

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. CHAFFERY AT HOME.

The golden mists of delight lifted a little on Monday, when Mr. and Mrs. G.E. Lewisham went to call on his mother-in-law and Mr. Chaffery. Mrs. Lewisham went in evident apprehension, but clouds of glory still hung about Lewisham's head, and his manner was heroic. He wore a cotton shirt and linen collar, and a very nice black satin tie that Mrs. Lewisham had bought on her own responsibility during the day. She naturally wanted him to look all right.

Mrs. Chaffery appeared in the half light of the passage as the top of a grimy cap over Ethel's shoulder and two black sleeves about her neck. She emerged as a small, middle-aged woman, with a thin little nose between silver-rimmed spectacles, a weak mouth and perplexed eyes, a queer little dust-lined woman with the oddest resemblance to Ethel in her face. She was trembling visibly with nervous agitation.

She hesitated, peering, and then kissed Mr. Lewisham effusively. "And this is Mr. Lewisham!" she said as she did so.

She was the third thing feminine to kiss Lewisham since the promiscuous days of his babyhood. "I was so afraid--There!" She laughed hysterically.

"You'll excuse my saying that it's comforting to see you--honest like and young. Not but what Ethel ... He has been something dreadful," said Mrs. Chaffery. "You didn't ought to have written about that mesmerising. And of all letters that which Jane wrote--there! But he's waiting and listening--"

"Are we to go downstairs, Mums?" asked Ethel.

"He's waiting for you there," said Mrs. Chaffery. She held a dismal little oil lamp, and they descended a tenebrous spiral structure into an underground breakfast-room lit by gas that shone through a partially frosted globe with cut-glass stars. That descent had a distinctly depressing effect upon Lewisham. He went first. He took a deep breath at the door. What on earth was Chaffery going to say? Not that he cared, of course.

Chaffery was standing with his back to the fire, trimming his finger-nails with a pocket-knife. His gilt glasses were tilted forward so as to make an inflamed knob at the top of his long nose, and he regarded Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham over them with--Lewisham doubted his eyes for a moment--but it was positively a smile, an essentially waggish smile.

"You've come back," he said quite cheerfully over Lewisham to Ethel. There was a hint of falsetto in his voice.

"She has called to see her mother," said Lewisham. "You, I believe, are Mr. Chaffery?"

"I would like to know who the Deuce you are?" said Chaffery, suddenly tilting his head back so as to look through his glasses instead of over them, and laughing genially. "For thoroughgoing Cheek, I'm inclined to think you take the Cake. Are you the Mr. Lewisham to whom this misguided girl refers in her letter?"

"I am."

"Maggie," said Mr. Chaffery to Mrs. Chaffery, "there is a class of being upon whom delicacy is lost--to whom delicacy is practically unknown. Has your daughter got her marriage lines?"

"Mr. Chaffery!" said Lewisham, and Mrs. Chaffery exclaimed, "James! How can you?"

Chaffery shut his penknife with a click and slipped it into his vest-pocket. Then he looked up again, speaking in the same equal voice. "I presume we are civilised persons prepared to manage our affairs in a civilised way. My stepdaughter vanishes for two nights and returns with an alleged husband. I at least am not disposed to be careless about her legal position."

"You ought to know her better--" began Lewisham.

"Why argue about it," said Chaffery gaily, pointing a lean finger at Ethel's gesture, "when she has 'em in her pocket? She may just as well show me now. I thought so. Don't be alarmed at my handling them. Fresh copies can always be got at the nominal price of two-and-seven. Thank you ... Lewisham, George Edgar. One-and-twenty. And ... You--one-and-twenty! I never did know your age, my dear, exactly, and now your mother won't say. Student! Thank you. I am greatly obliged. Indeed I am greatly relieved. And now, what have you got to say for yourselves in this remarkable affair?"

"You had a letter," said Lewisham.

"I had a letter of excuses--the personalities I overlook ... Yes, sir--they were excuses. You young people wanted to marry--and you seized an occasion. You did not even refer to the fact that you wanted to marry in your letter. Pure modesty! But now you have come here married. It disorganises this household, it inflicts endless bother on people, but never you mind that! I'm not blaming you. Nature's to blame! Neither of you know what you are in for yet. You will. You're married, and that is the great essential thing.... (Ethel, my dear, just put your husband's hat and stick behind the door.) And you, sir, are so good as to disapprove of the way in which I earn my living?"

