

Chapter 26

Close of the Life Episode

THE CHEVALIER'S RECONCILIATION WITH THE SPIRITS— THE PRISON—HOW THE CHEVALIER RETURNED TO EUROPE

"**G**ood-night, dear love, good-night!" This was the last entry in that journal wherein a pure and innocent heart had poured out in every line the treasures of an unrequited love; in which such mines of unwrought gold were opened up to the gaze of the shipwrecked man, who only realized their true value at the moment when he was to behold them all sinking in the ocean of a vanished past.

Her diary ends with those words of tender farewell, and to me has fallen the task of finishing up the history. I have set myself this work to do for a special purpose, and painful as it is I must fulfill it.

Since the night when I determined to devote myself to the care and protection of John Dudley's child, I had silently but resolutely abandoned my pursuit of the occult, my association with the various societies with which I had been connected, and all that formerly fascinated me and filled my soul with spiritual light and knowledge. I felt that the new duties I had voluntarily incurred, must not be divided with the old pursuits, and whilst I could not overcome the bitter disappointment I felt at being thus shut out from the realms of the unseen, in communion with which I had lived from boyhood, I never faltered in my purpose. I knew then and still believe, that the devotion so absolutely required to attain to the highest good in any condition of life admits of no compromise or divided interests. To stifle my heart's yearnings for the spiritual in which my whole being had been bound up, I plunged into the cares of public life, the duties of home, and the entertainment of my sweet bride, as if I had never known any other aims or employments. I devoted myself, moreover, to all those materialistic occupations with a restless and untiring energy which left me no time to think.

I accompanied my young wife and her friends to all the various scenes which I thought would interest them, and although I permitted my fakirs to amuse them with feats of occult art, I never took part in them, or suffered myself for one moment to brood over my altered career. This abandonment of my past life's dearest aspirations cost me many a pang, but I never thought my fairy understood this until I read her precious confidences to herself, and that at a time when all chance of changing the tide of her regrets was at an end.

During my enforced absence from her, I began to realize the monitions of my true nature crowding in upon me again. Visions haunted my pillow, voices sounded in my ears, and the fluttering wings of other worlds of being stirred the air around me. I steadily resisted these phenomena up to one dreadful night, when a vision of such intense horror flitted before me, that I was compelled to spring from my bed, dress hastily, and spend the rest of the night pacing the streets ere I could regain peace of mind and composure. The next night and the next, witnessed a recurrence of the same horrible representations, and on each occasion they forced upon my mind the conviction that what I beheld was the reflex of an actuality, not the mere distorted images of an unquiet vision. I saw, or seemed to see, my fair young bride dragged before an altar, where a scene of "black magic" was being enacted, and the forms of Helene Laval and her infamous brother were the presiding demons of the foul rites. I could almost hear the voices of these remorseless fiends mocking, insulting, and taunting my gentle wife, whilst I, a bound and helpless captive, stood looking on in vacant imbecility.

At first I regarded these representations as the result of an overstrained condition of mind, but at length their resistless force made their recurrence unendurable, and I was compelled to accept their spectral imagery as visions of prophetic if not of present reality. Spirit voices, too,—the spirits of those I had known and loved, but whom I had abandoned, whilst I sullenly complained that in thickening the mists of my destiny upon me they had abandoned me—now sounded in my ears, and in tones like muttering thunder, tones that could not be mistaken, insisted on being heard. They assured me of their constant love and untiring affection; pointed out the impossibility of their interference to alter my fate or change the purposes of the Infinite; they reminded me that whilst they could neither make nor mar the scheme in which the Creator had spun the woof of every living creature's destiny on an immutable plan, they were still commissioned to dispense in angelic ministry the strength which would enable me to bear the shafts of affliction and the wisdom which must overrule all things for good. They would be heard; they would enclose me in their arms of love; and in the names of those I had known and trusted on earth I was bidden to arise from my attitude of rebellion against the power of the spirits, and when I bent my stubborn soul and once more leaned in submission upon them, I was warned to depart for my home, to ride for life and death, by day and night, not to pause or linger, but hasten to her to whom I had been given as her earthly protector; to her whom I could not save from an inevitable fate, though I might share it with her and help her to endure it.

The constant echo of my present life, is a hymn of thankfulness that I did at last listen to these spirit voices and obey them.

