came into the drawing-room, and there Gray found her.

"What is the mystery, to-day, Miss Royal," he said, "it seems as if this is some great occasion."

"Why, of course it is, Mr. Gray," she answered.

"Why, don't you know this is my birthday?"

"Your birthday," said Gray, who seemed suddenly struck by some thought which he did not care to express.

"Yes, I come of age to-day," said Daphne, "and it was to have been my wedding-day. Two years have passed since it was fixed, but how changed it all is now!"

"I offer you all the good wishes possible," said Mr. Gray, "but you must excuse me if my first feeling is one of curiosity. I want to know what those old ladies have been talking about all the morning. It is no business of mine, but I have been your friend so far in Julian's absence, and I may be of use to you yet."

"Oh," said Daphne, "it is nothing but money, always money; I am perfectly sick of the subject. It does not interest me at all."

"It may not interest you," said Gray, "but nevertheless it is a very serious matter. You don't realise

how serious it is. Will you tell me what is going on?"

"I would if I could," said Daphne, "but it is impossible. Our lawyer is coming directly, and I have to sign a number of papers. That is all I can tell you."

"But why is it all you can tell me," said Gray, "why should you not tell me what the papers are?"

"For a very simple reason," replied Daphne, "I have promised not to tell anyone."

Gray replied to this in a low whistle.

"Then the old ladies mean business," he said, "and I wish to goodness I could find out what they are doing. What do you mean by saying they extracted a promise from you that you would tell nobody about it?"

"Oh, what does it matter," said Daphne, "there are much more important things in the world than money."

Gray made no direct reply, for indeed this did not need a direct answer. He walked about the room for a moment, and then turning to Daphne, he said:

"Answer me seriously, Miss Royal, do you con-

sider yourself bound to say nothing about the business that you are doing to-day, and to tell no one what those papers are ? ”

“ Of course,” said Daphne, with an air of great surprise. “ Did I not tell you I had given my word ? ”

A little later in the afternoon, Miss Riga's lawyer arrived : the servants were told that he was the only visitor to be admitted. This was a detail which did not escape Gray's attention. A great many visitors came to the house now in the afternoon ; it had become a sort of public resort, and it was a very noticeable fact that the house was to be closed to visitors. Gray knew that he could do nothing, but yet he could not tear himself away. He walked about the house, and wondered what were the bonds with which Daphne was binding herself, and how far she was robbing herself of her own ; but he was powerless. And so at last he resolved to go to town, and talk to Lord Ferdie about it. He had come to the conclusion that it would be a great relief to have a confidant in the matter. Just as he was passing through the hall to go out he heard Miss Riga's voice give an order to one of the servants. This was to

the effect that now, or at any time, if Lord Ferdinand Abchurch was to call he was to be admitted.

"Well," said Gray to himself as he went out by the front door, "that is an invitation for Lord Ferdie. I will take it to him. He has great natural advantages, and he may be able to do what I cannot."

In the early part of the evening of Daphne's coming of age, the house was very quiet. She was sitting alone in her room and thinking. She never gave a thought—not a serious thought—to the business transactions she had been engaged in, for she considered them of no account, and she had so much else to think about.

Just twenty-one—only a girl still with such strange experiences of her life. All the other members of the Lamasery were out of doors, with the exception of the two old ladies. They had a little sitting-room of their own upstairs, where the interview with the lawyer had been held. And after he had gone and Daphne had left them, Miss Riga locked the door in order to enjoy a few minutes' real private conversation.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Flite, the moment

she heard the key turned, and knew it was safe to speak, "you have been successful beyond my wildest dreams. It is all right now, dear, there is nothing to fear. We have not got much time left, it is true, but what we have got we can enjoy thoroughly."

"We may," said Miss Riga, who did not look so jubilant. "So far everything has succeeded splendidly, but don't forget we have still Daphne to deal with. She has signed these deeds, which will hold good if we can get her out of the country, but can we? I don't know how to convince her that she has a mission. The child is beyond me, she is not like the rest of them. And yet she is the only one who really believes in the thing itself, and I cannot make it out."

"Well," said Mrs. Flite, "there is only one thing to be done; we must 'hedge.'"

"You are an old gambler," said Miss Riga; "perhaps you can tell me how to do it. At the moment I don't quite see my way."

"Oh, it is simple enough," said Mrs. Flite; "you have a grand card in your hands. Now, keep Daphne up to the idea that she is going to America, and if

she goes to America, you and I can arrange it very easily. I take her, and I guarantee that she does not come back until you have done all you wish. In the meantime, compel her to bring Lord Abchurch into the camp, and you will have in him just as great a prize as in Daphne herself, I grant you ; but you will have to use a more subtle diplomacy, because he is a man of the world. But, nevertheless, if he once lends himself to this absurd affair, he will have to pay very heavily to get out of it." It was at that moment Miss Riga opened the door again, and gave the order which Gray overheard. She returned to the room, locked the door, and sat down by Mrs. Flite. "And do you think," she said, "that he will ever lend himself to this affair? I fancy he is too good a bird to be caught. He is too clever and too well educated."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Flite, "he is both ; but then you must remember that he is one of those men who sacrifice themselves for a cause. I know him—not personally, of course—but I know his reputation very well, indeed. In spite of his being a peer of the realm, he has been a Socialist, and he got dis-

gusted with it. Every fantastical cause that has come up in his time, which promised to benefit the human race, he has gone into. All those people he has been mixed up with have benefited a little. I only propose that he should do the same thing as us, and we will benefit a great deal. It may be possible to get him into the community and take Daphne to America as well, but certainly we will do one thing or the other."