"Well," said Lewisham. "Yes--I'm bound to say I do."

"You are really not bound to say it. The modesty of inexperience would excuse you."

"Yes, but it isn't right--it isn't straight."

"Dogma," said Chaffery. "Dogma!"

"What do you mean by dogma?" asked Lewisham.

"I mean, dogma. But we must argue this out in comfort. It is our supper hour, and I'm not the man to fight against accomplished facts. We have intermarried. There it is. You must stop to supper--and you and I must thresh these things out. We've involved ourselves with each other and we've got to make the best of it. Your wife and mine will spread the board, and we will go on talking. Why not sit in that chair instead of leaning on the back? This is a home--domus--not a debating society--humble in spite of my manifest frauds.... That's better. And in the first place I hope--I do so hope"--Chaffery was suddenly very impressive--"that you're not a Dissenter."

"Eh!" said Lewisham, and then, "No! I am not a Dissenter."

"That's better," said Mr. Chaffery. "I'm glad of that. I was just a

little afraid--Something in your manner. I can't stand Dissenters. I've a peculiar dislike to Dissenters. To my mind it's the great drawback of this Clapham. You see ... I have invariably found them deceitful--invariably."

He grimaced and dropped his glasses with a click against his waistcoat buttons. "I'm very glad of that," he said, replacing them. "The Dissenter, the Nonconformist Conscience, the Puritan, you know, the Vegetarian and Total Abstainer, and all that sort of thing, I cannot away with them. I have cleared my mind of cant and formulae. I've a nature essentially Hellenic. Have you ever read Matthew Arnold?"

"Beyond my scientific reading--"

"Ah! you should read Matthew Arnold--a mind of singular clarity. In him you would find a certain quality that is sometimes a little wanting in your scientific men. They are apt to be a little too phenomenal, you know, a little too objective. Now I seek after noumena. Noumena, Mr. Lewisham! If you follow me--?"

He paused, and his eyes behind the glasses were mildly interrogative. Ethel re-entered without her hat and jacket, and with a noisy square black tray, a white cloth, some plates and knives and glasses, and began to lay the table.

"I follow you," said Lewisham, reddening. He had not the courage to

admit ignorance of this remarkable word. "You state your case."

"I seek after noumena," repeated Chaffery with great satisfaction, and gesticulated with his hand, waving away everything but that. "I cannot do with surfaces and appearances. I am one of those nympholepts, you know, nympholepts ... Must pursue the truth of things! the elusive fundamental ... I make a rule, I never tell myself lies--never. There are few who can say that. To my mind--truth begins at home. And for the most part--stops there. Safest and seemliest! you know. With most men--with your typical Dissenter par excellence--it's always gadding abroad, calling on the neighbours. You see my point of view?"

He glanced at Lewisham, who was conscious of an unwonted opacity of mind. He became wary, as wary as he could manage to be on the spur of the moment.

"It's a little surprising, you know," he said very carefully, "if I may say so--and considering what happened--to hear you ..."

"Speaking of truth? Not when you understand my position. Not when you see where I stand. That is what I am getting at. That is what I am naturally anxious to make clear to you now that we have intermarried, now that you are my stepson-in-law. You're young, you know, you're young, and you're hard and fast. Only years can give a mind tone--mitigate the varnish of education. I gather from this

letter--and your face--that you are one of the party that participated in that little affair at Lagune's."

He stuck out a finger at a point he had just seen. "By-the-bye!--That accounts for Ethel," he said.

Ethel rapped down the mustard on the table. "It does," she said, but not very loudly.

"But you had met before?" said Chaffery.

"At Whortley," said Lewisham.

"I see," said Chaffery.

"I was in--I was one of those who arranged the exposure," said Lewisham. "And now you have raised the matter, I am bound to say--"

"I knew," interrupted Chaffery. "But what a shock that was for Lagune!" He looked down at his toes for a moment with the corners of his mouth tucked in. "The hand dodge wasn't bad, you know," he said, with a queer sidelong smile.

Lewisham was very busy for a moment trying to get this remark in focus. "I don't see it in the same light as you do," he explained at last.

"Can't get away from your moral bias, eh?--Well, well. We'll go into all that. But apart from its moral merits--simply as an artistic trick--it was not bad."

