

Chapter 15

Mr. Dudley's Diary Continued

PHILOSOPHY OF THE NEW BIRTH—THE RESURRECTION— WHY AND WHENCE—WONDERFUL SEANCE DURING A STORM

"**F**elix von Marx has, in his earth-life, taken himself out of the hands of loving spirit ministers, and sunk down to the sphere of elementary spirits, from which he can only escape by a resumption of the natural order of being, an order he has striven to reverse. He has entangled the soul and body of his adopted son in the same fatal meshes of error, and both must pay the penalty of new birth and resurrection, through pain and sorrow, before they can come into the order of nature, where the love of spirit friends and kindred can minister unto them.

"A little while longer and this beneficent change will be accomplished. In the spheres ruled by sub-mundane and super-mundane being, this great revolution has originated, and from thence the restoration must also come. Human spirits cannot yet intervene or aid them. We can but hover near and seize upon every favorable opportunity to sustain and strengthen them, until their restitution is effected. The All-Father when he placed mortals on earth, wisely dropped a veil between the past and future, the higher and lower realms of being, sufficiently opaque to shield the dim eyes of mortals from too much light—knowledge too high or vast for their frail natures to apprehend.

The daring souls who lift that veil and penetrate into the awful realms beyond are like swimmers who venture into the billowy wastes of which they have no soundings. Von Marx and Louis de B_____ are in the midst of these fathomless abysses of sub-mundane and super-mundane knowledge. We cannot help them yet, but God, the Father of spirits, can. He sees, knows, and pities, and will redeem them from the depths, and bring them into the paths he destines their feet to tread. Meantime His providence works through human means, and these you must employ to fulfill his designs.

"Once more the agencies of magic must be set in motion to redeem its victims. Call together, then, the Orphic Circle, and there you will receive the help you solicit, the guidance necessary for your future action, and the direction we cannot give, but the spirits who govern there can."

Such was the communication rapped out to me, letter by letter, at one of our own family seances in answer to an urgent appeal on my part for guidance concerning my future course in connection with the Chevalier de B_____. In obedience to the suggestions of the com-

municating spirit, one in whom we had all learned to repose implicit confidence, I determined to resume my place amongst the members of the Orphic Circle at their next regular meeting. I had not joined my companions for nearly four months, and the announcement of my intention to do so induced them to call a special seance at an earlier period than usual. On the night in question I left my invalid guest in his own apartment, whither he had retired, declining to accompany me, as he complained of an unconquerable tendency to sleep; indeed, he had sunk into a profound slumber before I left him, and I heard his desire to his servant not to awaken him till the following morning

After our lodge had been opened with the usual formulae, the scene began to resemble that which transpired on the night of Professor von Marx's death. There was the same uncertainty and waiting expectancy in our minds; the same restlessness of feeling amongst our neophytes, clairvoyants, and members. The lamps flickered and became extinguished several times, although the indescribable feeling of awe that pervaded our assembly induced the wardens to relight them, contrary to our custom. All at once, sheets of lightning flashed through the room in every direction, finally extinguishing every other light and followed by the most tremendous peals of thunder, I think, I ever heard.

This awful crash announced the bursting of a long-expected storm, which had been brooding over the city all day. For more than three hours the wildest commotion of the elements succeeded, indeed, for many subsequent years, the violence of the tempest that raged that night was not forgotten by those who witnessed it. At first we felt relieved by the opening of the storm without, deeming that the sensations of oppression we had experienced might be thus naturally accounted for, but very soon the feeling of nameless awe returned, and at length we perceived in the incessant glare of the lightning which filled out otherwise dark lodge-room with sheets of livid flame, a tall figure standing beside the central altar with one foot on the lowest step. At first we were disposed to think one of our own number had assumed this position under the efflatus of the magnetic trance, but the repeated flashes of the electric fluid illuminating the stranger's features, at length revealed to all present the unmistakable similitude of Felix von Marx.

We noticed, too, that the figure was arrayed in a professor's robe, whilst the college cap, which formed a portion of the costume, was distinctly visible, lying on the white cloth of the altar. Let me here remark, without any wrong done to a Society many of whose sessions and underlying principles, the members hold themselves sacredly bound to keep secret, that the apparitions which we had been accustomed to invoke, and those described by our seers, clairvoyants and neophytes, were not the spirits of the dead, or at least not so regarded; hence this unmistakable apparition, manifest to all present, and so clearly identical with one whose mortal remains we had ourselves committed to the grave, made a deeper and more profound impression upon us than a thousand spectral forms of the "flying soul" or the spirits of nature, whether in or out of the crystals and mirrors. We knew that on that night no stranger could by any possibility have entered the hall, nor had any one been present when the doors were locked and guarded, save the members and officers of the Society.