"And how are we going to get him into the community," inquired Miss Riga.

"We can only do it through Daphne," said Mrs. Flite, "for Daphne can do it. He would be more impressed by the air of innocence and conviction about that girl last night than by anything you said or anything he saw. Daphne was very obstinate about giving him a message, but I think she can be conquered, and if she gives him a message in which he is told to enter the brotherhood and give his life to the cause, the whole thing can be settled. I will take her to America the next day."

"Well, how is it to be done? You are showing yourself the general now. I must confess Daphne is

beyond me. I can manage the rest, but not Daphne."

"Well, leave it to me," said Mrs. Flite, "and let me try my hand. If you undertake to back up everything I say without questioning me I think I can manage it."

"Agreed," said Miss Riga, who was very complacent, having succeeded in her own enterprise beyond her wildest hopes.

The result of this was that a little later in the evening instead of making their appearance in the drawing room, Mrs. Flite and Daphne were shut up in Daphne's room, and Mrs. Flite was a diplomatist of the first water, and had always been agreeable to Daphne, who looked upon her, though she did not like her, as a friend rather than otherwise. This evening Mrs. Flite pursued the same policy. She talked to her very pleasantly about all manner of things and put Daphne at her ease. Then quite suddenly she turned to the girl and said :

"Now, Daphne, I have a little piece of business to do, and I want you to answer me very plainly. Why did you refuse to give that message to Lord Ferdinand Abchurch last night?"

Daphne was amazed and for a moment sat silent. Then she collected herself and said, "for this reason, that I had no proof that it was genuine."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Flite, "who is it you mistrust, myself or Miss Riga?"

"How can I tell you that I distrust either of you, but I am simply in the dark about the whole matter."

"You are more than that, Daphne," said Mrs. Flite; "you do distrust one or the other of us. Let me tell you, child, you have been so associated with us that you cannot escape from that association. I am only a learner, but now I accept it, and therefore it is not for me to speak as you or your aunt would, who have been in this thing from the commencement. But I am a woman of the world, and I can assure you that it is impossible to separate yourself from her now. Whatever this thing is, whether it is genuine or whether it is a fraud, you and she are identified, and do you see what I mean," she said after a moment's pause.

Daphne rose, drawing herself up to her full height, before she replied. "You imply," she said, "that the whole thing is a fraud, and that I have not got

the power to escape from it, having been associated with it so far. Is that what you mean?"

"You can take it so if you like," said Mrs. Flite, composedly. "And let me tell you," she went on, "that your future is not in your own hands. If you suspect your aunt of forging these messages, which convey orders to her disciples, why should she not suspect you of doing it?"

This was totally a new idea to Daphne, and she stood silent and astonished. "If she thinks you are going to accuse her," said Mrs. Flite, "she will settle the whole thing very easily by accusing you beforehand." Daphne still made no answer, her brain was reeling under this revelation.

"And you know," went on Mrs. Flite, "that we are all of us, unfortunately, in the power of the law. If these messages have been forged, and if any of us should choose to go to law for redress, money has been taken on false pretences. It won't do, my dear, we must hold together now. What your fate may be I cannot say, but the fact that you yourself talk of visions which you consider real, puts you in a more helpless position than any of the others. At

the very least you will be looked upon as mad. Now, don't be foolish, but lay up for yourself a quiet future. If you play into our hands we will play into yours. You have nothing to do, but when Lord Ferdie next visits us to give to him the message which I shall dictate to you. He will accept it from you as a truth, because he believes in you. I can see that at once. As soon as we have rescued him for the cause you and I will take the next boat for America, and when we are once there I won't allow you to be bothered any more. You shall be free from the whole thing—you will have done all that is wanted. But this one thing you positively must do.

For a moment there was complete silence after Mrs. Flite had delivered this little speech. Daphne had stood quite still, had not moved, had said never a word since first she rose from her chair in her amazement. But the amazement was giving place to a rage and great indignation. At last she found speech.

"And this thing," she said, "I positively refuse to do. I would infinitely rather end my days in Colny Hatch, or in the workhouse, than lend myself to these tricks and frauds of yours."

"Merciful power!" exclaimed Mrs. Flite, who had not in the least expected such a reply, "do you mean it?"

"I mean it," said Daphne, in a manner which she never hitherto used and which seemed to change her in a moment to a woman, "I mean it," she said, "and you will not find me alter, and I know you now for what you are. If this thing is controlled by that Master whom I have seen in my visions, then that Master is as bad as you are yourselves. Nothing will induce me to be your tool or his."

Just at this moment a loud knock at the front door resounded through the house. The two women were so absorbed in what they were saying to each other that they took no interest in it, and simply remained as they were, looking into each other's eyes. Someone was admitted to the house, and presently a servant came and said that Miss Royal was wanted.

"Come in," said Daphne, who was still standing like a statue, "what am I wanted for?"

"Miss Riga has sent me," said the servant, "to tell you that Lord Ferdinand Abchurch is here."

"Then you can tell Miss Riga that I am not coming down."

Mrs. Flite remained where she was, turning the whole matter over in her mind and wondering what to do next, for her generalship was outwitted. She was a creature of diplomacy, expecting always to meet the same quality, but she had met something real instead, something like a rock she could not move. A moment later Miss Riga herself entered the room.

"What is the matter?" she said. "I want Daphne downstairs; it is no good me talking to Lord Ferdie, you know that very well."

