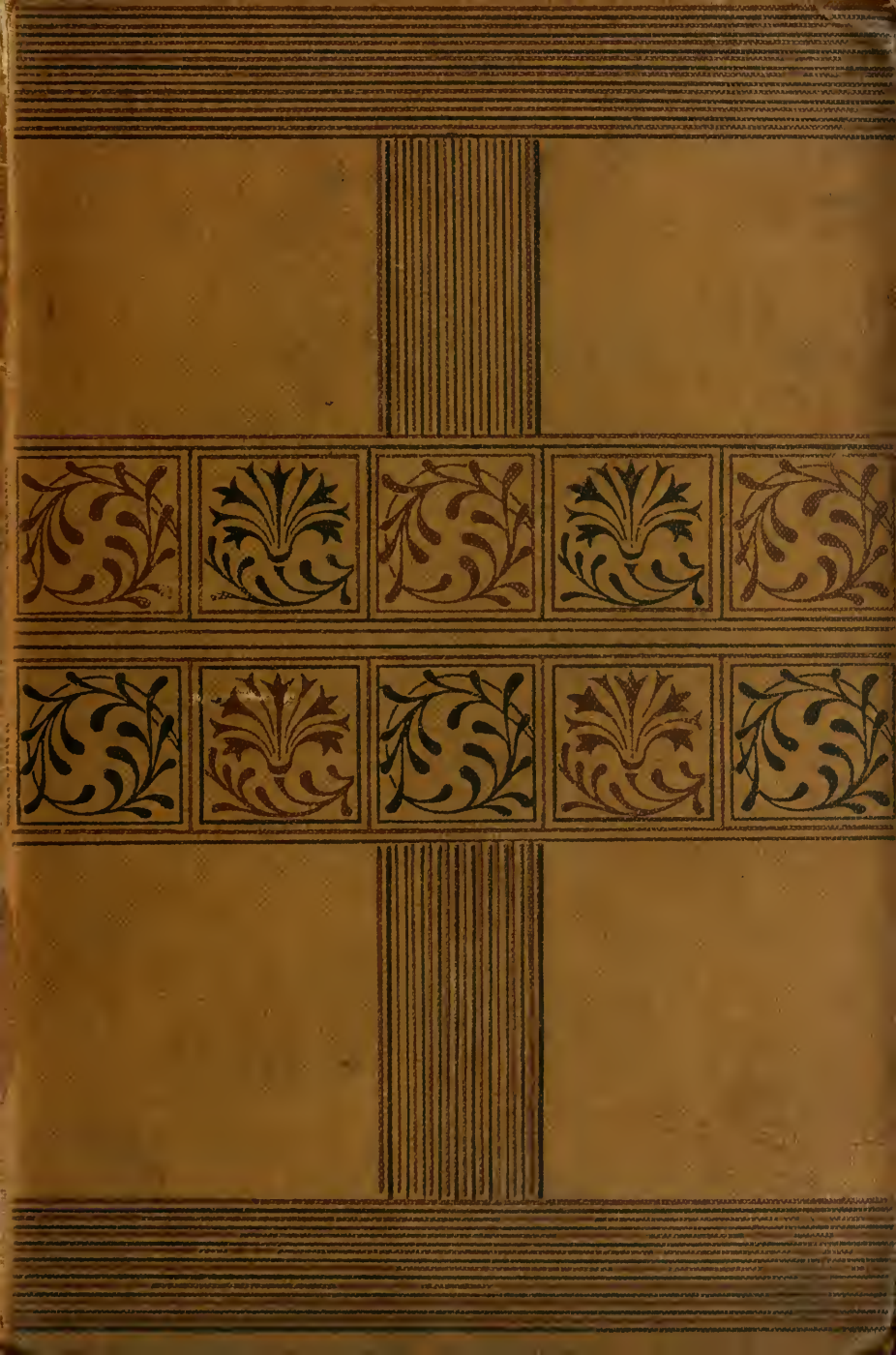

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THE NEW ABELARD

A Romance

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF 'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD' 'GOD AND THE MAN' ETC.

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OF

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THE NEW ABELARD.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ACTRESS AT HOME.