Several minutes of fearful suspense elapsed, and then the truth began to flash upon us, that the apparition of von Marx was not alone. Seated on the ground were a circle of dark, shrouded figures, such as we had seen some months before, only this time there was but one circle, and this seemed to enclose the altar and surround the tall stranger on every side but one, and in that opening, on the side of the altar opposite to von Marx, stood a female form veiled and enveloped in a luminous white, sparkling mist, through which we could dimly discern the outlines of her form. As this beautiful apparition with all the other phantom surroundings became visible, it seemed as if we, the watchers, would be turned to stone. My

blood began to freeze in my veins, my eyeballs to start from their sockets, and a horror such as I had never believed could possess a mortal without bereaving him of life, stole over me and threatened me with speedy dissolution. Had no relief come I am certain I should have expired; and the sensations I then felt, I was afterwards informed, were shared by most of my companions.

I have seen as well as heard much of spiritual phenomena since that time; beheld what is called by mediums "materialized forms," that is, human souls clothed again in the panoply of substantial fleshly bodies; but all these sights paled before the spiritual actuality of this dreadful phantom band, these dead alive, through whose impalpable forms we could see the opposite wall, the glare of the lightnings, and each other; these beings, who diffused around them that aroma of horror, from which our sentient humanity shrinks back; between whom and us exists an invisible barrier, which none can pass and live. But relief came at last. A slow and solemn strain of music filled the hall, commencing at first in soft and distant echoes, then it grew stronger, firmer, and more distinct, until it came amongst us, and was evidently accompanied by the soft but regular beat of marching feet. Something then passed me by; I felt the wind of moving bodies, and I saw my companions stir and turn their heads to look in the line of an invisible procession, which all could feel though none might see it. We also felt that the line of march was towards the altar. We saw by the unceasing glare of the lightning, the crouching forms look up and the tall stranger draw back to make way for the invisible host.

A space was cleared in front of the altar, which presently became filled up with a dense mass, and whilst a succession of rapid flashes kept the lodge in a continuous livid light, we saw a bier covered with white drapery, on which seemed to lie the sleeping form of the Chevalier de B _____. Then the female figure extended across the bier a staff wreathed with a shining serpent. This she pointed towards the male figure, who took it from her hand, and bent his head as if acknowledging a gift. The music ceased, and we heard a voice issuing, as it seemed, from the spot on which von Marx stood, although his lips moved not, nor did he appear to speak.

The voice said: "The life transfer has been made; man's work is ended, and God's has begun. The woof of two lives is spun anew; one regains his spiritual, the other his mortal birthright. God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Then the tone changed, and from the direction of the female form came a voice, sweeter than ever tone of music rung in mortal ears, saying: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." If more was spoken, our deafened ears lost it, for peal after peal of thunder shook the hall, distracting us by its crashing vibrations. A few seconds of thick darkness prevailed, and when next the streams of electric fire filled the hall, it was empty: at least, the phantoms had vanished, although we felt their dread presence passing us by, pressing against some of us the bier they carried, and heard amidst the pauses in the heavenly artillery, the beat of the rhythmical march and the faint vibrations of distant music, swallowed up again by the peals of the rolling thunder. Muttered exclamations of horror and the flare of matches followed. Some one in mercy to the rest had relighted the lamps, enabling us to look at each other's wild and haggard faces and stagger forth from that place of dread and glamour.

For four weary days and nights I and my distracted family watched by the cold, rigid, and lifeless form of our unhappy guest. No morning of awakening life had come for him, and the physicians pronounced that the vital spark had fled; nay, they urged, with what all

who loved him felt to be indecent haste, that the formulae of interment should proceed at once. My mediumistic girls insisted that life still remained. and that he would revive to thank and bless us; in fact, the grief and indignation of my wife and loving children at the conduct of strangers around us, was only equalled by the fear and inhumanity they displayed. The medical men shrugged their shoulders, sneered at the tender assiduity of the poor ladies, and muttered prophetic remarks about lunatic asylums. My dear wife sat holding the sleeper's lifeless hand, bathing it with her tears, but, like myself, felt uncertain in what direction to yield credence.

Deep as was our concern for our cherished guest, there were other points in our situation of an equally distressing character. During the entire four nights and days of our sad watch, an array of terrors beset us difficult to describe. The air, the ground, the walls, and every place and thing around us, seemed to be charged with unearthly sounds and spontaneous motion. Sometimes we sat listening to the pattering of little feet, or the regular beat of a marching host. The whining tones of small animals, the rustling of silk, flapping of wings, or a succession of low knockings, greeted us everywhere; strange birds flew through our halls and galleries, and rushed past us in our very chambers; indistinct forms flitted hither and thither by day as well as night. At times the noises deepened to an indescribable uproar, in which the ear found no special tone to distinguish, and then soured away to deep sighs, or distant moans. When neither sight nor hearing was affected, the scene became still more ghastly and oppressive in appeals to the sense of touch; some object would press against us, or so disturb the air, as to cause vibrations in all things around us.