"I am not coming," said Daphne, suddenly flaming up, "you have gone too far, and I defy you both. I do more—if the Master has ordered these things then I defy the Master himself. Look to yourselves, for I shall speak the truth from henceforward, now that I know it, to whoever asks me." So saying, she swept out of the room, leaving the two old ladies looking at each other in dismay.

CHAPTER XXI.

DAPHNE did not leave her room at all that evening until everyone had gone to bed. Lord Ferdie stayed some hours in the hope that she would appear, but she did not. All the time he was in the house, she paced her room to and fro, harassed by a tumult of thought. Late in the night, when all the house was quiet, an unexpected calm fell suddenly on her troubled spirit. A sense of new strength came to her, a feeling of resolution, deep enough to help her face the Evil One himself.

There is some mysterious inspiration to the restless soul in the silence and darkness of the night. Daphne, now grown still, and sitting silently in her room, felt, as the night advanced, as if she were now alone with the soul of the world, as if she could now demand the truth and command it. Led by some impulse which she could not have explained even to

herself, she rose suddenly, and taking her reading lamp in her hand, left the room, and went down the dark passages and the great silent, shadowy stairway to the drawing-room. She walked across it, and passed through the archway with an inspired look in her face which lent it a strange light. Little did she guess that as she approached the easel that held the portrait of Morial, she entered the range of Julian's vision!—that he could see her as plainly as though he were in the room with her. Her beauty seemed to him unearthly, with this strange, set expression on her face, but greater than ever. She seemed transfigured, as if she had cast off the trammels of her body; she looked like an angel.

Julian was keeping vigil, watching the crystal.

He had seen the whole proceedings of the day in his old home, but had not been able to understand them properly, for want of a clue. He had remained riveted to the contemplation of this mystic mirror, which revealed to them all the doings of those he loved.

Morial left him alone to watch and to ponder. Until he had exhausted his interest in his old home

and surroundings, and offered up his heart at the altar of sacrifice, it was useless to attempt to initiate him further, or excite his interest in any other matter. In occultism, whether it be good or evil, this is the first step ; and until it has been absolutely accomplished it is in no way possible to accomplish any other.

Therefore the neophyte was left alone with this terrible mirror, which reflected the life which he had left. It seemed an impossibility to him to tear himself away, and indeed I doubt whether anyone who has not been through the experience could imagine how much more terrible than any unexpected ghosts or extraordinary apparitions these familiar thoughts of home were to Julian when so far removed from them. To see and feel all that Daphne was doing and thinking, and to realise the hypocrisy and shams that surrounded her, appalled him as no dweller of the threshold, nor Angel Gabriel even, could have done, for the sense of responsibility upon himself, the sense of neglected duty was almost more than he could bear. Why had he left a plain, straightforward path—the path that lies before every man, who has

taken up the ordinary responsibilities of life,—why had he left it for this wild unintelligible quest?

He felt like a lost soul, looking out from its fleshy prison, here in this desert, and the work of his own hands, for if he had not come away, none of this would have happened.

Daphne advanced straight across the room to the easel on which Morial's portrait stood. She lit the candles on each side of it, and then she lit a number of other lights in the room. Julian could see all this; the crystal was like a shining diamond, with the light within it. Then she returned to the portrait, unlocked the doors, and flung them wide open. She stook back from it, and looked steadily at it, drawing herself up to her full height, and wore a look such as he had never seen upon her face before.

This seemed hardly like the girl he had known; although she had the same features—this was like the priestess of Isis. She remained silent for some moments, and Julian was very much puzzled as to what she was doing, but suddenly he understood. She extended her arms, and pointing at the portrait uttered the one word, "Morial!" in a tone of com-

mand. The word was uttered again and again, and then, to his surprise, she turned and faced him full, as though she realised in what direction to throw her command. Again she uttered the word, again she used this command, and there was something in her voice and form as she did so that made Julian quail before her, and feel glad that he had nothing to be ashamed of in her eyes. In the same instant his whole attention was absorbed by the fact that another person was with him.

Morial was there! Morial stood beside him! Morial had answered the call!

Julian with difficulty drew his eyes from the figure within the crystal which stood there like a shining spirit, and looked at the figure beside him. Yes, it was Morial, who had attended to this call that came from the other part of the world. Julian looked back at Daphne, and he understood, when he looked at her, that Morial had come within her vision. She saw him, and she still commanded him, her hand outstretched, her face resolute. She was no longer his tool, he was hers. And while Julian observed this with the utmost amazement, the sound of her

voice falling on his ears, came, as it seemed, from a long distance, but still perfectly distinct.

"Morial," she said, "I command you, answer me. What is it you want with Lord Ferdinand Abchurch?" and, to Julian's amazement, he heard the beautiful voice of the man at his side answer her:—

"I want him as my servant."

"And is it you, that you would have me play these tricks upon him?" said Daphne. "If you want him why not approach him honestly yourself, instead of letting these monsters prey upon him."

"That does not concern me," said Morial, "why do you question me about it?"

"Because," said Daphne, speaking calmly and quietly, every word dropping like the tinkle of silver on the ears of those who listened, "because I see cheating and trickery, and I will not lend myself to it. If you are one of the White Brotherhood you will not employ such methods as these. Answer me, I command you, and tell me what you want of Lord Abchurch."

And Morial answered her, "He has a great polit-

tical future before him, and I want that future for my own purpose."