On a certain Monday in June, little more than a year after the last letter of the correspondence quoted in the preceding chapter, two young men of the period were seated in the smoking-room of the Traveller's Club. One was young George Craik, the other was Cholmondeley, of the 'Charing Cross Chronicle.'

'I assure you, my dear fellow,' the journalist was saying, 'that if you are in want of a religion——'

'Which I am *not*,' interjected George, sullenly.

'If you are in want of a new sensation, then, you will find this new Church just the thing to suit you. It has now been opened nearly a month, and is rapidly becoming the fashion. At the service yesterday I saw, among other notabilities, both Tyndall and Huxley, Thomas Carlyle, Hermann Vezin the actor, John Mill the philosopher, Dottie Destrange of the Prince's, Labouchere, and two colonial bishops. There is an article on Bradley in this morning's "Telegraph," and his picture is going into next week's "Vanity Fair."'

'But the fellow is an atheist and a Radical!'

'My dear Craik, so am I!'

'Oh, you're different!' returned the other with a disagreeable laugh. 'Nobody believes you in earnest when you talk or write that kind of nonsense.'

'Whereas, you would say, Bradley is an enthusiast? Just so; and his enthusiasm is contagious. When I listen to him, I almost catch it myself, for half an hour. But you mistake altogether, by the way, when you call him atheistical, or even Radical. He is a Churchman still, though the Church has banged its door in his face, and his dream is to conserve all that is best and strongest in Christianity.'

'I don't know anything about that,' said Craik, savagely. 'All I know is that he's an infernal humbug, and ought to be lynched.'

'Pray don't abuse him! He is my friend, and a noble fellow.'

'I don't care whether he is your friend or not—he is a scoundrel.'

Cholmondeley made an angry gesture, then remembering who was speaking, shrugged his shoulders.

'Why, how has he offended *you?* Stop, though, I remember! The fair founder of his church is your cousin.'

'Yes,' answered the other with an oath, 'and she would have been my wife if he had not come in the way. It was all arranged, you know, and I should have had Alma and—and all her money; but she met him, and he filled her mind with atheism, and radicalism, and rubbish. A year ago, when he was kicked out of his living, I thought she was done with

him ; but he hadn't been gone a month before she followed him to London, and all this nonsense began. The governor has almost gone down on his knees to her, but it's no use. Fancy her putting down ten thousand pounds in solid cash for this New Church business ; and not a day passes but he swindles her out of more.'

'Bradley is not a swindler,' answered the journalist quietly. 'For the rest, I suppose that they will soon marry.'

'Not if I can help it! Marry that man! It would be a standing disgrace to the family.'

'But they are engaged, or something of that sort. As for its being a disgrace, that is rubbish. Why, Bradley might marry a duke's daughter if he pleased. Little Lady Augusta Knowles is crazy about him.'

True to his sarcastic instinct, Cholmondeley

added, 'Of course I know the little woman has a hump, and has only just got over her *grande passion* for Montepulciano the opera singer. But a duke's daughter—think of that!'

George Craik only ground his teeth and made no reply.

Shortly afterwards the two men separated, Cholmondeley strolling to his office, Craik (whom we shall accompany) hailing a hansom and driving towards St. John's Wood.

Before seeking, in the young man's company, those doubtful regions which a modern satirist has termed

The shady groves of the Evangelist,

let us give a few explanatory words touching the subject of the above conversation. It had all come about exactly as described. Yielding to Alma's intercession, and inspired, moreover,

by the enthusiasm of a large circle in London, Bradley had at last consented to open a religious campaign on his own account in the very heart of the metropolis. A large sum of money was subscribed, Alma heading the list with a princely donation, a site was selected in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, and a church was built, called by its followers the New Church, and in every respect quite a magnificent temple. The stained windows were designed by leading artists of the æsthetic school, the subjects partly religious, partly secular (St. Wordsworth, in the guise of a good shepherd, forming one of the subjects, and St. Shelley, rapt up into the clouds and playing on a harp, forming another), and the subject over the altar was an extraordinary figure-piece by Watts, 'Christ rebuking Superstition'—the latter a straw-haired damsel with

a lunatic expression, grasping in her hands a couple of fiery snakes. Of course there was a scandal. The papers were full of it, even while the New Church was building. Public interest was thoroughly awakened ; and when it became current gossip that a young heiress, of fabulous wealth and unexampled personal beauty, had practically created the endowment, society was fluttered through and through. Savage attacks appeared on Bradley in the religious journals. Enthusiastic articles concerning him were published in the secular newspapers. He rapidly became notorious. When he began to preach, the enthusiasm was intensified ; for his striking presence and magnificent voice, not to speak of the 'fiery matter' he had to deliver, carried everything before them.

