

Chapter 16

Mr. Dudley's Diary Continued

**A MYSTIC-DEPARTURE OF THE CHEVALIER TO INDIA
AND JOHN CAVENDISH DUDLEY TO AMERICA-
AFFECTING SCENES OF THE PARTING.**

September 30, 18—. Five months have elapsed since I made my last entry, and now it is the glorious period of ripe autumn, when Nature summons all her reserved force to cast a spell of loveliness over the scene, ere she closes up her summer housekeeping; when woods and hill, forest and glen, are adorned in the richest liveries of the fading year; when the green earth, blue sky, and the many-colored foliage of the woods, combine to clothe the scene in a wealth of harmonious beauty, unknown to any other season.

I am reclining on the velvet turf which covers the side of a lofty mountain overlooking the boundless expanse of the ocean. The purple mists of an autumn sunset crown the swelling hills of the distant landscape, and linger amidst the shady dells which checker the lovely scene. Far out at sea the white sails of many a fishing-boat gleam over the crested waves and relieve the expanse of heaving waters from the deep loneliness of an ocean view.

At the mountain's foot is the broad expanse of my own domain, the park and grounds of my old ancestral home, and by my side, stretched like myself on the mossy turf, is the object of my last eight months of incessant care, the Chevalier de B_____.

A greater change than that between my town residence and the seaside home in which we now luxuriate, has come over my esteemed but singular guest. All of youth or youthful manners, thoughts or habits, have wholly disappeared in him. He speaks and acts like a man of mature life, yet he is not yet twenty-one years of age. Although he has become almost restored to his ordinary share of health and strength, the cataclysms of the past have robbed him of that vigor and elasticity which should mark his time of life and whilst regaining the singular beauty of person which formerly distinguished him, there is a weary air, and a sad, far-away expression in his fine face, which never brightens into mirth or lights up with joy. He never speaks of Professor von Marx, and whenever I chance to mention his name, he listens with a shiver, and shrinks away from the subject with such evident distress, that I have come to regard that once dear and familiar name as tabooed between us. The passive submission which once distinguished his manner, has now changed to a stately, dignified demeanor, which speaks of fixed purpose and firm will. Though kind and courteous to all, affectionate to myself and family, and deferential to the opinions of others, there is a wall of isolation built up around him, which none can surmount; a lonely abstraction which repels

all human sympathy and silently rejects all confidence. In the days of convalescence, I communicated to him the details of Professor von Marx's will, his generous bequest of his small yet sufficient fortune to him, and his desire that I should become his guardian and trustee.

He listened to the financial details with some show of impatience, carelessly alluded to his own resources, which he supposed were already sufficient for his simple requirements; but he seemed too indifferent even to converse upon a topic so important to most young men as the bequest of an independence. Somewhat piqued in my own mind by what I could not for the life of me help considering as ingratitude for the poor professor's fatherly care, I remarked, perhaps rather coldly: "My dear old friend's chief sources of income were derived from the exercise of his brilliant talents; still, the bequest of every shilling he died possessed of, proves his desire to convince you that his affection for you survives beyond the grave. Don't you think so?" With an expression of anguish such as I have rarely seen upon any human countenance, the young man gazed at me for a moment, then crying in a choking voice: "Oh, hush! hush! if you would not kill me or drive me mad," he buried his face in his hands, over which the tears streamed fast and thick. I was shocked at the effect of my unkind remark and strove to atone for it by blundering apologies; but I soon found I had unstopped with reckless hand the vials of a grief too deep for utterance, and one which, thus renewed, bore down all the barriers of self-control, which the silent mourner had been laboring to erect around him.