"For your evil and selfish purpose," cried Daphne. "No, you shall not have him. He is honest, and I will not be the tool of these wretches who would take his money, and teach him nothing. If you are the true Master, you can influence him directly without this paltry teaching. But you are not; I know you, and I denounce you. The first step you force us into, poor and paltry though it is, compels us to give up our souls and our consciences; and then, perhaps, we are of some use to you. That would not be if you were true. I will not be a willing tool, I refuse to be, and I shall denounce you, and deny you, here in your own temple."

As she said this, it seemed to Julian as if she was actually materialised before his eyes, as if the crystal was merely a frame for her living form, or rather, a frame that surrounded it. Yes, Daphne stood there in front of him, but her eyes were fixed upon Morial. It was to him that she gave all her attention. Again he made an effort to take his eyes from her, and look at the strange being who stood by his side. He did

so, and saw a thing stranger than he expected. Morial stood there like a statue, tinted, coloured certainly, but just as if carved in marble, and for a moment Julian was convinced that life had gone from him, that he was turned to stone. He cried out, hardly knowing that he did so, "Daphne, what have you done." These words penetrated to her ears, through the strange medium which had carried her voice to him. He heard her give a sharp cry of joy and of exaltation, and looking back he saw that her eyes were now fixed on him, and she had stretched out both her hands as if in welcome. And then she spoke directly to him : "Julian," she said, "have no fear, the Good Spirit will save us ; see, the dark mystery is soulless, he cannot speak or live in the light of conscience."

Julian sprang forward, almost convinced that he could touch her, as he stood there, but his action induced some change which drew the mysterious cloud over the crystal, and in a moment the vision was gone, and he stood in the dim light of Morial's laboratory alone with this soulless figure.

Never had he experienced such a sensation as

that which came over him when he looked at this statue, which appeared truly void of life. Was it possible that this was the Morial of power, of God-like attributes whom he had so feared? Could this be the great one who could span the earth, and who had, by his own magic power, created this extraordinary mirror which destroyed time and space? Could it be? It was,—that he knew, for only a few minutes ago he had stood beside him; what could it mean then? Julian had not had time to realize the meaning of the miracle that had occurred close to him, under his agonised scrutiny. He did not yet grasp all that Daphne had meant in her last words. They came to her as an inspiration, a direct knowledge of the Unseen which governs the world; but to him they were only words as yet, and he was utterly baffled by the extraordinary change he saw before him. The unearthiness, the weirdness of it surpassed anything he could have imagined. It seemed as if with Morial's silence, all the world was silent. There was no sound, no movement, nothing; and he knew not where to go or where to turn in this strange wilderness without Morial's aid. But before

he had had time to do more than wonder at what he saw, a change came over Morial's face, and life returned, slowly and steadily, and the first sign of the animated soul was the brilliant smile of the beautiful youth whose person had so fascinated Julian when he first found Morial in the hermitage. The magician was gone, the dark master was in abeyance, and what he saw was the young man whose mere glance excited sympathy and aroused love.

"Something very curious has happened," said Morial, in the most ordinary, pleasant tone of voice, "and I do not yet know the reason of it. Come with me and we will leave this place, and take the rest I am sure we both need."

So saying he led the way out of the great room, and Julian with one glance at the darkened mirror followed him without comment. Morial went downstairs and through the corridors into the room in which he had first entertained Julian. This room was always brilliantly lit, always ready as if for a feast; it always had in it a subtle atmosphere of luxury and pleasure. Morial flung himself upon one of the couches, and seemed as if he was going to

fall into a sleep or a deep reverie. But after a moment he started up, and began to walk about the room, apparently unconscious, or else forgetful of Julian's presence.

"There is something I do not understand about it," he said. "There is something stronger than myself I have met with ; through the long centuries in which I have succeeded I have met with nothing like this. Kuthumi, I must speak with you, I must speak with both my friends."

Almost before he had uttered the words there came the delicate sound of silvery bells on the air, and then a voice, remote, but very clear. "You want us, Morial," said this voice, "you are in great danger, and we are both perfectly conscious of it. We shall be with you at once."

Morial appeared now suddenly to remember Julian's presence. He turned to him abruptly, and speaking to him in a cold, hard voice, "you must rest," he said.

"You mean," replied Julian, with something of the manner he would have used to an ordinary man, "you want to leave me."

"Certainly," answered Morial, "unless you rest

you will die, for your vigil has been a terrible and long one. Come, let me give you some medicine, or wine, whatever you like to call it, and then you will rest in peace, until there is need for you again."

As Morial spoke, Julian recognised for the first time, that he was absolutely worn out, and he knew very well that he needed all his strength. He had benefited in so extraordinary a manner from Morial's cordials before, and he did not hesitate to drink the one offered to him now. He knew that he could not stay where he was, his faculties were succumbing, and he would not have the strength to remain, even if he had been privileged to do so. But Morial was his host, and wished him gone. Being a gentleman as well as a neophyte, he drank the wine offered him, and went away to the ivory couch, where, instantly, he was lost in sleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

JULIAN'S next sensation was that of awakening with a sudden start which comes from the knowledge that there is an unexpected person in the room. The feeling was one of awe, as well as surprise. It seemed to him as if some very strange visitor had come to his bedside, for the moment he opened his eyes they rested on the figure of a man who was standing beside him, looking at him gravely and earnestly. He had never seen this figure before, and yet it gave him that curious feeling of recognition which most of us know. He knew at once that this grave man, this grey-bearded cassida, and yet so mild looking, was of Morial's brotherhood. His heart leaped within him at the thought. Perhaps this was a Master who was human, and who had retained a sense of conscience and honour. These thoughts flashed through his mind on the moment

of waking, while he lay without moving, gazing on this unexpected figure. But as soon as he was quite awake, which from the effect of surprise was very quickly, his visitor drew a chair from its place, put it near to Julian's couch, and sat down upon it in the most friendly manner.