"I don't know much about tricks--"

"So few who undertake exposures do. You admit you never heard or thought of that before--the bladder, I mean. Yet it's as obvious as tintacks that a medium who's hampered at his hands will do all he can with his teeth, and what could be so self-evident as a bladder under one's lappel? What could be? Yet I know psychic literature pretty well, and it's never been suggested even! Never. It's a perpetual surprise to me how many things are not thought of by investigators. For one thing, they never count the odds against them, and that puts them wrong at the start. Look at it! I am by nature tricky. I spend all my leisure standing or sitting about and thinking up or practising new little tricks, because it amuses me immensely to do so. The whole thing amuses me. Well--what is the result of these meditations? Take one thing:--I know eight-and-forty ways of making raps--of which at least ten are original. Ten original ways of making raps." His manner was very impressive. "And some of them simply tremendous raps. There!"

A confirmatory rap exploded--as it seemed between Lewisham and Chaffery.

"Eh?" said Chaffery.

The mantelpiece opened a dropping fire, and the table went off under Lewisham's nose like a cracker.

"You see?" said Chaffery, putting his hands under the tail of his coat. The whole room seemed snapping its fingers at Lewisham for a space.

"Very well, and now take the other side. Take the severest test I ever tried. Two respectable professors of physics--not Newtons, you understand, but good, worthy, self-important professors of physics--a lady anxious to prove there's a life beyond the grave, a journalist who wants stuff to write--a person, that is, who gets his living by these researches just as I do--undertook to test me. Test me!... Of course they had their other work to do, professing physics, professing religion, organising research, and so forth. At the outside they don't think an hour a day about it, and most of them had never cheated anybody in their existence, and couldn't, for example, travel without a ticket for a three-mile journey and not get caught, to save their lives.... Well--you see the odds?"

He paused. Lewisham appeared involved in some interior struggle.

"You know," explained Chaffery, "it was quite an accident you got me--quite. The thing slipped out of my mouth. Or your friend with, the

flat voice wouldn't have had a chance. Not a chance."

Lewisham spoke like a man who is lifting a weight. "All this, you know, is off the question. I'm not disputing your ability. But the thing is ... it isn't right."

"We're coming to that," said Chaffery.

"It's evident we look at things in a different light."

"That's it. That's just what we've got to discuss. Exactly!"

"Cheating is cheating. You can't get away from that. That's simple enough."

"Wait till I've done with it," said Chaffery with a certain zest. "Of course it's imperative you should understand my position. It isn't as though I hadn't one. Ever since I read your letter I've been thinking over that. Really!--a justification! In a way you might almost say I had a mission. A sort of prophet. You really don't see the beginning of it yet."

"Oh, but hang it!" protested Lewisham.

"Ah! you're young, you're crude. My dear young man, you're only at the beginning of things. You really must concede a certain possibility of

wider views to a man more than twice your age. But here's supper. For a little while at any rate we'll call a truce."

Ethel had come in again bearing an additional chair, and Mrs. Chaffery appeared behind her, crowning the preparations with a jug of small beer. The cloth, Lewisham observed, as he turned towards it, had several undarned holes and discoloured places, and in the centre stood a tarnished cruet which contained mustard, pepper, vinegar, and three ambiguous dried-up bottles. The bread was on an ample board with a pious rim, and an honest wedge of cheese loomed disproportionate on a little plate. Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham were seated facing one another, and Mrs. Chaffery sat in the broken chair because she understood its ways.

"This cheese is as nutritious and unattractive and indigestible as Science," remarked Chaffery, cutting and passing wedges. "But crush it--so--under your fork, add a little of this good Dorset butter, a dab of mustard, pepper--the pepper is very necessary--and some malt vinegar, and crush together. You get a compound called Crab and by no means disagreeable. So the wise deal with the facts of life, neither bolting nor rejecting, but adapting."

"As though pepper and mustard were not facts," said Lewisham, scoring his solitary point that evening.

Chaffery admitted the collapse of his image in very complimentary

terms, and Lewisham could not avoid a glance across the table at Ethel. He remembered that Chaffery was a slippery scoundrel whose blame was better than his praise, immediately afterwards.

For a time the Crab engaged Chaffery, and the conversation languished. Mrs. Chaffery asked Ethel formal questions about their lodgings, and Ethel's answers were buoyant, "You must come and have tea one day," said Ethel, not waiting for Lewisham's endorsement, "and see it all."

Chaffery astonished Lewisham by suddenly displaying a complete acquaintance with his status as a South Kensington teacher in training. "I suppose you have some money beyond that guinea," said Chaffery offhandedly.

