

Chapter 24

Psychology—Its Uses and Abuses

PREPARATIONS TO DEPART WITH LADY BLANCHE—FEEL THE IMPRESS OF A STRANGE OCCULT POWER—THE PLOT OF THE ENCHANTRESS TO EXECUTE HER THREATS.

The day at length arrived preceding that fixed for the departure of Lady Blanche Dudley from Calcutta. Early in the morning I rode over to the viscount's country house to communicate my final arrangements to Blanche, and inquire how I could still further contribute to her comfort. The poor girl perfectly well understood that I was the cause of her banishment, in fact she had so informed me; but she only thanked me for my fraternal care, and assured me in her own gentle way that she was confident I had studied her best interest and happiness, and that she was willing to go.

Throughout this interview there was a dreamy, abstracted manner about her which strangely troubled me. It was not coldness nor absence, but a sort of duality, if I may use the term, which made me feel as if it were not Blanche who addressed me, but her spirit or the spirit of another speaking through her. When I addressed her she listened, but apparently to some one else, not me; and in her answers there was a halting, incomprehensible air of distance which perplexed and pained me inexpressibly.

With a view of arousing her from this lost condition, I separated some of the flowers I had brought her and attempted to arrange them, as I had frequently done before, with the simple fondness I should have manifested for a cherished sister, amongst her beautiful ringlets; but for the first time in our lives I believe, she repelled me, and shrinking from me like a startled fawn, she waved her hand in farewell, and darted out of the apartment, nor did she return again whilst I remained at the villa. Like all individuals susceptible of spirit influence or psychological impressions, I am compelled to acknowledge myself to be a creature of moods, for which I am not always prepared to render, even to myself, any sufficient explanation. That night I knew the impress of a strange and occult power was upon me. An unconquerable restlessness possessed me, peopling every lonely place with unendurable visions, yet compelling me to withdraw from all human companionship.

Towards midnight I became weary of wandering through the gardens and over the terraces of my own residence, and wayworn and wretched as I felt, but without any clew to analyze or control my miserable sensations, I retired to my own chamber, determined to try if by fastening my attention on a mass of accounts and other details of a business character, I could conquer the occult influences that beset me. All would not do, however. I could

neither write, read, or even sit still. Again I re-entered the gardens of the once splendid, though now ruinous old villa I inhabited, and walked about, without aim, purpose, or relief, until I was foot-sore and weary. At length I returned to my dozing attendants, who were waiting up for me. Almost as much aggravated by the presence of these poor, patient drudges, as I was angry with myself for imposing upon them, I hastily dismissed them and prepared to retire for the night, determined to compel the sleep I longed for, yet dreaded.

When I was but half undressed, the same restless fit returned upon me, and the same sense of a nameless, formless presence haunted me. Then, as ever in my experience, I found that when the mind is most disturbed, the lucidity of the spirit is most obscured. One of the earliest lessons of initiation I had to learn for the attainment of high spiritual exaltation, was self-control and the entire subjugation of all exciting impulses, passions, or emotions. I had been taught, and now believe, that the highest grades of spiritual power, require for their achievement, a life of complete abstinence, chastity, and, as before stated, the subjugation not only of the passions, but even of the social affections, tastes and appetites. To be the perfect master of one's self, is the first necessary preparation for mastery over others, or the attainment of that complete condition of mental equilibrium in which Nature, with all her realms of occult unfoldment, becomes subject to the power of the adept. Naturally impulsive, passionate, and emotional, I know I should never have succeeded in attaining to the conditions of spiritual exaltation I aimed at, had I not inherited by nature those gifts of the spirit, which I had not passivity enough to earn by culture.

Still, I had labored faithfully through the probationary exercises enjoined upon me. Already I had succeeded in a thousand self-conquests that few young men of my age could have accomplished, and it was only at very rare intervals now, that poor fallible human nature triumphed over the acquired stoicism of the adept. The present occasion, however, witnessed one of those mental defeats for which I had before paid many penalties. At length I determined that my wisest course was not to exhaust myself any further by maintaining the spiritual warfare that was distracting me. "Let the powers of evil do their worst," I mentally exclaimed, "I will heed them no more."