"You are rested now, are you not?" he asked.

"Perfectly," said Julian. "What is it that lies before me now? I have all my strength back, and I am ready."

"Oh, nothing so alarming," he replied, "only a simple matter of discussion. I have come to talk to you a little, to try and make you realise your position, and how madly you are sacrificing a great future for a merely temporal good."

"And how do you know all this about me?" said Julian.

"There is nothing wonderful about that," was the answer. "I have known all about you, as you call it, since you left London in answer to Morial's call, and I have been talking to him ever since you came into this room and fell asleep."

"Oh, then you are Kuthumi," with an instan-

taneous feeling of conviction. "It was you whom Morial called to his aid and counsel."

A curious feeling of defiance took possession of him, as he said this, and he added, inspired by this feeling, "Why have you come to see me, what have you to say to me?"

"I will answer your questions one by one," said his visitor, with the gentle, benevolent manner which seemed to be his strongest characteristic. "You are quite right, your intuition serves you well. I am Kuthumi, and I came at Morial's call, to counsel him with the third of our brotherhood, whose name you do not know, and never will know. I have come to talk to you, because Morial has selected you for a great mission, and in your success or failure his welfare is concerned."

"But I am only a child in the hands of you," said Julian, rather bitterly, "you that are Masters of the earth—of life."

"Yes, you are only a child," said Kuthumi very composedly. "You are less than a child in our hands. We can take your life, we can give it back to you, but the dominant will in you we cannot

control, unless you determine to offer up your heart in the sacrifice which Morial showed you."

"And if I refuse?" said Julian.

"Then you must fail on the very threshold of the great life, as so many have done, and with your failure you must yield your earthly life. No man can go so far as you have gone, and go back into the world and face it. That cannot be permitted. Pause, and consider, my friend, before you refuse to sacrifice the youth, and health, and strength of this life you are now living; pause a thousand times, and consider before you sacrifice all the potentialities that lie in the centuries before you if you persevere in the great life."

Julian was silent for a moment, and then he said, in a very low voice, "Well, what is required of me, what does the surrender of the heart actually mean?"

"You know," was the answer, "as well as I can tell you. You have to give up all thought of those whom you have loved. It is not bare selfishness in its simple form that will ruin you in your great faith, but it is the thought for others which paralyses you. This seems unlike selfishness, but, believe me,

it is not. Why should you care for one or two individuals who pass away as the flowers pass away, so short is their span? Why should that care interfere with the possibilities of a chosen life which shall be continuous, and shall have the great gift of continuity through all ages. To you is the great opportunity given of becoming one of ourselves when we pass on. Although we have centuries of immortality on this earth, yet there comes an end to this, because our power becomes too great, others step in and take our places, and Morial has offered you this one great chance. If you take it, if you decide to blot out your personal passions and affections, then to the whole race you may be as a god."

"And to do that," said Julian, "I have to blot out, not only my affections but my conscience."

It seemed to him, almost as if Daphne prompted him to say those words, as if her spirit was with him. In reality he saw her spirit-like figure, as he had seen her in the crystal, clearly before him. She stood there, or her memory of her stood there, like an angel, forbidding him to be deceived by this Jesuitical reasoning.

"The first thing," said Kuthumi, with perfect calmness, that the neophyte surrenders to his Master is his conscience. What can a mortal creature of a short span of life, such as yours, know of actual right and wrong? Nothing ; it is impossible. You must surrender your own judgment to that of those who are greater than yourself. If you cannot do this, you can do nothing."

"I cannot do it," said Julian, "it is useless. I am beginning to understand now, as I recover my faculties, the meaning of all that I have seen, in my long vigil, in the crystal. If those visions were true, and I cannot doubt them, for they bore the internal stamp of truth, then it is my duty to go back, and to save the helpless creatures whom I have left behind me from the consequences of my fanatical act. I left my home maddened, and carried out of myself, by a supernatural call. I return to it convinced that the every-day duties must be attended to before these others which are out of focus with life."

"Let me tell you," said Kuthumi, "that if you refuse to enter upon the ceremony of sacrifice, you will never leave this place."

There was a long pause after this. Julian knew well what the sinister words uttered in that sweet voice meant. He thought, for and against, but his own reason weighed not so heavily with him as the memory of Daphne's words.

"If I can be certain," he said, "that what I am doing will produce good I will sacrifice myself, but I will not sacrifice others, and that terrible crystal which reflects thoughts as well as deeds shows me that others are being sacrificed.

Kuthumi looked at him with a kind of sorrow rather than anger. "And for such a poor thing," he said, "are you determined to let all go?"

"What else can I do?" said Julian, suddenly aroused into a feeling of passionate expostulation; "if Morial would act, as I would act in his place, if he would let me use that crystal as Daphne used it, tell her the truth about everything, and guard her against those who are cheating and telling falsehoods, then I would suffer anything, I would endure anything."

"Yes," said Kuthumi, "but then you have no right to dictate to the Master. He knows best his own methods."

"I am not fit for the life," was Julian's reply, "and I suppose I have wrecked my own life ; but even if it be so, nevertheless, those whom I have loved and trusted must remain my first care, and, in spite of all you say, I cannot permit Daphne to be made a tool of liars and cheats while I live."

"Be it so," said Kuthumi, with the same perfect composed sweetness of manner, "but if you retain that decision, and, from what I see, I fear you will, you cannot live long."

