

## CHAPTER XI.

### MANIFESTATIONS.

Miss Heydinger declined to disbelieve in the spirits of the dead, and this led to controversy in the laboratory over Tea. For the girl students, being in a majority that year, had organised Tea between four o'clock and the advent of the extinguishing policeman at five. And the men students were occasionally invited to Tea. But not more than two of them at a time really participated, because there were only two spare cups after that confounded Simmons broke the third.

Smithers, the square-headed student with the hard grey eyes, argued against the spirits of the dead with positive animosity, while Bletherley, who displayed an orange tie and lank hair in unshorn abundance, was vaguely open-minded, "What is love?" asked Bletherley, "surely that at any rate is immortal!" His remark was considered irrelevant and ignored.

Lewisham, as became the most promising student of the year, weighed the evidence--comprehensively under headings. He dismissed the mediumistic séances as trickery.

"Rot and imposture," said Smithers loudly, and with an oblique glance

to see if his challenge reached its mark. Its mark was a grizzled little old man with a very small face and very big grey eyes, who had been standing listlessly at one of the laboratory windows until the discussion caught him. He wore a brown velvet jacket and was reputed to be enormously rich. His name was Lagune. He was not a regular attendant, but one of those casual outsiders who are admitted to laboratories that are not completely full. He was known to be an ardent spiritualist--it was even said that he had challenged Huxley to a public discussion on materialism, and he came to the biological lectures and worked intermittently, in order, he explained, to fight disbelief with its own weapons. He rose greedily to Smithers' controversial bait.

"I say no!" he said, calling down the narrow laboratory and following his voice. He spoke with the ghost of a lisp. "Pardon my interrupting, sir. The question interests me profoundly. I hope I don't intrude. Excuse me, sir. Make it personal. Am I a--fool, or an impostor?"

"Well," parried Smithers, with all a South Kensington student's want of polish, "that's a bit personal."

"Assume, sir, that I am an honest observer."

"Well?"

"I have seen spirits, heard spirits, felt the touch of spirits,"

He opened his pale eyes very widely.

"Fool, then," said Smithers in an undertone which did not reach the ears of the spiritualist.

"You may have been deceived," paraphrased Lewisham.

"I can assure you ... others can see, hear, feel. I have tested, sir. Tested! I have some scientific training and I have employed tests. Scientific and exhaustive tests! Every possible way. I ask you, sir--have you given the spirits a chance?"

"It is only paying guineas to humbugs," said Smithers.

"There you are! Prejudice! Here is a man denies the facts and consequently won't see them, won't go near them."

"But you wouldn't have every man in the three kingdoms, who disbelieved in spirits, attend séances before he should be allowed to deny?"

"Most assuredly yes. Most assuredly yes! He knows nothing about it till then."

The argument became heated. The little old gentleman was soon under

way. He knew a person of the most extraordinary gifts, a medium ...

"Paid?" asked Smithers.

"Would you muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn?" said Lagune promptly.

Smithers' derision was manifest.

"Would you distrust a balance because you bought it? Come and see." Lagune was now very excited and inclined to gesticulate and raise his voice. He invited the whole class incontinently to a series of special séances. "Not all at once--the spirits--new influences." But in sections. "I warn you we may get nothing. But the chances are ... I would rejoice infinitely ..."

So it came about that Lewisham consented to witness a spirit-raising. Miss Heydinger it was arranged should be there, and the sceptic Smithers, Lagune, his typewriter and the medium would complete the party. Afterwards there was to be another party for the others. Lewisham was glad he had the moral support of Smithers. "It's an evening wasted," said Smithers, who had gallantly resolved to make the running for Lewisham in the contest for the Forbes medal. "But I'll prove my case. You see if I don't." They were given an address in Chelsea.

The house, when Lewisham found it at last, proved a large one, with such an air of mellowed dignity that he was abashed. He hung his hat up for himself beside a green-trimmed hat of straw in the wide, rich-toned hall. Through an open door he had a glimpse of a palatial study, book shelves bearing white busts, a huge writing-table lit by a green-shaded electric lamp and covered thickly with papers. The housemaid looked, he thought, with infinite disdain at the rusty mourning and flamboyant tie, and flounced about and led him upstairs.

She rapped, and there was a discussion within. "They're at it already, I believe," she said to Lewisham confidentially. "Mr. Lagune's always at it."

There were sounds of chairs being moved, Smithers' extensive voice making a suggestion and laughing nervously. Lagune appeared opening the door. His grizzled face seemed smaller and his big grey eyes larger than usual.

"We were just going to begin without you," he whispered. "Come along."