His form shook with convulsive sobs; he threw himself on the ground, tearing up handfuls of earth and sod, in his wild and uncontrollable grief. I was fairly aghast, and knew not what to say or do in such a crisis, when, for the first time for nearly five months, I was equally startled and rejoiced to hear the low, deep tones of Felix von Marx's spirit, murmuring clearly in my ear, "Leave him to me." I retreated, and never again ventured on such dangerous ground, except to speak of such business arrangements as were absolutely essential to be discussed. When I again mentioned the topic of my guardianship, he thanked me, with many expressions of grateful appreciation, but stated, as one that had formed a resolution from which there could be no departure, that he should be glad to stay with me for one year he then proposed to take his leave, having determined to visit Madame, his mother, now his sole surviving parent in India. I was a little taken aback at the quiet air of determination with which this plan was announced, and asked him if he desired to spend that intervening year in college, or some seat of learning, where he could cultivate his wonderfully intellectual powers by study.

"No, no, no! my friend," he replied, with that nervous haste which always seemed to possess him, when any allusions were made to his past life. "I shall never study again, at least not in schools or colleges. My future studies must be conducted in the hard school of life, but not in books. I cannot read! I cannot read! I shall not need to do so either." And read he did not. I never saw him open a book whilst he remained with me, yet his conversation upon every subject except his own past life, was brilliant and masterly. He played and sang exquisitely, yet he never glanced at a note of music, nor do I know when or how he had learned that art. Except in his preparation for his military career, none of his acquirements were of a scholastic character, yet their compass and range was immense.

He could solve a mathematical problem and speak with the utmost correctness of geometrical proportions, yet sound him on the methods by which he had arrived at his conclusions, and he became confused, and said he had not studied enough to answer. He would discourse brilliantly on geological formations and was never weary of descanting on the grandeur of the universe, but when pressed to answer some question of mere detail, he would gaze wildly at the questioner, and complain that such subjects troubled him. In ancient lore, espe-

cially on the foundations of theology, astrology, and ethnology, I have heard this strange being discourse by the hour.

With eyes fixed on some far-distant object, and seemingly unconscious of the interest and admiration he excited, he would pour forth a stream of eloquence on the most occult subjects. Color, form, tone, earth, heaven, the marvels of astronomy, the superb architecture of the universe—everything, in short, that a long life of profound study would have informed others of, this young man described in words that burned into the listener's consciousness, and when the tides of thought ceased to flow, he would stammer, stare wildly, seem worn and exhausted, and sink back into his usual abstracted isolation. Nothing ever seemed to distress him so much, as the attempt to find out whence he derived his knowledge, or how he had acquired such a vast fund of information. I have seen others of his stamp since then; trance mediums gifted with a similar influx of inspiration, but the type was new to me when I first saw the Chevalier de B_____, nor do I ever remember any somnambulist as highly gifted as him.

When he announced his intention to stay with me for one year, he added: "I will remain for your good, my best and truest friend, as well as for my own. I can tell you some things that will interest you; you will help this shivering, unstrung, frame of mine to grow into strength and manhood."

These were the very words he was speaking at the time marked in my diary at the opening of this chapter. We had never held any seances of the Orphic Society since the memorable night of the Chevalier's resuscitation. The great shock we then experienced, and the cares which had since engrossed me with my invalid ward, had determined us to adjourn until the winter. During my young friend's convalescence all my butterfly acquaintances had returned; congratulations poured in upon me, and my weird reputation changed for a character of "unmixed firmness and benevolence;" meantime, I had deemed it prudent in my intercourse with my singular charge to avoid all allusion to his past life or occult subjects generally. How to deal most tenderly with this fearfully sensitive nature was my sole care, and in so doing, I utterly disregarded the advice of my Orphic associates, namely, to take every opportunity of cultivating his remarkable powers of clairvoyance, or, as we had now learned to term it, mediumistic gifts. My daughters and many of their young acquaintances still held spirit circles and I often joined them with my dear wife, when we derived such happiness as the earth and earthly things could not bring, in communion with our beloved angel guardians. To the Chevalier I never spoke of these seances. I believe he knew of their occurrence, but he never mentioned them to me, and generally absented himself from the house when they were in session.