Julian was about to make some answer to these ominous words, but his voice died away before he said anything, for Kuthumi was no longer there. He vanished from before Julian's eyes like a mist before the sun. He was gone in an instant, and there was his chair standing where he had placed it. Julian was so surprised at this sudden departure, that he sat there for a few moments, gazing at the vacant chair. Why had Kuthumi left him so suddenly, what could this mean?

It was nearly dusk, but not quite, in London at this moment. Daphne, who had had a terrible day, not exactly of altercation, but of obstinately sticking to

her own resolutions, and listening to the other side, had gone wearily up to her own room for a little quiet and rest. She was thinking of Julian, a terrible conviction had come upon her that she would never see him again. As she went up the dim stairs, gray with the coming evening, and yet not lighted, a vision passed quickly before her, which made her hesitate a moment. In the flash of illumination she had seen Julian and her supernatural visitor holding their conversation. The vision was gone instantly, and she recovered herself and went on her way, but a moment later she saw a figure before her, which she recognised. It was standing in the doorway of her own room, and as she approached it, it receded, and, entering the room, awaited her. It was Kuthumi, as she had seen him a second before, in her vision, but real now as any man. Kuthumi with his perfect sweetness of manner, which would disarm even the most suspicious person. Daphne saw that some great trial was before her, and without saying a word, or showing any feeling, she went straight into her room, and closed the door behind her. And then she stood and faced this unexpected visitor.

"I am glad to see that you are not alarmed," said Kuthumi, "at my appearance here. Do you know that you stand in great danger? I have come to warn you. You have disobeyed the Master himself. He can crush you instantly if he chooses, but instead of that he would rather save you, and therefore I have come to try and show you how foolish your deeds are."

"Show me, then," said Daphne, "what you would have me do."

"The mistake you are making," said Kuthumi, very gently and persuasively, "is to think that you are to judge for yourself. That is not so ; you must let those who know more than you judge for yourself."

"But I cannot yield," said Daphne, "I must know what I am doing, and I must understand it."

"If you adhere to this," said Kuthumi, "you mark out for yourself a future of horrible suffering. You cannot thus set your Master at defiance without draw-upon yourself the fires of expiation. Be warned. Do you wish to see Julian Arundel again ?"

"Yes," said Daphne, "I do wish to see him again."

"He is in your Master's hands," said Kuthumi, "powerless in his hands, and it depends on you whether he lives or dies. Obey the Master, and such teachers as he shall choose to set over you, and all will be well. Set him at defiance, as you do now, and Julian Arundel's life must be sacrificed. Your influence with Julian is so great that he feels it, even the other side of the world."

Daphne's face lit up with a brilliance that made her look positively angelic. She clasped her hands with a gesture of delight.

"Is it possible," she said, "that I saw Julian the other night? did he hear my voice? has he responded? is that why you have come to tempt me? You cannot do it," she said, and as she spoke she seemed transfigured. "I would rather let Julian die than have him return to me with his conscience and honour broken and ruined. I would rather never see him again than when he returned I should have lies on my soul that I could never wipe out. No, Morial is a black master, I know it, and I repudiate him."

As she spoke she raised her hand with the same gesture that she used when Julian saw her in the crys-

tal, and the same majesty transformed her figure, and it was scarcely recognisable. She did not know her own power, she could not realise it; those who are inspired never can. But she was startled to see that she had so readily silenced her tempter. Kuthumi faded from before her; as she spoke he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER this extraordinary interview, Daphne remained standing and thinking deeply, forgetting what she had come to her room for, and that she was tired, and wished to rest. Her whole mind was absorbed in her strange position, and trying hard how to act. While she remained thus lost in thought, a knock came to the door, and the servant, entering, gave her a little note, which she took mechanically, without even thinking who it came from, or what it might mean. But the servant waited, saying that she had been specially asked to take back an answer. Opening it, Daphne saw it was from Mr. Gray, begging her to come down to him at once into the drawing-room, and speak to him. She decided immediately to do so, for it was evident that he had some important reason for sending to her in this way, as they met continually in the ordinary manner during the day.

"Tell Mr. Gray I will come down at once," she said.

In a very few moments she went into the big room,

which at this time was deserted. It was all lit up for the evening, when there was to be a great meeting. Lord Ferdinand Abchurch was to become a member of the new sect, and a member of the inner circle of chosen disciples on this evening, and preparations were made for a full gathering ; but no one was yet in the great room, except Mr. Gray, who was pacing impatiently up and down, awaiting Daphne's entrance.

"Miss Royal," he said, "I have to-day made a great discovery. Chance favoured me in that I know one of the firm of lawyers whom Miss Riga employs. I daresay what I have done seems unpardonable in your eyes, and indeed I can hardly justify it to myself. I know that I was not intended to know, and I have devoted myself to obtaining this knowledge, but now I have it, whatever you think of me, I will use it, that is to say, I will try and explain to you your position."

"What are you talking about?" said Daphne, "I don't understand you."

"Are you still intending to leave this country with Mrs. Flite?" asked Gray.

Daphne sighed, "I suppose so," she said. "I don't intend to go if I can help it, but after all it would be a trifling thing to what I am expected to do here. Once away from my aunt I cannot be expected, surely, to deceive people, as she wishes me to now. I am speaking very plainly, you see, Mr. Gray, but you know so much that there is no reason why I should not."