It may safely be assumed that time had at

last reconciled him to the secret trouble of his life. Before settling in London he had ascertained, to his infinite relief, that Mrs. Montmorency had gone to Paris and had remained there with her child, under the same 'protection' as before. Finding his secret safe from the world, he began unconsciously to dismiss it from his mind, the more rapidly as Alma's relations towards him became more and more those of a devoted sister. Presently his old enthusiasm came back upon him, and with it a sense of new power and mastery. He began to feel an unspeakable sacredness in the tie which bound him to the woman he loved; and although it had seemed at first that he could only think of her in one capacity, that of his wife and the partner of his home, her sisterhood seemed indescribably sweet and satisfying. Then, again,

her extraordinary belief in him inspired him with fresh ambition, and at last, full of an almost youthful ardour, he stepped out into the full sunshine of his London ministry.

In the least amiable mood possible, even to him, George Craik drove northward, and passing the very portals of Bradley's new church, reached the shady groves he sought. Alighting in a quiet street close to the 'Eyre Arms,' he stood before a bijou villa all embowered in foliage, with a high garden wall, a gate with a wicket, and the very tiniest of green lawns. He rang the bell, and the gate was opened by a black-eyed girl in smart servant's costume; on which, without a word, he strolled in.

'Mistress up?' he asked sharply; though it was past twelve o'clock.

'She's just breakfasting,' was the reply.

Crossing the lawn, Craik found himself before a pair of French windows reaching to the ground; they stood wide open, revealing the interior of a small sitting-room or breakfast parlour, gorgeously if not tastily furnished —a sort of green and gold cage, in which was sitting, sipping her coffee and yawning over a penny theatrical paper, a pretty lady of uncertain age. Her little figure was wrapt in a loose silk morning gown, on her tiny feet were Turkish slippers, in her lap was one pug dog, while another slept at her feet. Her eyes were very large, innocent, and blue, her natural dark hair was bleached to a lovely gold by the art of the *coiffeur*, and her cheeks had about as much colour as those of a stucco bust.

This was Miss Dottie Destrange, of the 'Frivolity' Theatre, a lady famous for her falsetto voice and her dances.

On seeing Craik she merely nodded, but did not attempt to rise.

'Good morning, Georgie!' she said—for she loved the diminutive, and was fond of using that form of address to her particular friends. 'Why didn't you come yesterday? I waited for you all day—no, not exactly all day, though—but except a couple of hours in the afternoon, when I went to church.'

Craik entered the room and threw himself into a chair.

'Went to church?' he echoed with an ugly laugh. 'I didn't know *you* ever patronised that kind of entertainment.'

'I don't as a rule, but Carrie Carruthers

called for me in her brougham, and took me off to hear the new preacher down in Regent's Park. Aram was there, and no end of theatrical people, besides all sorts of swells; and, what do you think, in one of the painted glass windows there was a figure of Shakespeare, just like the one on our drop curtain! I think it's blasphemous, Georgie. I wonder the roof didn't fall in!'

The fair doves of the theatre, we may remark in parenthesis, have seldom much respect for the temple in which they themselves flutter; they cannot shake from their minds the idea that it is a heathen structure, and that they themselves are, at the best, but pretty pagans.

Hence they are often disposed to receive in quite a humble spirit the ministrations of their

mortal enemies, the officers of the Protestant Church.

George Craik scowled at the fair one as he had scowled at Cholmondeley.

'You heard that man Bradley, I suppose?'

'Yes; I think that was his name. Do you know him, George?'

'I know no good of him. I wish the roof *had* fallen in, and smashed him up. Talk about something else; and look here, don't let me catch you going there again, or we shall quarrel. I won't have any one I know going sneaking after that humbug.'

'All right, Georgie dear,' replied the damsel, smiling maliciously. 'Then it's true, I suppose, that he's going to marry your cousin? I saw her sitting right under him, and thought her awfully pretty.'