Unearthly sounds had not wholly ceased, nor did the flitting forms of unknown beings altogether disappear from our old, time-honored residence, but these mystic sights and sounds were chiefly confined to the apartments occupied by the Chevalier and his Arab servant, and into these charmed precincts I was the only member of the family that ever penetrated. I know I heard thrilling, mystic voices more than once, in conversation with my strange ward when I approached his rooms; sometimes, too, I saw unmistakably, a beautiful, luminous female form hovering in the moonlight when I had lingered with him alone after the night had fallen; but as he never entered with me on the topic of the inner life, and I would no more have dared broach it to him than I would have trodden on a wounded foot, the subject was entirely dropped between us until the evening that again introduces us to— whoever my readers may chance to be. On this occasion my guest, raising himself on his arm and fixing his dark, luminous eyes on mine, said: "Mr. Dudley, why don't you renew the Orphic seances with which you were so interested?"

"Why don't I renew them?" I said, taken aback by the abruptness of the question. "Because—because—I have been engaged in other matters; besides, you see, we are away off in the country, and our lodge is in town, you know."

"What does that matter?" rejoined my companion, with that impetuosity which I had begun to associate with his most abnormal conditions. "The place matters little, except when it is favorable or otherwise to the work in hand. Mr. Dudley, summon your companions," naming over rapidly several gentlemen, near neighbors of mine, whom I knew to be interested in occult pursuits, but of whose secret predilections I had no reason to think the Chevalier had been aware. "Call them together and establish a lodge-room in the midst of yon glorious grove; the grove behind that hill, I mean. It is your own property, and you can take measures to secure it from interruption."

"I like your idea," I replied, "but you know we have none of our lucides or clairvoyants within reach, nor shall we be likely to meet with them again till winter."

"You will need none," replied the Chevalier in his far-off, dreamy way.

I did not question him then, for I was beginning to understand this "mystic" better and better every day. I only asked, therefore, when he thought we might begin.

"One week from now."

"Be it so. The plan shall be put in operation."

For the next six days I busied myself incessantly with gardeners, woodsmen, and carpenters. I had a space cleared in the center of a thick grove of pines which grew in the bottom of an amphitheatre, surrounded on all sides but one by precipitous rocks difficult of descent. The fourth side was bounded by a lovely little lake, on which I was accustomed to have boats plying for the enjoyment of my family and visitors. As the lake and the whole of the surrounding ground was on my own estate, there was no fear of any strangers gaining access to our romantic lodge, especially when I issued orders that no boats should ply at the time when we were in session. As our meetings were fixed for the evening, I had lamps hung up in the trees around the open space, and a temporary shed erected in which to keep our instruments of music, etc. The arrangements were as nearly as possible modelled after our lodge-room in town.

There was but one of our London members living near me, and that was a fine old French gentleman who might have formed a not unapt representative of Scott's "Last Minstrel." He was a poet "improvisatore" and divine harpist. Several of our other members were musicians, singers, and members of an amateur madrigal club, to which in my younger days I had myself belonged. Here, then, were all the elements required for our seances, save always the officiating priest, about the identity of whom I at first speculated with some anxiety. When the appointed evening arrived, however, I at once understood that my young friend, penetrated with gratitude for the services I and my family had been the happy instruments of rendering him in his hours of severest trial, had determined to devote the one year of his residence with me to the gratification of my dearest wishes—namely, the interpretation of the divine order of being, the profound mysteries of nature, and the grand arcana of creation, as revealed by the inspiration of the noblest spiritual influences, through his own entranced lips.

For one entire year I and a chosen circle of friends were the highly privileged recipients

of these sublime truths, conveyed to us partly in our woody amphitheatre at N_____, partly in a London lodge, which we had fitted up expressly for these sacred meetings, from which all but an assemblage of kindred minds were excluded.

From the first seance, I had fortunately secured the conditions by which they could be reported. The memoranda transcribed from the phonographic notes of one of our party, who kindly devoted himself to this service, are still in my possession, and may one day be given to the world. Much of the ideality they abound with has become filtered through the utterances of other inspired media during the new dispensation, but never have I read, heard of, or imagined a scheme of divine order so grand, so just, complete, and beautiful in all its details, as that furnished us by the inspiration of this highly-gifted mystic.