Throwing myself on my bed, half undressed as I was, I fell asleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow, nor did I awake again until the moon was low in the heavens, and the stars were beginning to pale; then, and not till then, I awoke suddenly, disturbed by a noise I could not at first distinguish the nature of. With heavy, half-closed eyes I lay still, waiting for a repetition of the disturbance. It came in the sound of a low sob—a sob of woe, a sound so plaintive and heart-rending that I shuddered as I listened. Again and yet again, this piteous moan resounded in my ears. It was no dream; I soon became convinced it was a reality; that it came from the terrace outside my room, was approaching nearer and nearer, and was now mingled with another sound, namely, that of a very light, but slow footstep on the veranda. The next moment a white, fleecy form passed through the open glass doors of my chamber, and bare-headed, except for the profusion of golden curls that fell around her neck and shoulders, in a floating white evening dress, soiled, torn, and trailing as if dragged through brambles and stony places, appeared the bending, wayworn form of the hapless Blanche Dudley.

One glance sufficed to show me there was no speculation in those fixed but lustrous eyes which looked straight forward, staring, yet heart-broken, into vacancy. Her beautiful face was deathly pale, she walked like one in a deep sleep, with a stately onward motion; yet her little feet halted, and were evidently cut and bruised, for her white shoes were torn and stained with blood. Her hands hung drooping by her side. In her bosom were placed the flowers I had that day brought her; but except for the white gauze evening dress she wore,

she had no shelter from the chill night air, more chill at that season of the year and hour of the night, than is often experienced even in northern latitudes.

As she passed through the open doors of my room, she walked forward with the automatic air of a magnetized subject, until she reached the foot of my bed, when she paused, uttered a low cry, as if she had been suddenly struck, and sank to the ground, where she lay on the lace that shaded the couch, like a mass of newly-fallen snow.

To extricate myself from the enclosing curtains, so arranged as to protect the sleeper from the insects of that tropical land, and raise the white and seemingly lifeless form from the ground, was but the work of a few moments; but even as I held her in my arms, almost paralyzed for the instant with astonishment and dismay, the flash of lights from without streamed into my chamber, and seven or eight Brahmins, who were associated with me in one of the most important occult societies to which I belonged, appeared upon the veranda, some of them deliberately entering the room, others standing without and gazing upon me sternly through the open doors.

"In the name of heaven," I cried, choking with rage and indignation, "what do you want here, gentlemen?"

"We have come here to convince ourselves that an evil tale we have heard of your unworthiness, Louis de B_____, is no slander," said one of the oldest of my visitors, a noble Guroo, to whom, as one of my teachers, I had pledged myself in the most solemn vows to observe for a given time the strictest asceticism in thought, word, and deed.

"What, sir!" I answered indignantly, "have you then the right to enter my private apartments, intrude upon my most sacred hours of retirement, and invade every custom of honor and good breeding in this fashion?" I had laid the unfortunate lady on a divan as I saw the strangers at my window, and now stood between her and the invaders.

"Louis," said the first speaker, advancing towards me mildly but firmly, "we have been this night informed that by your arts you have lured away an unfortunate lady from her home, and beguiled her here for her destruction. You know the awful penalties you incur for breaking your vows during the time you have pledged to fulfill them; but even the honor due to our order is as nothing compared to the duty we, as your spiritual fathers, are called upon to perform, when we attempt to save you from the base act with which you are charged."

"Who charges, me?" I asked,

"One who is himself a neophyte of our order," answered the Guroo.

"Ferdinand Perrault," said a low voice at my side, and turning hastily around, I saw the shrouded form and cowled head of the Byga, Chundra ud Deen.

Before I could appeal to him, as I knew I could successfully, for aid in my dreadful emergency, he glided quietly up to a group of statues placed in a distant part of the chamber, interspersed with rose-trees and tropical plants, and adding in his low but thrilling voice, "and here is the enchantress," he dragged forward, seemingly by his own volition rather than any force he used, a masked and veiled female, who had up to that moment been concealed amongst the trees and statues. This person the Byga led forward, obviously with no effort on his part, but with a terrible show of reluctance and terror on hers, until he placed her in the center of the group that clustered around me. In an instant I had dragged the veil

from her head and the mask from her face, discovering, as I was confident I should, the deathly pale yet defiant features of Madame Helene Laval.