'You let her alone,' grumbled George, 'and mind your own affairs.'

'Why don't you marry her yourself, Georgie?' persisted his tormentor. 'I hope what I have heard isn't true?'

'What have you heard?'

'That she prefers the parson!'

The young man sprang up with an oath, and Miss Dottie burst into a peal of shrill laughter. He strode off into the garden, and she followed him. Coming into the full sunlight, she looked even more like plaster of Paris, or stucco, than in the subdued light of the chamber; her hair grew more strawlike, her eyes more colourless, her whole appearance more faded and jaded.

'I had a letter this morning from Kitty,' she said carelessly, to change the subject.

'Kitty who?'

'Kitty Montmorency. She says old Ombermere is very ill, and thinks he's breaking up. By the way, that reminds me—Kitty's first husband was a man named Bradley, who was to have entered the Church. I suppose it can't be the same.'

She spoke with little thought of the consequences, and was not prepared for the change which suddenly came over her companion.

'Her *husband*, did you say?' he exclaimed, gripping her arm. 'Were they married?'

'I suppose so.'

'And the man was named Bradley—Ambrose Bradley?'

'I'm not *quite* sure about the Christian name.'

'How long was this ago?'

'Oh, a long time—ten years,' she replied; then with a sudden remembrance of her own claims to juvenility, which she had forgotten for a moment, she added, 'when I was quite a child.'

George Craik looked at her for a long time with a baleful expression, but he scarcely saw her, being lost in thought. He knew as well as she did that she was ten or fifteen years older than she gave herself out to be, but he was not thinking of that. He was wondering if he had, by the merest accident, discovered a means of turning the tables on the man he hated. At last he spoke.

'Tell me all you know. Let us have no humbug, but tell me everything. Did you ever see Bradley before you saw him yesterday?'

'Never, Georgie.'

'But Kitty Montmorency was once married to, or living with, a man of that name? You are quite sure?'

'Yes. But after all, what does it signify, unless——'

She paused suddenly, for all at once the full significance of the situation flashed upon her.

'You see how it stands,' cried her companion. 'If this is the same man, and it is quite possible, it will be worth a thousand pounds to me—ah, ten thousand! What is Kitty's address?'

'Hôtel de la Grande Bretagne, Rue Caumartin, Paris.'

All right, Dottie. I shall go over to-night by the mail.'

The next morning George Craik arrived in Paris, and drove straight to the hotel in the Rue Caumartin—an old-fashioned building, with a great courtyard, round which ran open-air galleries communicating with the various suites of rooms. On inquiring for Mrs. Montmorency he ascertained that she had gone out very early, and was not expected home till midday. He left his card and drove on to the Grand Hotel.

It might be a fool's errand which had brought him over, but he was determined, with the bulldog tenacity of his nature, to see it through to the end.

Arrived at the hotel, he deposited his Gladstone-bag in the hall, and then, to pass the time, inspected the visitors' list, preparatory to writing down his own name.

Presently he uttered a whistle, as he came to the entry—

'Lord and Lady Ombermere and family, London.'

He turned to the clerk of the office, and said carelessly in French—

'I see Lord Ombermere's name down. Is his lordship still here?'

'Yes,' was the reply. 'He has been here all the winter. Unfortunately, since the warm weather began, milord has been very ill, and since last week he has been almost given up by the physicians.'

CHAPTER XII.

IN A SICK ROOM.

Ah blessed promise! Shall it be fulfilled,
Tho' the eye glazes and the sense is still'd?
Shall that fair Shape which beckon'd with bright hand
Out of the Mirage of a Heavenly Land,
Fade to a cloud that moves with blighting breath
Over the ever-troublous sea of Death?
Ah no; for on the crown of Zion's Hill,
Cloth'd on with peace, the fair Shape beckons still!

The New Crusade.

It was a curious sensation for Ambrose Bradley, after bitter experience of a somewhat ignominious persecution, to find himself all at once—by a mere shuffle of the cards, as it were—one of the most popular persons in all Bohemia; I say Bohemia advisedly, for of course that greater world of fashion and reli-

gion, which Bohemia merely fringes, regarded the New Church and its pastor with supreme indifference.

But the worship of Bohemia is something; nay, Bradley found it much.