In my plain and homely phraseology I may venture to say I think more highly of myself and my kind, the world I live in, the scheme of which I am a part, and the God who created and sustains me, as I find all these elements of being described and explained in these sublime trance addresses; and now, if I have dwelt long, fondly, and perhaps with too much minutiae of detail, upon the strange events which have served to carve out the remarkable character of whom I have written, nay, if I have seemed to exaggerate his excellences almost to the rank of a hero of romance, it is not because I am moved by the deep affection which he has won from me and all around him, not, as many cursory observers have declared, because we who knew and loved him were "under the spell of his many attractive qualities," but because I perceived in him, as in all sensitives, mediums, and mystics, idiosyncrasies which if carefully studied and classified, would serve as the basis of a new phase of mental science, and one of which the world stands very much in need.

Looking back upon my intercourse with the Chevalier de B_____, I find one of the most noteworthy and interesting examples of abnormal power and spiritual inspiration it has ever been my lot to encounter, but I have also found one of the most striking evidences how far the practices of animal magnetism and human psychology can be abused and perverted from their true use to become an instrument of ruin, mental imbecility, and even madness.

Happily, my experiences with this gentleman bore witness also to the percontra of this fatal position, and showed how healthful and elevating pure spiritual influences and high inspiration may become, when exercised upon a self-centered mind and freed from the intervention of powerful human influences.

I need scarcely offer to the intelligent reader any comments on the history of this young man's subjection, and the final subversion to all personal identity to his erring but devoted friend, Felix von Marx. The history conveys its own moral rebuke and lesson.

The narrative of the "life transfer," mysterious and unprecedented as it is, I solemnly affirm I have detailed word for word and incident for incident exactly as it occurred, as far as I myself apprehended it. The terrible visions and spectral scenes at the Orphic Circles only partially explain the mystery of their origin and meaning, but because their awful demonstrations were shared with me by many other witnesses, who urge me to place them on record, I have fulfilled this task as faithfully as an earnest desire to narrate the truth and nothing but the truth could inspire me to do. I can scarcely expect to obtain credit for my statements, not because they are more remarkable or startling than the wonders which are now transpiring amongst us every day in the annals of the modern Spiritualistic movement, but because they did not occur in a commonplace way, and because there are urgent reasons why I cannot openly and publicly vouch for their reliability. I know the lack of authenticity

which attaches to an anonymous writer, and one so deeply interested in his subject as I have been; still I am compelled and impelled to write. I put my narrative into the great cauldron of Time, confident that the base metals of error and misapprehension will ultimately be fused away, whilst the grains of true gold will be gathered up and become current coin in the generations that shall be; and now, for the present at least, my journal in connection with my much esteemed friend, the Chevalier de B _____, must draw to a close. Well and nobly has he paid me with gems of inspiration and heavenly truth, for all I endured in his behalf during our seasons of great trial.

The time came at length when his highly prized ministry was to cease amongst us, and young and old in my household, mistress and maid, master and servant, looked sorrowfully and with heavy hearts to that to-morrow when we should see his face no more.

The day came when I was to depart for America, my friend to India—I on a mission hardly known to my family, scarcely acknowledged to myself, to search into the realities of the much-vaunted American Spiritualistic movement by a tour through the United States that I designed should occupy me one year; my friend to enter upon those stormy scenes of public life which have made for him a name and fame which few would, or ever will associate with the dreamy, unearthly mystic whom Felix von Marx delighted to call his "moody sprite," his "well-beloved Ariel."

"God bless and keep you, and good angels have you in charge, my Louis!" I muttered, between the spasms of nose-blowing and eyes-wiping, as I stood waving a very damp handkerchief on the wharf from which a splendid East Indiaman was setting sail on the day when I took leave of my friend—he whom I would so gladly, so proudly have called my son, had Fate so willed it

"We meet again this day ten years hence, my kind and generous friend," cried the Chevalier de B _____, returning the salute.

I watched the white signal waving in the breeze as long as my blurred eyes could keep the noble form of my friend in sight, and when at last I stood staring at vacancy, and suddenly remembered what a spectacle I was making of myself to the booby wharfmen standing by, I turned away, murmuring, "Ten years! It is a long time to wait, but he will surely come."