"See how you have wronged me, gentlemen!" I exclaimed passionately. "Here is the demon that has wrought this destruction. Here is the enchantress by whose remorseless arts this unhappy lady, her trusting friend, her warm-hearted defender, her most miserable magnetic subject, has been drawn hither, whilst you have simply been invited to bear witness to the shame and ruin this fiend has planned." Who could doubt or misunderstand further the character of this foul plot? Long before she had any such vile purposes to gain by her arts, Madame Laval had openly boasted of her magnetic control over the hapless Lady Blanche Dudley, and by way of what she called "interesting psychological experiments," she had on several occasions exhibited her power by biologizing the unconscious and innocent victim to her side, when she was at some distance from her. Who could have conceived those powers, which appeared to have been exercised merely in pastime on the one side by an interested student of spiritual science, and on the other by a pure, unsuspecting, and loving-hearted friend, could thus have been turned to the base design of destroying that friend's peace of mind and honorable name, to say nothing of the shame and disgrace intended to fall upon me.

Had I been sufficiently composed to have noted the details of the sad scene in which I was engaged, I could not have failed to remark the extraordinary palsy of fear or mental subjugation that had fallen on the once commanding Helene. She stood with eyes glaring fury and defiance, yet vainly striving to protest her innocence. A spell stronger than her own overpowered her, and so long as the clasp of the shrouded Byga was on her arm she could only glance fiercely from one to the other of those who surrounded her without being able to utter an intelligible sentence. As to the Brahmins, they knew and really trusted me. My kind friend, Nanak Rai, was one of their party, and my little fakir, Nazir, flitted from one to another, explaining to them who this new intruder on the scene really was, and the arts she had practiced with his sister Anine, for the express purpose of subduing me and injuring the poor, innocent lady.

"This is all my sister's work," cried the little fakir impetuously. "Alas! alas! that ever the blood of Nazir Sahib should flow in the veins of so base a Chandala! But O my fathers!" he cried, suddenly starting into a new passion and gesticulating towards the gardens with frantic energy, "there is still worse woe in store for the innocent ones. Hide the poor lady, Chevalier! Hide her, if you value her life! Yonder comes her proud uncle, led on by that base-born son of a Sudra, Perrault. See where they come with torches in search of the absent lady, whom Perrault well knows is to be found in this fatal place. We are too late!" he added, dropping into the background. "The enemy is upon us." He was right, for before any of us could recover from the shock his disclosures occasioned, the Viscount R_____, accompanied by Perrault, and a nephew of his, who happened to be visiting at the house when the absence of the unfortunate Lady Blanche was discovered, entered the apartment from the gardens without. Lady Blanche had, as I afterwards learned, been missing since ten o'clock that evening.

Knowing how fond she was of rambling through the gardens by moonlight, the domestics had been despatched in every direction to seek and recall her. Hour after hour passed away in fruitless search, and it was about an hour after midnight, and just as the infamous Perrault knew that his sister's horrible scheme must be on the eve of accomplishment, that he appeared before the viscount, simulating haste and an eager desire to serve an afflicted family, with the terrible tidings that he had been informed by the famous Vaudoo woman, Anine, that I, "the Chevalier de B_____," had been working charms to entice the

hapless girl to my residence, and that she was in all probability there even at that very moment. When this piece of intelligence was first communicated to the proud nobleman, the tale-bearer had nearly lost his life for his pains, so infuriated did the viscount become at what he deemed a shameful slander; but when Perrault had succeeded in evading his first explosion of wrath, and reiterated again and again the truth of his assertions, the viscount called upon his nephew, who was then on a visit at his house, for advice and aid. It was agreed between them that Perrault should be their prisoner, and either make good his words or pay the penalty of their utterance. They compelled him, therefore, to enter the carriage with them, in which they drove off, with a speed inadequate to satisfy their frantic impatience, to my residence.