He could count among the occasional visitors to his temple some of the leading names in Art and Science. Fair votaries came to him by legions, led by the impassioned and enthusiastic Alma Craik. The society journals made much of him; one of them, in a series of articles called 'Celebrities in their Slippers,' gave a glowing picture of the new Apostle in his study, in which the sweetest of Raphael's Madonnas looked down wonderingly on Milo's Venus, and where Newman's 'Parochial Sermons' stood side by side with Tyndall's Belfast address, and the original edition of the

'Vestiges of Creation.' The correspondent of the 'New York Herald' telegraphed, on more than one occasion, the whole, or nearly the whole, of one of his Sunday discourses—which, printed in large type, occupied two columns of the great Transatlantic daily; and he received forthwith, from an enterprising Yankee caterer, an offer of any number of dollars per lecture, if he would enter into a contract to 'stump' the States.

Surely this was fame, of a sort.

Although, if the truth must be told, even Bohemia did not take the New Church overseriously, Bradley found his intellectual forces expand with the growing sense of power.

Standing in no fear of any authority, human or superhuman, he gradually advanced more and more into the arena of spiritual contro-

versy; retired further and further from the old landmarks of dogmatic religion; drew nearer and still nearer to the position of an accredited teacher of religious æstheticism. Always literary and artistic, rather than puritanical, in his sympathies, he found himself before long at that standpoint which regards the Bible merely as a poetical masterpiece, and accepts Christianity as simply one manifestation, though a central one, of the great scheme of human morals.

Thus the cloud of splendid supernaturalism, on which alone has been projected from time immemorial the mirage of a heavenly promise, gradually dissolved away before his sight,

> And like the cloudy fabric of a vision
> Left not a wrack behind.

The creed of spiritual sorrow was exchanged

for the creed of spiritual pleasure. The man, forgetful of all harsh experience, became rapt in the contemplation of 'beautiful ideas'—of an intellectual phantasmagoria in which Christ and Buddha, St. John and Shakespeare, Mary Magdalene and Mary Shelley, the angels of the church and the winged pterodactyls of the chalk, flashed and faded in everchanging kaleidoscopic dream.

The mood which welcomed all forms of belief, embraced none utterly, but contemplated all, became vague, chaotic, and transcendental; and Ambrose Bradley found himself in a fairy world where nothing seemed real and solemn enough as a law for life.

For a time, of course, he failed to realise his own position.

He still rejoiced in the belief that he was

building the foundation of his New Church, which was essentially the Old Church, on the rock of common sense. He was still certain that the Christ of history, the accredited Saviour of mankind, was blessing and consecrating his eager endeavour. He still persuaded himself that his creed was a creed of regeneration, his mission apostolic.

He had taken a small house on the borders of Regent's Park, and not far away from the church which Alma had built for him as a voluntary offering. It was arranged plainly but comfortably, with a touch of the then predominant æstheticism ; the decorations tasteful, the furniture mediæval ; but all this was Alma's doing and, throughout, her choosing. Bradley himself remained unchanged ; a strong unpretending man of simple habits, more like

an athletic curate in his dress and bearing than like a fashionable preacher.

Of course it goes without saying that he was ostracised by the preachers of his own maternal Church, the Church of England; so that he added the consciousness of sweet and painless martyrdom to that of popular success Attacks upon him appeared from time to time in the less important religious journals; but the great organs of the national creed treated him and his performances with silent contempt.

He was seated in his study one morning in early summer, reading one of the attacks to which I have just alluded, when Miss Craik was shown in. He sprang up to welcome her, with outstretched hands.

'I want you to come with me at once,' she

said. 'Agatha Combe is worse, and I should like you to see her.'

'Of course I will come,' answered Bradley. 'But I thought she was almost recovered?'

'She has had a relapse; not a serious one, I trust, but I am a little alarmed about her. She talks so curiously.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; about dying. She says she has a presentiment that she won't live. Poor Agatha! When *she* talks like that, it is strange indeed.'