"I know a great deal, indeed," said Gray, "I know you have signed a power of attorney to your aunt, which gives her absolute control over all your possessions during your absence, and I know that Julian gave you power of attorney when he left. And as soon as she has got you out of this country, she has both of your estates under her absolute control. Now that I have put it as plainly as that, do you see why you have been asked to leave this country?"

"Surely she cannot be as bad as that?" said Daphne.

"I may be very wrong in my estimate of human nature," said Mr. Gray; "but I think if you allow her to carry out all your plans, that if you ever return

to this country, you will find both yourself and Julian penniless."

"But my aunt, what will she do?" said Daphne.

"Oh, that I cannot say," said Gray. "But I should say that you will never see her again, unless some strong controlling hand is put upon her."

"But surely it will be," cried Daphne. "The Master is a reality—I have seen him. Surely he will not allow all this to be done, merely for that one person's benefit."

"I cannot answer you," said Gray, "I cannot understand it. I am certain that you and Julian both believe in your visions, but I know that Miss Riga doesn't believe in them; and if the Master whom you see is using her as a tool, he must be bad himself to use so bad a tool, and to allow such methods to be adopted."

"I have defied him," said Daphne. "I have no mercy to expect from him; and now I am prepared to defy her, now that I see this as you put it before me. I see how awful it appears when one looks at it from your point of view. I know so little of the value of money, that I think nothing of my losses,

but I do think a great deal of her gain, wrought by so terrible means ; and, knowing how wicked her methods are, I can believe that she never intends me to return, and that is why Mrs. Flite is to go with me."

Daphne spoke with that terrible conviction of treachery which shows that no further argument is needed.

"I have been trying to think what to do," said Gray. "You must get those papers back. You must remember that, even if you are willing to give everything you possess to that woman, you have no right to give everything that Julian possesses."

"Oh, I see it plainly," said Daphne. "I see that I shall be doing a dishonourable thing ; I shall fail at my post of trust. In his absence I am simply his steward, and he gave me that power of attorney because he trusted me. I shall not fail," she said, "to cry out in fear," and without another word she went away, leaving Gray in the room to ponder.

In two hours more that room was filled with a large gathering of the faithful. That was what Miss Riga called them ; what they actually were, who can

tell? Some, indeed, were very earnest, some were ready to sacrifice everything; but, no doubt, many, like Mrs. Flite, were looking out for a happy hunting-ground of some sort or the other. However, they were there, and presented a goodly show, and all seemed in equal earnest. Lord Abchurch came quite early, for he was greatly interested in the whole matter, and having made up his mind to understand it, was determined to do so thoroughly. It seemed that Mrs. Flite was deputed to entertain him, for she kept close to him during the time before the actual proceedings of the evening began. Miss Riga never came in until the last moment, making always a theatrical kind of entrance; and to-night, Gray, who was watching everything with great interest, noticed also that Daphne did not come until the last moment. He was in a very silent humour that evening. He had so much to think of, and was glad that Mrs. Flite devoted herself to Lord Ferdie. He was watching the two closely, because they interested him more than anyone else, until Daphne appeared, when he saw Lord Ferdie start violently. Mrs. Flite had just put her lace handkerchief to her mouth,

and a look of triumph was on her face. A look of anxiety and surprise was on Lord Ferdie's. In his hand was a crimson rose, which had fluttered to him, as it seemed, from the ceiling. He held it up, and looked at it in great amazement. A flutter of excitement passed through the whole room, for this miracle had been worked in full conclave, and before the eyes of the full meeting.

"Look at it, Lord Ferdie," said Mr. Foster, "it is sure to contain a letter from the Master;" and at these words everyone instantly drew a little nearer, and Lord Ferdie found himself the centre of a curious group. He pressed the rose gently, and drew from out the petals a folded paper. He opened it slowly, and under the scrutiny of all those curious eyes.

"Is it an order?" said an awed voice at last.

"I cannot understand it," said Lord Ferdie, "it seems to be written in some unknown language."

"Sanskrit, probably," said Gray. "I can read it, Ferdie, if it is so. Let me look."

At that moment Daphne's voice was heard, and Gray turned with a start, very much surprised that she was in the room. She was standing in the arch-

way, half hidden by the curtain, and now came forward.

"I have been here some moments," she said, speaking deliberately, and yet with a strong and subdued excitement. "I have seen all that has happened. It is not worth your while to read that message, Mr. Gray; that is not a message from the unseen. Mrs. Flite is very clever, and has learned her business admirably, but I saw her throw the rose, although perhaps no one else did."

"Oh, yes, some one did," said Gray very drily, "and I have seen her do it before."

Miss Riga was in the room by this time, and Mrs. Flite started from her chair and approached her.

"There is a conspiracy against us," she said, in a voice almost inarticulate, with a mingling of passion and terror.

Daphne turned upon them.

"No, it is no conspiracy," she said. I am speaking the truth and intend to speak the truth. I came into this room with that intention to-night. When I saw so many drawn into this network of deceit, I resolved, come what might, I would speak, and tell

what I knew, and just as I entered the room I saw this trick played before my eyes. The credulous, who have believed so much, never paused to question but truly no one fresh from the outer world, could be so easily deceived," and as she said this she turned to Lord Ferdie.

He rose, and coming to her side, "No," he said, "I was not deceived." He spoke very quietly, but the words evidently struck terror into the hearts of the two conspirators. They both looked at him with glances of dismay.

"I have much more to say than this," said Daphne, and the amazed, eager little crowd drew back from her as she drew herself up and addressed them, with a peculiar manner, which made her seem like an inspired priestess.