The room was furnished even more finely than the drawing-room of the Whortley Grammar School, hitherto the finest room (except certain of the State Apartments at Windsor) known to Lewisham. The furniture struck him in a general way as akin to that in the South Kensington Museum. His first impression was an appreciation of the vast social

superiority of the chairs; it seemed impertinent to think of sitting on anything quite so quietly stately. He perceived Smithers standing with an air of bashful hostility against a bookcase. Then he was aware that Lagune was asking them all to sit down. Already seated at the table was the Medium, Chaffery, a benevolent-looking, faintly shabby gentleman with bushy iron-grey side-whiskers, a wide, thin-lipped mouth tucked in at the corners, and a chin like the toe of a boot. He regarded Lewisham critically and disconcertingly over gilt glasses. Miss Heydinger was quite at her ease and began talking at once. Lewisham's replies were less confident than they had been in the Gallery of Old Iron; indeed there was almost a reversal of their positions. She led and he was abashed. He felt obscurely that she had taken an advantage of him. He became aware of another girlish figure in a dark dress on his right.

Everyone moved towards the round table in the centre of the room, on which lay a tambourine and a little green box. Lagune developed unsuspected lengths of knobby wrist and finger directing his guests to their seats. Lewisham was to sit next to him, between him and the Medium; beyond the Medium sat Smithers with Miss Heydinger on the other side of him, linked to Lagune by the typewriter. So sceptics compassed the Medium about. The company was already seated before Lewisham looked across Lagune and met the eyes of the girl next that gentleman. It was Ethel! The close green dress, the absence of a hat, and a certain loss of colour made her seem less familiar, but did not prevent the instant recognition. And there was recognition in her

eyes.

Immediately she looked away. At first his only emotion was surprise. He would have spoken, but a little thing robbed him of speech. For a moment he was unable to remember her surname. Moreover, the strangeness of his surroundings made him undecided. He did not know what was the proper way to address her--and he still kept to the superstition of etiquette. Besides--to speak to her would involve a general explanation to all these people ...

"Just leave a pin-point of gas, Mr. Smithers, please," said Lagune, and suddenly the one surviving jet of the gas chandelier was turned down and they were in darkness. The moment for recognition had passed.

The joining of hands was punctiliously verified, the circle was linked little finger to little finger. Lewisham's abstraction received a rebuke from Smithers. The Medium, speaking in an affable voice, premised that he could promise nothing, he had no "directing" power over manifestations. Thereafter ensued a silence....

For a space Lewisham was inattentive to all that happened.

He sat in the breathing darkness, staring at the dim elusive shape that had presented that remembered face. His mind was astonishment mingled with annoyance. He had settled that this girl was lost to him

for ever. The spell of the old days of longing, of the afternoons that he had spent after his arrival in London, wandering through Clapham with a fading hope of meeting her, had not returned to him. But he was ashamed of his stupid silence, and irritated by the awkwardness of the situation. At one moment he was on the very verge of breaking the compact and saying "Miss Henderson" across the table....

How was it he had forgotten that "Henderson"? He was still young enough to be surprised at forgetfulness.

Smithers coughed, one might imagine with a warning intention.

Lewisham, recalling his detective responsibility with an effort, peered about him, but the room was very dark. The silence was broken ever and again by deep sighs and a restless stirring from the Medium. Out of this mental confusion Lewisham's personal vanity was first to emerge. What did she think of him? Was she peering at him through the darkness even as he peered at her? Should he pretend to see her for the first time when the lights were restored? As the minutes lengthened it seemed as though the silence grew deeper and deeper. There was no fire in the room, and it looked, for lack of that glow, chilly. A curious scepticism arose in his mind as to whether he had actually seen Ethel or only mistaken someone else for her. He wanted the séance over in order that he might look at her again. The old days at Whortley came out of his memory with astonishing



detail and yet astonishingly free from emotion....

He became aware of a peculiar sensation down his back, that he tried to account for as a draught....

Suddenly a beam of cold air came like a touch against his face, and made him shudder convulsively. Then he hoped that she had not marked his shudder. He thought of laughing a low laugh to show he was not afraid. Someone else shuddered too, and he perceived an extraordinarily vivid odour of violets. Lagune's finger communicated a nervous quivering.

What was happening?

The musical box somewhere on the table began playing a rather trivial, rather plaintive air that was strange to him. It seemed to deepen the silence about him, an accent on the expectant stillness, a thread of tinkling melody spanning an abyss.

Lewisham took himself in hand at this stage. What was happening? He must attend. Was he really watching as he should do? He had been wool-gathering. There were no such things as spirits, mediums were humbugs, and he was here to prove that sole remaining Gospel. But he must keep up with things--he was missing points. What was that scent of violets? And who had set the musical box going? The Medium, of course; but how? He tried to recall whether he had heard a rustling or

detected any movement before the music began. He could not recollect. Come! he must be more on the alert than this!

He became acutely desirous of a successful exposure. He figured the dramatic moment he had prepared with Smithers--Ethel a spectator. He peered suspiciously into the darkness.

Somebody shuddered again, someone opposite him this time. He felt Lagune's finger quiver still more palpably, and then suddenly the raps began, abruptly, all about him. Rap!--making him start violently. A swift percussive sound, tap, rap, dap, under the table, under the chair, in the air, round the cornices. The Medium groaned again and shuddered, and his nervous agitation passed sympathetically round the circle. The music seemed to fade to the vanishing point and grew louder again.