Summoning my servants around me I distributed to each his task. Like the pilgrims of the ancient passover, we each fulfilled the duties I marked out with a speed which admitted of no let or hinderance. When all my arrangements were completed, I set out on my journey alone, and partly by train, partly on horseback, traveled two hundred miles to Calcutta, with an urgent haste that increased every instant as I neared the city. The last twenty miles I rode, in the heat of a scorching day, on horseback. The train which I might have taken, had I waited, would not leave till night, but the impetuous eagerness to which I had worked myself up, would have urged me to go on foot, had I been unable to hire horses to carry me. As it was, I had to change them every hour, for I loved and pitied the noble animals and would not for worlds have subjected them to the heat and toil of a journey, the hardships of which seemed to have lost all effect upon me. As I rode on; the voices deepened to the roar of a torrent in my ears, and the shadows of impending fate closed down so thickly upon me that I could see nothing but my little girl, forlorn, wayworn, and broken-hearted, just as I had beheld her on the dreadful night when the spell of the foul enchantress lured her to my home.

Five miles from the city, a little, dusty, wayworn figure threw itself before my horse and with much difficulty succeeded in stopping my headlong career. It was the fakir Nazir; he would he must, he said, speak with me, and as he leaned breathless against my panting horse, he poured out a horrible, an almost incredible story. My wife, my fair and gentle wife, that delicately nurtured lady who had never known any ruder shelter than the luxurious homes of her father and husband, was in a common prison, thrown there under charge of stealing a gold locket from Madame Helene Laval. The shocking tale, poured out amidst tears—aye! actually tears from those unused eyes that had never wept before—was this. He told me how at the lady's supplication he had spirited away her fatal lock of hair, but finding that another portion of this precious talismanic curl was enclosed in a gold locket, and fearing that if this remained, the base enchantress would still torment her victim, he had rashly added that paltry jewel to the abstracted lock.

It would seem that the loss of these means to work injury, was realized almost immediately. Madame Laval, who no doubt suspected the nature of the arts as well as the source by which she was thus baffled, sent for a Chulah, and by means of one of these singular and expert conjurers, a "magic ball" was set in motion, which she was assured would travel on, and, followed by the conjurer, never stop until it reached the place where the lost jewel was to be found. Nazir rightly conjectured this explanation of the mode in which it was ascertained that the lost locket was in my house. He had met the operator, he said, who confessed to him that there was some power which prevented his crossing any threshold, at which point the magic ball became suddenly arrested. The fact that it was traced thus far, however, must have been sufficient for the plotters who availed themselves of this clew to follow out the rest of their hellish plan.

What I afterwards learned let me here state in brief. The vile brother and sister knew I was far away from my hapless wife. They doubtless suspected the power by which the unfortunate lady had obtained possession of the missing locket, and convinced by their magician's art that it was still in my house, they secretly and swiftly executed their direful plan of vengeance.

By aid of an immense bribe and the civic influence possessed by Perrault, the remorseless wretches first obtained a warrant to search my house, where the missing locket was immediately discovered; they then proceeded to arrest my hapless girl, my little sinless fairy, the high-born Lady Blanche, and actually removed her to a common felon's prison, before, as I have since had reason to believe, the city magistrates or any officials, save a set of hired, bribed, and remorseless myrmidons, knew aught of the shameful transaction.

It was not until night of that same fatal day, the fakir added, that he, who had been out of the city, returned to find the woe and wreck his indiscretion had occasioned. Graham, the viscount, all my friends were absent or not to be found till night. My servants scattered themselves in every direction to seek for help, but none of them really understood the facts of what had happened until Nazir returned and in frantic self-accusation ran from place to place, rousing my friends and telling his shocking story. Still the night had to elapse before aid and rescue could be procured, and then—it came too late, too late!

What the miserable and insane persecutors expected to effect by their daring act, none can say. They must have known that the entire community would rise against them, and their horrible act of vengeance recoil on themselves with crushing force. As it was, they were so swift in their work, and kept it so silent and secret for many hours, that it was not until the fakir's return, that the tidings became noised abroad, and rescue could be obtained. The viscount and his lady were at length reached, the magistrates apprised of the horrible plot,

and my entire circle of friends aroused by the indomitable energy and remorse of the unhappy Nazir. Friends and officials alike had hastened to the prison to release the unfortunate girl. Why she was still there and could not be removed, alas, alas! I too well knew. I could hear no more; indeed, I knew nothing more until I reached the city, and my servants crowded around me with assistance, for the horse I rode, fell at the gate of my own house—my house all void and empty now! How I reached the prison I know not, or how, or whether, the darkness that fell around my way was in the air or in my own dim eyes.

