

CHAPTER XII.

LEWISHAM IS UNACCOUNTABLE.

That night, as she went with him to Chelsea station, Miss Heydinger discovered an extraordinary moodiness in Lewisham. She had been vividly impressed by the scene in which they had just participated, she had for a time believed in the manifestations; the swift exposure had violently revolutionised her ideas. The details of the crisis were a little confused in her mind. She ranked Lewisham with Smithers in the scientific triumph of the evening. On the whole she felt elated. She had no objection to being confuted by Lewisham. But she was angry with the Medium, "It is dreadful," she said. "Living a lie! How can the world grow better, when sane, educated people use their sanity and enlightenment to darken others? It is dreadful!

"He was a horrible man--such an oily, dishonest voice. And the girl--I was sorry for her. She must have been oh!--bitterly ashamed, or why should she have burst out crying? That did distress me. Fancy crying like that! It was--yes--abandon. But what can one do?"

She paused. Lewisham was walking along, looking straight before him, lost in some grim argument with himself.

"It makes me think of Sludge the Medium," she said.

He made no answer.

She glanced at him suddenly. "Have you read Sludge the Medium?"

"Eigh?" he said, coming back out of infinity. "What? I beg your pardon. Sludge, the Medium? I thought his name was--it was--Chaffery."

He looked at her, clearly very anxious upon this question of fact.

"But I mean Browning's 'Sludge.' You know the poem."

"No--I'm afraid I don't," said Lewisham.

"I must lend it to you," she said. "It's splendid. It goes to the very bottom of this business."

"Does it?"

"It never occurred to me before. But I see the point clearly now. If people, poor people, are offered money if phenomena happen, it's too much. They are bound to cheat. It's bribery--immorality!"

She talked in panting little sentences, because Lewisham was walking in heedless big strides. "I wonder how much--such people--could earn honestly."

Lewisham slowly became aware of the question at his ear. He hurried back from infinity. "How much they could earn honestly? I haven't the slightest idea."

He paused. "The whole of this business puzzles me," he said. "I want to think."

"It's frightfully complex, isn't it?" she said--a little staggered.

But the rest of the way to the station was silence. They parted with a hand-clasp they took a pride in--a little perfunctory so far as Lewisham was concerned on this occasion. She scrutinised his face as the train moved out of the station, and tried to account for his mood. He was staring before him at unknown things as if he had already forgotten her.

He wanted to think! But two heads, she thought, were better than one in a matter of opinion. It troubled her to be so ignorant of his mental states. "How we are wrapped and swathed about--soul from soul!" she thought, staring out of the window at the dim things flying by outside.

Suddenly a fit of depression came upon her. She felt alone--absolutely alone--in a void world.

Presently she returned to external things. She became aware of two people in the next compartment eyeing her critically. Her hand went patting at her hair.