Towards evening and in the gray of dawn, we heard on each successive night, the sound of solemn music, which would alternately advance and recede, like a band of performers who came towards the place wherever we might happen to be, passed through it, and then retreated from it. These strains were not only delightful to the ear, but wonderfully soothing to our excited minds; they seemed to convey an element of consolation and a message of peace, very cheering to us and entirely free from the ghastly prestige of all the other manifestations. At the earnest request of my faithful associates of the Orphic Circle, who rallied around my afflicted family with true fraternal kindness, we had placed the poor Chevalier on a bier, surrounded with burning tapers, and a profusion of sweet, fresh flowers in which he so passionately delighted. On several occasions the tapers would flicker and go out spontaneously, but as we never left the sleeper alone, the watchers were careful to relight the tapers at the very instant they were extinguished.

Before the fourth night had set in, several of our domestics had left us in irrepressible terror. Those who remained, though they had grown old and attached in our service, expressed their deepest horror of the scenes enacting around them, but pity for our distress overcame their fears, and provided they were permitted to move about in groups, they determined not to forsake us. The Arabian, who had attended the young Chevalier from early infancy, throughout this whole dread period remained unmoved. He never left the chamber where his beloved master lay, and if we had not brought him his daily mess of rice and other simple articles of food, he might have starved ere he would have quitted his solemn charge.

The heroine of my now diminished household was my precious Blanche. This brave young girl rallied the drooping spirits of the domestics, and assembling them together at morning and evening, read them passages of Scripture and made them join her own pure voice in singing solemn hymns. Each night, accompanied by my old and well-tried butler, she passed through every room in the dreary mansion, inspected its fastenings, and by her cheerful voice and noble example, stimulated the timid domestics to exert themselves in guarding the house from the possible inroad of marauders. These precautions were by no

means unnecessary. All sorts of wild reports had gone abroad concerning the state of our distressed household. For two days the door was besieged with curious inquirers, who sought under any pretense to gain admission, or learn tidings of what was passing within. It would seem that the reports of those who left us were rather discouraging to the idly curious without, for after the first two days of our mournful watch and ward, our house was quite deserted, and even the tradesmen who presented themselves with goods at the servants' entrance, handed them in and fled away, with signs of terror as marked, as if the place had been infected with some dreadful pestilence.

Looking back upon this most trying period of my life, I am amazed to recall my own power of self-government and composure. Like my youngest daughter, I felt that my mission was to cheer and strengthen others, and in the effort to do this, my own fortitude and self-reliance rose to the rescue. I never before, perhaps I might own with compunction, never since, have prayed so heartily, never felt a more complete reliance on the great, good God, to whom I knew all subordinate agencies, however powerful or wicked, were eternally subject.

My faith increased with every new trial, and at last I felt able to endure whatever more might come, and only marvelled what the worst would be. I must not omit to mention that there was one phenomenon which, though calculated to inspire the most dread of all others, filled us with sentiments of hope and courage, for which we could not account, even to ourselves. This was the unmistakable sound of Felix von Marx's voice, speaking from the empty air, speaking above, around us, we knew not from whence, but ever sounding with a tone so clearly human, kind, and encouraging, yet firm and commanding, that all our fears vanished directly his accents met our ears. Sometimes he uttered only the one word, "John," sometimes "Dear John," or "I am here; fear nothing." On one occasion my little Blanche startled our dreary hall with one of her bright, ringing peals of laughter, her delight was so great, as she heard the full, rich, well-remembered tone crying, "Good little Blanche, well done."

On the fourth evening this consoling voice repeated many times in clear and cheery accents, "All's well!" Towards midnight, worn out as we were with a distress that knew no parallel, oppressed with long watching, the desertion of the world without, and the increasing prevalence of the awful disturbances within, I insisted that my dear girls should retire with their weeping mother to rest, and that no one should watch with me that night, but the faithful Arabian, and my Orphic brother, Sir Thomas L_____. Before parting for the night, I dismissed my tired domestics with a short prayer and kind benediction. I then assembled my family, including Sir Thomas and the Arabian, in my library, which adjoined the room where the bier was laid. There met together, I read to my sobbing listeners the beautiful sixty-ninth Psalm, which commences thus: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul." Just as I had reached the pathetic words, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren and an alien unto my mother's children," I was struck dumb by hearing the voice of von Marx crying in sharp, clear, distinct tones, "Louis, Louis, awake!" Instantly there was a movement in the death-chamber; a deep-drawn sigh, then another and another. Other sounds followed, echoed by the beating of every throbbing heart; then—the sound of a footstep. It advanced nearer, nearer yet. The half-closed door between the rooms was gently moved, then pushed open, and the Chevalier, dressed in his ordinary costume, as we had laid him on the bier, very pale, but moving with a firm step and erect bearing, stood in our midst. The light of reason was in his fine eyes; the smile of recognition on his lips. Extending to my wife and myself each, a cold hand, which we warmly clasped to our hearts, he said in his own natural voice and sweet Italian accent, "My dear friends, I have had a long, long sleep. I see you thought it was to have been my last; but your wayward Louis is not dead yet you see, and will live far many years to thank and bless you for all your kindness."