Every gate was opened, and many hands were outstretched to me as I made my way from point to point and passed gloomy cells and through damp, dark passages. Fit resting-place for my fairy bride! Meet shelter for a crushed and broken flower like her!

Presently the Viscount R_____, very pale and very kind, and several of my brother officers encountered me. I never paused to greet them, though they surrounded me and would have kept me back. I heard many voices speaking in tones of deep sympathy, indignation, and regret.

I never answered them. I did not speak, I had no thought but of her—knew nothing but her.

As I passed on I was met at the threshold of an open door by the viscountess and a group of women, one of whom, my wife's favorite ayah, held a small bundle in her arms. As I advanced she removed the folds of a dainty shawl and showed me the face of a dead child. I stooped and kissed it and then passed on—on till I reached a wretched pallet gorgeously covered with splendid shawls and strewn with fragrant flowers. I heard wild cry—my name pronounced in those soft, tender accents so like the tones of her own broken harp—white arms wound around me, soft hands clasping my neck, a fair golden head nestling in my bosom, and—so she died.

Back in the old ruinous house, ruins covered up with gorgeous art until it had once shone like a fairy palace; back in the house, she had so loved and where her presence had made the place a paradise, amidst the flowers and bloom, the pale statues, and deep, unbroken silence; back with my fairy bride and my dead child—alone and still and quiet, I spent that long, long night, whilst the storm of fierce passion, prompting men to riot and ruin, filled the streets without. The real truths that surround great tragedies are never known to the world, but there is an element of generosity in public sentiment, a depth of honest manliness in the human heart, which however crowded down by the artifices and sordid cares of civilization, can always be aroused to indignant protest by the action of injustice or wanton cruelty. Such a sentiment seemed to have been awakened by the impassioned utterances of my poor little fakir, who, in his frantic anxiety to right the great wrong done to his hapless lady had again exceeded the bounds of prudence in declaiming against the authors of the cruel deed.

The viscount had made strenuous efforts to keep the matter secret, fearing lest its publication in some garbled form should attach disgrace to his noble family; in fact he caused the report to be industriously circulated, that the lady so shamefully wronged was a domestic attached to his wife's household, not one of his own immediate connections—an interpretation of the tale which I believe prevails to this day in the city where this great tragedy of my life really occurred.

A portion of the populace, who had learned something of the fakir's story, and with it understood that the lady's imprisonment and death were connected with the enchantments

practiced by the house, and without further inquiry into the right or wrong of what they did, had burned it to the ground. All this caused a restless wave of riot and destruction to surge through the streets that night which might have disturbed any sleep but hers, or aroused any mourning but such as mine; but the storm raged on—we were all still and quiet within.

It was about nine o'clock the next night that I left my house—a home no longer—accompanied by Capt. Graham and Col M_____, a noble-hearted gentleman, between whom and myself a warm friendship subsisted.

We threaded our way through the lowest and most obscure part of the city, until we gained the miserable hut which Graham and I had before visited, the dwelling of Anine, the sister of Nazir. The door was barred and bolted within, but at my signal Nazir himself opened it, and after carefully fastening it again, led me on from the dwelling through several courts and ruinous buildings, when we gained the door which I knew led into the halls where we had witnessed the scenes of "black magic" described in a previous chapter. We crossed the outer hall, and paused before the entrance which led to the interior chamber. Here I stopped to gain breath and strength enough to proceed, but whilst I leaned against the door, I heard the voices of those I came to seek, the accursed brother and sister who had wrought my great ruin, in angry altercation within. The sounds of those hateful tones supplied the stimulus I needed and impelled me at once to push open the door and enter. Crouching on the threshold inside was Anine, awaiting our coming, according to Nazir's directions.

Perrault and his sister had, it seemed, sought temporary shelter there, fearing to trust themselves to the rage of an excited populace in the streets. They were both seated at a table on which refreshments were spread, but the altar, braziers, and all the abominable paraphernalia of fetish rites, were strewed around in disorder and neglect. The guilty pair started to their feet as we entered, and the woman uttered a faint cry of alarm. Our plans were already laid, however, and no time was lost in idle parley. Graham and the fakir seized Perrault, and Col. M_____, laying his hand firmly on Madame Laval's arm, told her sternly that the least cry or attempt at resistance would cost them both their lives. I then proceeded to cut to pieces the fatal pictures of myself and their victim—which last they had recently hung up beside my own—throw down and stamp upon the waxen images, and break up or rend apart all the instruments and machinery of their vile art.