"Enough to go on with," said Lewisham, reddening.

"And you look to them at South Kensington, to do something for you--a hundred a year or so, when your scholarship is up?"

"Yes," said Lewisham a little reluctantly. "Yes. A hundred a year or so. That's the sort of idea. And there's lots of places beyond South Kensington, of course, even if they don't put me up there."

"I see," said Chaffery; "but it will be a pretty close shave for all that--one hundred a year. Well, well--there's many a deserving man has

to do with less," and after a meditative pause he asked Lewisham to pass the beer.

"Hev you a mother living, Mr. Lewisham?" said Mrs. Chaffery suddenly, and pursued him through the tale of his connexions. When he came to the plumber, Mrs. Chaffery remarked with an unexpected air of consequence that most families have their poor relations. Then the air of consequence vanished again into the past from which it had arisen.

Supper finished, Chaffery poured the residuum of the beer into his glass, produced a Broseley clay of the longest sort, and invited Lewisham to smoke. "Honest smoking," said Chaffery, tapping the bowl of his clay, and added: "In this country--cigars--sound cigars--and honesty rarely meet."

Lewisham fumbled in his pocket for his Algerian cigarettes, and Chaffery having regarded them unfavourably through his glasses, took up the thread of his promised apologia. The ladies retired to wash up the supper things.

"You see," said Chaffery, opening abruptly so soon as the clay was drawing, about this cheating--I do not find life such a simple matter as you do."

"I don't find life simple," said Lewisham, "but I do think there's a

Right and a Wrong in things. And I don't think you have said anything so far to show that spiritualistic cheating is Right."

"Let us thresh the matter out," said Chaffery, crossing his legs; "let us thresh the matter out. Now"--he drew at his pipe--"I don't think you fully appreciate the importance of Illusion in life, the Essential Nature of Lies and Deception of the body politic. You are inclined to discredit one particular form of Imposture, because it is not generally admitted--carries a certain discredit, and--witness the heel edges of my trouser legs, witness yonder viands--small rewards."

"It's not that," said Lewisham.

"Now I am prepared to maintain," said Chaffery, proceeding with his proposition, "that Honesty is essentially an anarchistic and disintegrating force in society, that communities are held together and the progress of civilisation made possible only by vigorous and sometimes even, violent Lying; that the Social Contract is nothing more or less than a vast conspiracy of human beings to lie to and humbug themselves and one another for the general Good. Lies are the mortar that bind the savage Individual man into the social masonry. There is the general thesis upon which I base my justification. My mediumship, I can assure you, is a particular instance of the general assertion. Were I not of a profoundly indolent, restless, adventurous nature, and horribly averse to writing, I would make a great book of this and live honoured by every

profound duffer in the world."

"But how are you going to prove it?"

"Prove It! It simply needs pointing out. Even now there are men--Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and such like--who have seen bits of it in a new-gospel-grubbing sort of fashion. What Is man? Lust and greed tempered by fear and an irrational vanity."

"I don't agree with that," said Mr. Lewisham.

"You will as you grow older," said Chaffery. "There's truths you have to grow into. But about this matter of Lies--let us look at the fabric of society, let us compare the savage. You will discover the only essential difference between savage and civilised is this: The former hasn't learnt to shirk the truth of things, and the latter has. Take the most obvious difference--the clothing of the civilised man, his invention of decency. What is clothing? The concealment of essential facts. What is decorum? Suppression! I don't argue against decency and decorum, mind you, but there they are--essentials to civilisation and essentially 'suppressio veri.' And in the pockets of his clothes our citizen carries money. The pure savage has no money. To him a lump of metal is a lump of metal--possibly ornamental--no more. That's right. To any lucid-minded man it's the same or different only through the gross folly of his fellows. But to the common civilised man the universal exchangeability of this gold is a sacred and fundamental

fact. Think of it! Why should it be? There isn't a why! I live in perpetual amazement at the gullibility of my fellow-creatures. Of a morning sometimes, I can assure you, I lie in bed fancying that people may have found out this swindle in the night, expect to hear a tumult downstairs and see your mother-in-law come rushing into the room with a rejected shilling from the milkman. 'What's this?' says he. 'This Muck for milk?' But it never happens. Never. If it did, if people suddenly cleared their minds of this cant of money, what would happen? The true nature of man would appear. I should whip out of bed, seize some weapon, and after the milkman forthwith. It's becoming to keep the peace, but it's necessary to have milk. The neighbours would come pouring out--also after milk. Milkman, suddenly enlightened, would start clattering up the street. After him! Clutch--tear! Got him! Over goes the cart! Fight if you like, but don't upset the can!... Don't you see it all?--perfectly reasonable every bit of it. I should return, bruised and bloody, with the milk-can under my arm. Yes, I should have the milk-can--I should keep my eye on that.... But why go on? You of all men should know that life is a struggle for existence, a fight for food. Money is just the lie that mitigates our fury."