Such were the circumstances that complicated the scene of misery which surrounded me on that fatal night. I believe it was to the preternatural power of the Byga, and the steady, calm friendship of Nanak Rai, that I owed the preservation of my senses throughout those trying hours; certainly it was due to the latter's humanity and firm control over me that Madame Helene Laval and her infamous brother escaped from my hands with their lives. It was also to the Brahmin's force of character, commanding presence, and clear, straightforward explanation that I owed my own life, which the viscount was determined to sacrifice the moment he found that the unfortunate Lady Blanche was in my chamber.

"Be still, all of you," said the good man, "and listen to the story I have to tell." He then, in simple, earnest language, gave the sum of my fakir's narrative; a concise but scathing description of the arts practiced by Madame Laval, and a glowing account of myself, and my incapacity, as he steadily affirmed, for the base part attributed to me. He dared Madame Laval or her brother to controvert his statements; and when both of these wretched and baffled plotters were silent, he pointed as the climax of his evidence, to the unfortunate girl, who, still under the spell of the somnambulic trance, lay extended on the divan where I had placed her. Putting me gently aside as I stood by to guard her—the only poor act of reparation I could now make—this kind and true gentleman, who was also a well-skilled magnetizer, took her tenderly by the hand, and set her on her feet, still unconscious as she was, in our midst.

Her forlorn and wayworn appearance, her torn dress, bloodstained shoes, dishevelled curls, and the indescribable aspect of woe and innocence that marked those set and rigid features, the soiled and fluttering rags of her fleecy evening dress, and the fact that the hapless girl had been dragged for more than seven long miles through a rough country during a chill night, and amidst dangers that froze the blood to reflect upon—all these circumstances combined, had the effect which the wise pleader expected they would. The viscount turned aside his head, and buried his face in his handkerchief; the good Brahmins murmured words of pity; and even the ruthless enchantress was moved, and hid her face from the sight of her much-wronged victim in the folds of her veil. At that moment a strange phenomenon appeared amongst us.

Above that young, sunny head, so beautiful, yet so touching in its innocence and desolation, appeared what seemed to be at first, a little glimmering light, a spark no larger than a fire-fly, which might have been imprisoned in her golden curls; but presently it increased in size, expanded and diffused into a luminous, misty halo, which increased in extent and brilliancy until it formed a complete coronet of glory above and around the beautiful somnambulist's head.

I know not what may have been the experience of others. I have frequently heard the Spiritists since then describe the beauty of the spirit lights they have seen and the variety of the

modes in which these luminous appearances were made visible. I only know that never before or since have I beheld any phenomenon of this kind, so directly in contact with a mortal, never any sign of angelic presence and guardianship that produced upon the witnesses so deep, reverent, and hallowing an influence. In the midst of the hush which ensued as this phenomenon became perfected, the good Brahmin said in his gentlest accents, "Blanche, my child, what brings you here? Answer as if you were in the presence of your God."

"She is in the presence of her God, Brahmin," replied the entranced lips of Blanche, though the voice and accent was that of another. "Her spirit is with the angels, and a stronger than her shall answer you. There is the cause of her coming," and as she spoke, she advanced with a stately step towards the veiled figure of Helene, who was still held firmly by one of the Brahmins—for the Byga, was gone. With an authoritative gesture she threw back Madame Laval's veil, and then said in a deep and searching tone: "Answer, Helene de Laval. Why have you brought hither Blanche Dudley? By what power and for what purpose? Answer! for you are in the presence of your God!" There was not an individual there who did not experience a thrill of awe as that slight creature, now seemingly a tall and stately presence, stood like an accusing angel, encircled by a halo of divine light, confronting her evil genius.

"What have I done?" murmured the dark-browed sibyl, the psychological spell evidently becoming reversed, and the frail subject commanding the operator.

"Speak the truth, Helene, and answer!" repeated the beautiful ecstatic in a voice that made her enemy shudder.

"I lured her hither by my power of will," muttered the sibyl, as if each word were wrung from her by tortures.

"For what purpose?" thundered the viscount. "Answer that, foul enchantress!"

But Helene heard him not; she was wholly in the power of one magnetizer, and under that spell she had no senses for any other. The hand of the somnambulist was laid on her arm and she was enthralled.

"For what purpose?" repeated Blanche, turning with mild dignity upon the viscount. "Can you ask? Know you not she purposed to destroy the name and fame of her victim?"

"Let her confess it, then," said one of the Brahmins, fiercely.