Amine, under my directions, then gathered up the fragments in a heap, cast them into a large, dry, stone tank, and set fire to them. All this I did without haste, rage or passion. I was very calm, and conducted my work with the utmost deliberation. When this was accomplished, I directed Anine and the fakir to take charge of Madame Laval, towards whom I never once trusted myself to look, nor did I speak to or notice her, although she often addressed me in terms of supplication. I then motioned my friends to retire to one of the large desolate courts which we had before crossed, leading the brother and sister prisoners with us.

Arrived at our destination, Col. M_____, addressed Perrault, and without enlarging upon the misery he and his accomplices had wrought, he simply told him the hour of reckoning so long ago promised had arrived. He reminded them both that they were utterly at our mercy; that a dreadful fate awaited them should we, as we might, give them up to justice, but instead, I had resolved, little as he deserved such grace, to deal with him as if he were a gentleman, rather than what he was; in short, that I was now prepared to give him the only chance for his life which mortal combat afforded.

Without suffering him to answer, the colonel directed him to assume a position opposite

me, and briefly, yet still with the military courtesy which never for one moment forsook him, introduced him to Graham, who had, with the utmost reluctance and disgust, consented for my sake to act as Perrault's second.

Baffled and hopeless, the trembling coward took the place assigned him, exchanged a few words of formality with Graham, received from him one of my pistols, and instantly, without waiting for the dropping of the handkerchief, which was the signal agreed upon for firing, discharged the weapon at me. Whether the treacherous villain's hand shook or he was but an indifferent marksman I know not, but the shot was ill-spiced and only took effect upon my left arm.

Furious at this murderous act, my gallant friends seized him on either side, and shouting to me to kill him, bravely held him between them, awaiting the result of my fire. My aim was deliberate and my purpose fixed. I determined not to charge my soul with an act of murder for so worthless a being, I would only maim him for life. I said as much before I drew the trigger, and then fired, and I know succeeded in my design. He fell, but not to die. Better for him if he had. After this deed of retribution, my friends and myself quitted the accursed spot forever.

It had been my intention to proceed to England immediately, taking with me all that I now had to return to the bereaved father of his precious child, contained in a splendid sarcophagus; but I had drawn too largely on the forces of Nature and she demanded immunity for the heavy draught. For many weeks I hovered between life and death, consumed by a raging fever.

The viscount and his kind wife, to both of whom I had become very dear, desired to have me removed to their own country seat, but though by their provident care my once bright home had been despoiled, shut up, and all my household dispersed, it was not to their house that I was carried. My kind and loving friend, Nanak Rai, claimed the charge of me, and attended only by my well-trying and faithful Arab servant Ali, I was conveyed to his residence, where he watched and ministered to me with the skill of a physician and the care of a tender father.

For many a long day and succeeding week, this excellent friend's untiring efforts were exerted to snatch me from the confines of the grave. With his remarkable skill, and under his benign and holy influence, I became at length restored to health alike of body and mind.

In the peaceful retirement of his home, I became also reconciled to myself, my fate, and the ministry of the angels whom I had once so sullenly rejected. All my spiritual powers and aspirations returned to me, but returned with a nearer and dearer sense of the sweet companionship which the spirits of beloved earthly friends alone can bring. How many times during my long nights of weariness and pain, have I heard the light step of my fairy, running through the hall, and stopping just as she used to do when she meant to surprise me, and then stealing, close, very close to me! Her ringing laugh sounded softly, though still very subdued in my ears, her golden tresses swept over my burning face, and her tender tones once more whispered words of love and consolation, ever ending by a promise of "the rest in heaven," to which she had herself attained.

Good and gracious Father of spirits, with what deep ingratitude and pitiful self-denial do poor mortals reject thy best blessing, when they refuse to accept or scoff at, the precious truths of spiritual communion!

The thirty years of life experience, the summary of which I have sketched out in these pages,

have pointed candidly and dispassionately to the abuse as well as the use of the vast and wondrous powers that lay occultly hidden away in man, and the unseen universe by which he is surrounded. But whatever may be the dangers, terrors, and mysteries of occultism, let suffering humanity assure itself there is ever an angel side to this realm of being, one on which the soul may lean as the anchor let down for its support from the hand of the Creator.

Had it not been for the power which bridged over the Lethean river that separated me from all that I had loved on earth, health might have resumed her sway, but reason would have fled from its shattered throne within my mind forever. One by one I had seen the fondest, the truest, the best, all upon whom I had anchored my warmest affections, fall by my side, vanish from my sight, and leave me alone. With a heart full of passionate impulses veiled by the cold exterior of disciplined asceticism, I had been compelled to see every tie of affection snapped, every earthly hope shipwrecked.

