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THE MONKS OF THELEMA.

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CHAPTER I.

"Here dwell no frowns nor anger; from these gates Sorrow flies afar."

TWO novices are waiting for the ceremony of reception. They have been placed side by side upon a seat at the lower end of the great hall, and have been enjoined to wait in silent meditation. The low seat perhaps typifies the stool of repentance; but until the reception is over one hardly likes to speculate on the meaning of things. One of the novices is a man and the other a girl. Two by two the fraternity have entered into this ark, and two by two they go out of it. So much only is known to the outer world. The man is about thirty years of age, with bright eyes, and smooth shaven chin and cheek. If the light were better, you would make out that he has a humorous twinkle in his eyes, and that his lips, which are thin, have got a trick of smiling at nothing—at the memory, the anticipation, the mere imagined umbra of a good thing. This kind of second sight is useful for keeping the

spirits at a uniform temperature, a simmering rather than a bubbling of cheerfulness. The unhappy people who have it not are melancholy in solitude, rush into any kind of company, often take to drink, commit atrocious crimes while drunk, and hang themselves in prison. Mr. Roger Exton will never, it is very certain, come to this melancholy end. He is extremely thin and rather tall; also his face is brown, of that colour which comes of long residence in hot climates. In fact Mr. Exton has but recently returned from Assam, where he has made a fortune—which we hope is a large one—some say by tea, or, according to another school of thinkers, by indigo. The question, still unsettled, belongs to those open controversies, like the authorship of "Junius," or the identity of the "Claimant," which vex the souls of historians and tap-room orators. The only other remarkable points about this novice were that his hair was quite straight, and that, although he was yet, as I have said, not much more than thirty, the corners of his eyes were already provided with a curious and multitudinous collection of crows' feet,