

## THE COUNTESS DECIDES

rather than at the base of the Pyramids. Tea was a joyous festival, with much laughter, gossip, and cigarettes in the hall. If you objected to tobacco, you enjoyed your cup in the drawing-room.

The Countess came down the broad stairway with some slight degree of hesitation, as if she feared the multitude of inquiring eyes about to be turned upon her. A tall gentleman, who happened to be passing, looked at her, then paused and actually appeared to be waiting for her. He spoke with a half-laughing diffidence that almost amounted to a stutter, as he fumbled with his eyeglass.

"Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, I believe we are by way of being related to each other. My name is Warlingham."

The lady stopped on the lower step, and a look of startled annoyance came for a moment into her eyes. There was a note of indifference, but nevertheless of inquiry, in her voice when at last she said:

"Lord Warlingham?"

"Yes. I think I was not mistaken when I ventured to suggest that our families are connected."

"Very remotely, I fear."

"I am told that the kinship of cousinship extends to the forty-second degree," replied his Lordship, with that depreciatory, audible smile of his which gave him the air of a bashful boy making his first venture towards conversation, although he must have been well past his fortieth year.

The lady laughed nervously.

"I think that when the kinship reaches the forties, the adjective remote becomes justified," she said.

"Possibly. Still, as like clings to like, remoteness has affinity for remoteness; and we are so remote from Eng-