I had borne so much and strained at the cords of mental effort with such fearful energy, that I know I must have become a raving lunatic if I had turned despairing glances to the land of the hereafter, and sought in vain there for my vanished loves and my own goal of rest.

Looking through the eyes of my beloved ones, as they all returned to me, one by one, each assuming his or her place in the bright procession, with all the well-remembered tokens that could bring me the assurance there was no death, only change, I could see bright angels, higher still than the spirits of earth, and a Deity over all, upon whom I could lean my trembling soul and be at rest. Once more the tides of spiritual life and force rolled in upon the storm-beaten shores of my destiny; once more the grand scheme of the universe and the philosophy of existence was unrolled before me. I began again to recognize myself as the link between the lower and higher worlds, at the same time that I learned the necessity of hedging in the aspiring intellect by the safe boundary lines of matter and mystery, lest the soul, penetrating too far into the arcanum of the illimitable beyond, should become lost, wrecked, overwhelmed in immensities of being, too vast for finite humanity to comprehend.

I know I have not always remembered or applied these salutary lessons. Removed from the wise and philosophic teachings of my excellent Brahminical friend, restored to health and reconciled to myself, my angels, and my destiny, the spring of my wild aspirations has impelled me into the profoundest realms of occultism, into the depths yawning beneath my feet, and the heights stretching away above my head; piercing the path of the stars and plunging into regions of mystery beyond the safe limitations of human spiritual guidance.

In scaling these tremendous ladders of knowledge, I have experienced many a fearful fall, paid many a heavy penalty. Again and again I have returned from these awful pilgrimages with a wounded, bruised, and wayworn spirit; but ever, as I came, I have found rest, peace, and consolation in the loving ministration of earth's enfranchised spirit friends. I have learned to believe that communion between the denizens of this planet and her spirit spheres, should constitute the highest, purest, most normal and healthful exercise of our soul's religious faculties. Mortals have but an imperfect realization of this sublime truth, amidst the folly, fanaticism, wrong, and imposture that have disgraced the movement miscalled Spiritualism--a movement which has served to externalize much of the darkest features of human nature, but as yet has been permitted to do little more than point to the mines of unwrought treasure that lay hidden beneath the possibilities of that communion. As yet it is all too human and too redolent of human shortcomings.

I dare not pause now even to hint at what we may hope for in the better day of spiritual communion, when its modus operandi shall be understood by science, and its sublime revelations be received in the spirit of religious reverence. Time and space, however, I now find have become limited in this volume to a closing sentence.

When strength of mind and body returned to me, I left my noble friend's peaceful dwelling with the benison of a thankful heart upon its hospitable roof-tree. Then I stood once more on shipboard, waving farewell to groups of the dear and warmhearted friends who had trod with me life's rough and rugged paths in India; and with many a "God-speed" sounding in my ears, and many a moistened eye following the track of the ship out into the pathless wastes of ocean, sailed away to commence a new career of research in to the realms of spiritual existence.

Editor's Note: In Conclusion

The reader will observe that the foregoing sketches only account for ten years of the author's career after his departure from England, and constitute simply one portion of the "Ghost Land" papers, the remainder of which include an equally interesting and thrilling record extending over nearly twenty years more of the author's eventful and varied experiences in occult spiritism, many of which I have shared with him. As the ample dimensions of this volume forbid further additions, I take advantage of the epoch recorded in the last chapter to close these sketches, at least for the present.

By the favor of the author, I am in possession of another series of papers from his pen, of even more importance to the thinking part of the community than either of his previous works. This valuable MSS. I hope to present to the world on some future occasion.

Time and experience invariably regulate the demands of public opinion for the quality of the literature it can assimilate. Guided by that standard, no less than the means open to me, I shall determine how far I may be enabled to publish the rest of the fascinating sketches commenced in this volume, as well as the MSS. above referred to, the merits of which will be sufficiently well understood by the readers of "Art Magic," when I add that it treats of and enlarges upon the same subjects as those contained in that extraordinary work.

Life is short, but its responsibilities are to my mind continued throughout eternity; were it not so, the harassing cares, duties, and burdens which belong to the editorship of works so startling and revolutionary as those put forth by the Chevalier de B _____ would never be assumed or endured by his friend and the world's faithful worker,

—EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN,

Ed. Ghost Land.