"No," said Lewisham; "no! I'm not prepared to admit that."

"What is money?"

Mr. Lewisham dodged. "You state your case first," he said. "I really

don't see what all this has to do with cheating at a séance."

"I weave my defence from this loom, though. Take some aggressively respectable sort of man--a bishop, for example."

"Well," said Lewisham, "I don't much hold with bishops."

"It doesn't matter. Take a professor of science, walking the earth. Remark his clothing, making a decent citizen out of him, concealing the fact that physically he is a flabby, pot-bellied degenerate. That is the first Lie of his being. No fringes round his trousers, my boy. Notice his hair, groomed and clipped, the tacit lie that its average length is half an inch, whereas in nature he would wave a few score yard-long hairs of ginger grey to the winds of heaven. Notice the smug suppressions of his face. In his mouth are Lies in the shape of false teeth. Then on the earth somewhere poor devils are toiling to get him meat and corn and wine. He is clothed in the lives of bent and thwarted weavers, his Way is lit by phossy jaw, he eats from lead-glazed crockery--all his ways are paved with the lives of men.... Think of the chubby, comfortable creature! And, as Swift has it--to think that such a thing should deal in pride!... He pretends that his blessed little researches are in some way a fair return to these remote beings for their toil, their suffering; pretends that he and his parasitic career are payment for their thwarted desires. Imagine him bullying his gardener over some transplanted geraniums, the thick mist of lies they stand in, so that

the man does not immediately with the edge of a spade smite down his impertinence to the dust from which it rose.... And his case is the case of all comfortable lives. What a lie and sham all civility is, all good breeding, all culture and refinement, while one poor ragged wretch drags hungry on the earth!"

"But this is Socialism!" said Lewisham. "I--"

"No Ism," said Chaffery, raising his rich voice. "Only the ghastly truth of things--the truth that the warp and the woof of the world of men is Lying. Socialism is no remedy, no ism is a remedy; things are so."

"I don't agree--" began Lewisham.

"Not with the hopelessness, because you are young, but with the description you do."

"Well--within limits."

"You agree that most respectable positions in the world are tainted with the fraud of our social conditions. If they were not tainted with fraud they would not be respectable. Even your own position--Who gave you the right to marry and prosecute interesting scientific studies while other young men rot in mines?"

"I admit--"

"You can't help admitting. And here is my position. Since all ways of life are tainted with fraud, since to live and speak the truth is beyond human strength and courage--as one finds it--is it not better for a man that he engage in some straightforward comparatively harmless cheating, than if he risk his mental integrity in some ambiguous position and fall at last into self-deception and self-righteousness? That is the essential danger. That is the thing I always guard against. Heed that! It is the master sin. Self-righteousness."

Mr. Lewisham pulled at his moustache.

"You begin to take me. And after all, these worthy people do not suffer so greatly. If I did not take their money some other impostor would. Their huge conceit of intelligence would breed perhaps some viler swindle than my facetious rappings. That's the line our doubting bishops take, and why shouldn't I? For example, these people might give it to Public Charities, minister to the fattened secretary, the prodigal younger son. After all, at worst, I am a sort of latter-day Robin Hood; I take from the rich according to their incomes. I don't give to the poor certainly, I don't get enough. But--there are other good works. Many a poor weakling have I comforted with Lies, great thumping, silly Lies, about the grave! Compare me with one of those rascals who disseminate phossy jaw and lead poisons, compare me with a millionaire who runs a music hall with an eye to feminine talent, or

an underwriter, or the common stockbroker. Or any sort of lawyer....

"There are bishops," said Chaffery, "who believe in Darwin and doubt Moses. Now, I hold myself better than they--analogous perhaps, but better--for I do at least invent something of the tricks I play--I do do that."

"That's all very well," began Lewisham.