How was it done?

He heard Lagune's voice next him speaking with a peculiar quality of breathless reverence, "The alphabet?" he asked, "shall we--shall we use the alphabet?"

A forcible rap under the table.

"No!" interpreted the voice of the Medium.

The raps were continued everywhere.

Of course it was trickery, Lewisham endeavoured to think what the mechanism was. He tried to determine whether he really had the Medium's little finger touching his. He peered at the dark shape next him. There was a violent rapping far away behind them with an almost metallic resonance. Then the raps ceased, and over the healing silence the little jet of melody from the musical box played alone. And after a moment that ceased also....

The stillness was profound, Mr. Lewisham was now highly strung. Doubts assailed him suddenly, and an overwhelming apprehension, a sense of vast occurrences gathering above him. The darkness was a physical oppression....

He started. Something had stirred on the table. There was the sharp ping of metal being struck. A number of little crepitating sounds like paper being smoothed. The sound of wind without the movement of air. A sense of a presence hovering over the table.

The excitement of Lagune communicated itself in convulsive tremblings; the Medium's hand quivered. In the darkness on the table something faintly luminous, a greenish-white patch, stirred and hopped slowly among the dim shapes.

The object, whatever it was, hopped higher, rose slowly in the air,

expanded. Lewisham's attention followed this slavishly. It was ghostly--unaccountable--marvellous. For the moment he forgot even Ethel. Higher and higher this pallid luminosity rose overhead, and then he saw that it was a ghostly hand and arm, rising, rising. Slowly, deliberately it crossed the table, seemed to touch Lagune, who shivered. It moved slowly round and touched Lewisham. He gritted his teeth.

There was no mistaking the touch, firm and yet soft, of finger-tips. Almost simultaneously, Miss Heydinger cried out that something was smoothing her hair, and suddenly the musical box set off again with a reel. The faint oval of the tambourine rose, jangled, and Lewisham heard it pat Smithers in the face. It seemed to pass overhead. Immediately a table somewhere beyond the Medium began moving audibly on its castors.

It seemed impossible that the Medium, sitting so still beside him, could be doing all these things--grotesquely unmeaning though they might be. After all....

The ghostly hand was hovering almost directly in front of Mr. Lewisham's eyes. It hung with a slight quivering. Ever and again its fingers flapped down and rose stiffly again.

Noise! A loud noise it seemed. Something moving? What was it he had to do?

Lewisham suddenly missed the Medium's little finger. He tried to recover it. He could not find it. He caught, held and lost an arm. There was an exclamation. A faint report. A curse close to him bitten in half by the quick effort to suppress it. Tzit! The little pinpoint of light flew up with a hiss.

Lewisham, standing, saw a circle of blinking faces turned to the group of two this sizzling light revealed. Smithers was the chief figure of the group; he stood triumphant, one hand on the gas tap, the other gripping the Medium's wrist, and in the Medium's hand--the incriminatory tambourine.

"How's this, Lewisham?" cried Smithers, with the shadows on his face jumping as the gas flared.

"Caught!" said Lewisham loudly, rising in his place and avoiding Ethel's eyes.

"What's this?" cried the Medium.

"Cheating," panted Smithers.

"Not so," cried the Medium. "When you turned up the light ... put my hand up ... caught tambourine ... to save head."

"Mr. Smithers," cried Lagune. "Mr. Smithers, this is very wrong. This--shock--"

The tambourine fell noisily to the floor. The Medium's face changed, he groaned strangely and staggered back. Lagune cried out for a glass of water. Everyone looked at the man, expecting him to fall, save Lewisham. The thought of Ethel had flashed back into his mind. He turned to see how she took this exposure in which he was such a prominent actor. He saw her leaning over the table as if to pick up something that lay across it. She was not looking at him, she was looking at the Medium. Her face was set and white. Then, as if she felt his glance, her eyes met his.

She started back, stood erect, facing him with a strange hardness in her eyes.

In the moment Lewisham did not grasp the situation. He wanted to show that he was acting upon equal terms with Smithers in the exposure. For the moment her action simply directed his attention to the object towards which she had been leaning, a thing of shrivelled membrane, a pneumatic glove, lying on the table. This was evidently part of the mediumistic apparatus. He pounced and seized it.

"Look!" he said, holding it towards Smithers. "Here is more! What is this?"

He perceived that the girl started. He saw Chaffery, the Medium, look instantly over Smithers' shoulders, saw his swift glance of reproach at the girl. Abruptly the situation appeared to Lewisham; he perceived her complicity. And he stood, still in the attitude of triumph, with the evidence against her in his hand! But his triumph had vanished.

"Ah!" cried Smithers, leaning across the table to secure it. "Good old Lewisham!... Now we have it. This is better than the tambourine."

His eyes shone with triumph. "Do you see, Mr. Lagune?" said Smithers. "The Medium held this in his teeth and blew it out. There's no denying this. This wasn't falling on your head, Mr. Medium, was it? This--this was the luminous hand!"