"I have to tell you," she said, "that I have seen this thing from the beginning, and that not only are the grand words that are used, reduced to mere meaningless jargon, because they are in the mouths of people who use them for a bad end; not only are the great thoughts drawn from the old religions debased and degraded, because they are used as the

screen for selfish and wicked actions. All that would be unintelligible, because we all know that the ordinary human being is imperfect and evil. But I have to say, too, I have myself seen the Master who initiated this movement and that he, so far as I can judge, is as evil as the creatures whom he uses." As she said this she turned with a magnificent gesture to the portrait of Morial, the doors of which were always unlocked and thrown open for these special gatherings, and instead of addressing the people about her, she addressed her next words to the portrait itself.

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Julian, left to himself, experienced a sense of loneliness which had never befallen him before. All hope, all ambition, seemed killed by Kuthumi's terrible words. Morial as a guide and a teacher was destroyed for him. What had he learned from this monster of selfishness, that he should wish to know? Nothing! The only thing that he desired to do was to save Daphne from the terrible consequences of the position in which she was placed, but he was powerless to do this, was powerless as though he were

dead, here in this remote, unexplored region. When his mind reverted to this, a longing to see and know what was happening drew him, almost without thought, from the room in which he had been sleeping, to that in which the crystal hung. He had no thought of Morial, or of anything else in the world—except what was happening in his own home. The crystal was clouded when he reached it, and he set himself to will that this cloud should clear, and he should see the truth. It did clear, as if in obedience to his will, and he saw the gathering which we have seen in the great drawing-room. He heard Daphne's words, and a kind of terror came upon him when he saw her address herself to the portrait, for he knew by experience and by intuition that if she commanded Morial he must obey her, and if she did this to-night the final battle between them must come, and he dreaded that she would be the one that would be crushed. While he was thinking this, he heard her voice ring out, clear and plain, "Morial, I command you. I have found that by some mysterious power I can make you obey me ; you who profess to be the ruler of the world, I command you to listen to me now,

that I denounce you as a spirit of evil. You have knowledge and you have power, you are a Master but you are a black Master. You put evil thoughts into men's minds, you corrupt them, you lead them into fatal positions, from which they can never escape, and then you make them your helpless tools. I know that Miss Riga wants the money which rich believers bring ; but you want more, you want their souls and their consciences, and their whole lives to be sacrificed to your monstrous selfishness, and you would make them as evil as yourself. Answer me," she said with an air of command which surpassed any possibility which seemed to lie within herself, a manner which seemed visibly inspired. "Answer me, I command you." And then at this moment there came upon Julian the awful sense which he had experienced before when Daphne called him. Morial had come at her command, and again it seemed as if she saw him in person, for she turned from the portrait, and directly faced the place where Julian stood, and where Morial stood beside him.

"I denounce you," she cried. "I know you to be a Master of the Black Art, and a servant of the devil ;

MORIAL THE MAHATMA.

invoke the pure Spirit of Truth to withstand your Jesuitical casuistries. I call upon the inner power of good which dwells in every man to withstand your subtle temptations ; and I demand that the Pure Spirit which enlightens the world shall destroy you."

Julian, listening intently to these words, forgot that he stood close to the Master to whom she addressed these words, but Morial's presence was recalled to his memory by a terrible stifled cry which seemed like no human sound that he had ever heard. He turned and looked, expecting to see something terrible and agonising, some mortal struggle for life. What he did see was simply the statue-like figure of the beautiful youth, whose fascinations had been so great. Looking back, he saw that the crystal was clouded, and terrified that he should not know the result of Daphne's inspired effort, he approached Morial hastily, and, touching him, to his horror, it was as though he had touched, not merely marble only, but ice. He recoiled from the chill of this contact, and as he did so he heard a cry of despair, a wail as of a lost spirit, and he recognised the voice of Kuthumi. And he heard this voice speak. "He is

gone," it said, "where shall we find another in the world to join us. The mystic number is destroyed, He is gone." The voice died away. Julian looked at the crystal, but it was dark again. He approached Morial's figure, but it was fixed, immovable, and colder than death. A horror fell upon him, which was uncontrollable; this exquisite form, this beautiful face, filled him with a sense of terror, now that this smile had gone, and those eyes were helpless. Led by an uncontrollable impulse, he rushed out of the room, and throwing back the curtain from the doorway escaped into the outer air. But as he did so he almost fell across the lifeless figure of the panther which lay upon the threshold. Recovering himself he went on, and reached the lawn. The sun was high, and it seemed to have scorched the very ground on which he stood, for the verdure had vanished, where the velvet turf had been, it was all parched and harried. In spite of the heat of the sun, a bitter wind, ice-cold, blew across the valley. It appeared to have killed the flowers which had bloomed in such quantities, for on every side they drooped and hung lifeless on their stalks. The sight was horrible,

and affected Julian with a new terror. He turned, and rushed back to the other side of the hermitage, to that place where he knew the great black horse Agape dwelt in a charmed stable. The great horse had been his friend before, and it seemed to him that in this strong animal life there would be some comfort. He flung wide the door, and rushed in, longing to touch the creature, and feel its burning breath. It had before now saved him from death. The horse stood there, but Julian's artistic eye told him instantly that life was gone; that the splendid form before him was a statue of ebony, fixed and immovable as the rock in which the charmed stable was hewn. With an awful cry he flung himself at the feet of this majestic statue, and in one moment the shock had silenced the questioning brain, and he had found the eternal quiet of death.

THE END.

223
2P. 223
82Academy
Criminal
183
26
267J. 223
223
192
193