"I might forgive them their dishonesty," said Chaffery, "but the stupidity of it, the mental self-abnegation--Lord! If a solicitor doesn't swindle in the proper shabby-magnificent way, they chuck him for unprofessional conduct." He paused. He became meditative, and smiled faintly.

"Now, some of my dodges," he said with a sudden change of voice, turning towards Lewisham, his eyes smiling over his glasses and an emphatic hand patting the table-cloth; "some of my dodges are damned ingenious, you know--damned ingenious--and well worth double the money they bring me--double."

He turned towards the fire again, pulling at his smouldering pipe, and eyeing Lewisham over the corner of his glasses.

"One or two of my little things would make Maskelyne sit up," he said presently. "They would set that mechanical orchestra playing out of

pure astonishment. I really must explain some of them to you--now we have intermarried."

It took Mr. Lewisham a minute or so to re-form the regiment of his mind, disordered by its headlong pursuit of Chaffery's flying arguments. "But on your principles you might do almost anything!" he said.

"Precisely!" said Chaffery.

"But--"

"It is rather a curious method," protested Chaffery; "to test one's principles of action by judging the resultant actions on some other principle, isn't it?"

Lewisham took a moment to think. "I suppose that is so," he said, in the manner of a man convinced against his will.

He perceived his logic insufficient. He suddenly thrust the delicacies of argument aside. Certain sentences he had brought ready for use in his mind came up and he delivered them abruptly. "Anyhow," he said, "I don't agree with this cheating. In spite of what you say, I hold to what I said in my letter. Ethel's connexion with all these things is at an end. I shan't go out of my way to expose you, of course, but if it comes in my way I shall speak my mind of all these spiritualistic

phenomena. It's just as well that we should know clearly where we are."

"That is clearly understood, my dear stepson-in-law," said Chaffery. "Our present object is discussion."

"But Ethel--"

"Ethel is yours," said Chaffery. "Ethel is yours," he repeated after an interval and added pensively--"to keep."

"But talking of Illusion," he resumed, dismissing the sordid with a sign of relief, "I sometimes think with Bishop Berkeley, that all experience is probably something quite different from reality. That consciousness is essentially hallucination. I, here, and you, and our talk--it is all Illusion. Bring your Science to bear--what am I? A cloudy multitude of atoms, an infinite interplay of little cells. Is this hand that I hold out me? This head? Is the surface of my skin any more than a rude average boundary? You say it is my mind that is me? But consider the war of motives. Suppose I have an impulse that I resist--it is I resist it--the impulse is outside me, eh? But suppose that impulse carries me and I do the thing--that impulse is part of me, is it not? Ah! My brain reels at these mysteries! Lord! what flimsy fluctuating things we are--first this, then that, a thought, an impulse, a deed and a forgetting, and all the time madly cocksure we are ourselves. And as for you--you who have hardly learned

to think for more than five or six short years, there you sit, assured, coherent, there you sit in all your inherited original sin--Hallucinatory Windlestraw!--judging and condemning. You know Right from Wrong! My boy, so did Adam and Eve ... so soon as they'd had dealings with the father of lies!"

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At the end of the evening whisky and hot water were produced, and Chaffery, now in a mood of great urbanity, said he had rarely enjoyed anyone's conversation so much as Lewisham's, and insisted upon everyone having whisky. Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel added sugar and lemon. Lewisham felt an instantaneous mild surprise at the sight of Ethel drinking grog.

At the door Mrs. Chaffery kissed Lewisham an effusive good-bye, and told Ethel she really believed it was all for the best.

On the way home Lewisham was thoughtful and preoccupied. The problem of Chaffery assumed enormous proportions. At times indeed even that good man's own philosophical sketch of himself as a practical exponent of mental sincerity touched with humour and the artistic spirit, seemed plausible. Lagune was an undeniable ass, and conceivably psychic research was an incentive to trickery. Then he remembered the matter in his relation to Ethel...

"Your stepfather is a little hard to follow," he said at last, sitting on the bed and taking off one boot. "He's dodgy--he's so confoundedly dodgy. One doesn't know where to take hold of him. He's got such a break he's clean bowled me again and again."

He thought for a space, and then removed his boot and sat with it on his knee. "Of course!... all that he said was wrong--quite wrong. Right is right and cheating is cheating, whatever you say about it."

"That's what I feel about him," said Ethel at the looking-glass.

"That's exactly how it seems to me."