"Enough has been said to right the wrong and clear the innocent," answered the sleeper, with inexpressible sweetness and command. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will re-quitte;" then releasing the arm of Madame Laval, she clasped her own fair hands together, and raising her eyes to heaven with an ecstatic expression impossible to describe, she murmured, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us!"

The halo then gradually faded from her head. Nanak stretched out his arms to receive her, as a father would have, sheltered his child; then raising her as if she had been an infant, at a sign from me he carried her through the glass doors, and down to where the viscount's carriage waited below. It was then that, as if moved by a burst of honest indignation which would no longer endure repression, the fakir Nazir exclaimed: "She is a hard and cruel woman, that!" pointing to Helene, who stood confronting us all with an expression of the fiercest rage and hardihood.

"She deserves the reprobation of men as well as the judgments of Brahma. I know not how far she may have come with her poor victim, but I saw her riding in her carriage over the rough roads and stony paths, whilst the sweet young lady, in her unsheltered garments and her little feet torn and bleeding, toiled on behind her. She went on like one in her sleep, ever straight forward, over rough ways and smooth, whilst you woman leaned from her carriage window, and beckoned to her with her hand, and mocked her with her mouth, and laughed and jeered at her. I heard her cry, 'Faster, my gay bird! Come on faster, faster yet! I am guiding you to your bridegroom, my pretty piece of purity, and we'll have a fine wedding before the stars are set; and many a one shall hear how the fine Lady Blanche Dudley offered herself to an unwilling lover, before another sun has set upon her dishonored head.'"

I dashed my hand over the fakir's mouth and bade him be silent or I would call him to account for not rescuing her. Some of the Brahmins then took a kind leave of me, whilst others remained to offer me service. Leaving the detested brother and sister in their charge, and the fakir engaged in telling his story to the viscount, I went out to seek Nanak, whom I found standing at the carriage window, speaking in his own kind, fatherly way, words of cheer and consolation to the now awakened lady, who was weeping bitterly. Gently pushing him aside, I sprang into the carriage, and taking a seat by her side, with my arms closely folded around her, I whispered: "The day has dawned, my Blanche; the day that is to see you leave not for your father's, but for your husband's home.

"Let your maids attire you in your simplest, whitest robe, my Blanche. Let them smooth these poor, disordered tresses, and place in them the sweet white flowers I will send you, and at eight o'clock to-night I will be with you, and in the face of friends and enemies you shall give me a husband's right to shield you henceforth from every harm that may befall so long as you and I do stay in life on earth." A few more whispered words of cheer and promise, and then I left her.

"Your carriage waits you, Madame," I said to the now closely-veiled form of the woman who encountered me on the threshold of my door. "No words! There is your place."

I saw my servants hand her in, and then bade the coachman drive her away.

"Not so fast, sir!" I said, as I saw her brother hastening after the carriage, which he tried to detain.

"Let me go!" he screamed, as I seized and dragged him back. "You wouldn't murder me, would you? Help!" he shouted, "I am being strangled, murdered!"

"What would you do, Louis?" exclaimed Nanak, vainly trying to extricate the struggling wretch from my grasp. "Let him go, I say! You shall not steep your soul in sin for such a worm as that. Nay, I command you by a word you must obey!"

The word was spoken and I was disarmed.

"I'll have a reckoning with him yet," I muttered, all the Hindoo in my veins rising against the wretch upon whom I had resolved to avenge his own no less than his sister's villainy. At this moment the viscount and his nephew joined the Brahmin in pleading for the poltroon's escape.

Contenting myself for the present with hurling him amongst the bushes and rank weeds of the garden, I bade him remember, my hour of full requital was yet to come.

That night, at eight o'clock, saw me the husband of sweet, pure, innocent Blanche Dudley. Her haughty uncle was well satisfied, and her own loving guileless heart leaped with the purest joy she had ever known on earth. As to me, I bade farewell to my hopes of life amongst the stars, to the mysteries of the occult, my dreams of spiritual exaltation, and all my wanderings in the realms of supernal glory.

Hopes and aspirations—all were dashed to the earth, and I set myself lovingly, tenderly to fulfill the life of new duties that honor and compassion had thrust upon me.