Leaving the house together, Bradley and Alma entered Regent's Park. Their way lay right across, towards the shady sides of Primrose Hill, where Miss Combe was then residing. The day was fair and sunny, and there was an unusual number of pleasure-seekers and

pedestrians in the park. A number of boys were playing cricket on the spaces allotted for that recreation, nursemaids and children were sprinkled everywhere, and near the gate of the Zoological Gardens, which they passed, a brass band was merrily performing. Bradley's heart was light, and he looked round on the bright scene with a kindling eye, in the full pride of his physical strength and intellectual vigour.

'After all,' he said, 'those teachers are wise who proclaim that health is happiness. What a joyful world it would be if everyone were well and strong.'

'Ah yes!' said his companion. 'But when sickness comes——'

She sighed heavily, for she was thinking of her friend Agatha Combe.

'I sometimes think that the sum of human misery is trifling compared to that of human happiness,' pursued the clergyman. 'Unless one is a downright pessimist, a very Schopenhauer, surely one must see that the preponderance is in favour of enjoyment. Look at these ragged boys—how merry they are! There is not so much wretchedness in the world, perhaps, as some of us imagine.'

She glanced at him curiously, uncertain whither his thoughts were tending. He speedily made his meaning plain.

'Religion and Sorrow have hitherto gone hand in hand, vanishing through the gate of the grave. But why should not Religion and Joy be united this side the last mystery? Why should not this world be the Paradise of all our dreams?'

'It can never be so, Ambrose,' replied Alma, 'until we can abolish Death.'

'And we can do that in a measure; that is to say, we can abolish premature decay, sickness, disease. Look what Science has done in fifty years! More than other-worldliness has done in a thousand! When Death comes gently, at the natural end of life, it generally comes as a blessing—as the last sacrament of peace. I think if I could live man's allotted term, useful, happy, loving and beloved, I could be content to sleep and never wake again.'

Alma did not answer. Her thoughts were wandering, or she would have shrunk to find her idolised teacher turning so ominously towards materialism. But indeed it was not the first time that Bradley's thoughts had drifted in

that direction. It is not in moments of personal happiness or success that we lean with any eagerness towards the supernatural. Glimpses of a world to come are vouchsafed chiefly to those who weep and those who fail; and in proportion as the radiance of this life brightens, fades the faint aurora of the other.

In a small cottage, not far from Chalk Farm, they found Miss Combe. She was staying, as her custom was, with friends, the friends on this occasion being the editor of an evening paper and his wife; and she had scarcely arrived on her visit—some weeks before—when she had begun to ail. She was sitting up when Alma arrived, in an armchair drawn close to the window of a little back parlour, commanding a distant view of Hampstead Hill.

Wrapt in a loose dressing-gown, and leaning back in her chair, she was just touched by the spring sunshine, the brightness of which even the smoke from the great city could not subdue. She did not seem to be in pain, but her face was pale and flaccid, her eyes were heavy and dull. Her ailment was a weakness of the heart's action, complicated with internal malady of another kind.

Tears stood in Alma's eyes as she embraced and kissed her old friend.

'I have brought Mr. Bradley to see you,' she cried. 'I am glad to see you looking so much better.'

Miss Combe smiled and held out her hand to Bradley, who took it gently.

'When you came in,' she said, 'I was half dreaming. I thought I was a little child

again, playing with brother Tom in the old churchyard at Taviton. Tom has only just gone out; he has been here all the morning.'

Said brother Tom, the unwashed apostle of the Hall of Science, had left unmistakable traces of his presence, for a strong odour of bad tobacco pervaded the room.

'It seems like old times,' proceeded the little lady, with a sad smile, 'to be sick, and to be visited by a clergyman. I shall die in the odour of sanctity after all.'

'You must not talk of dying,' cried Alma. 'You will soon be all right again.'

'I'm afraid not, dear,' answered Miss Combe. 'I saw my mother's face again last night, and it never stayed so long. I take it as a warning that I shall soon be called away.'

Strange enough it seemed to both those who listened, to hear a person of Miss Combe's advanced views talking in the vocabulary of commonplace superstition.

'Don't think I am repining,' she continued. 'If I were not ripe, do you think I should be gathered? I am going where we all must go—who knows whither? and, after all, I've had a "good time," as the Yankees say. Do you believe, Mr. Bradley,' she added, turning her keen, grave eyes on the clergyman, 'that an atheist can be a spiritualist, and hold relations with an unseen world?'

'You are no atheist, Miss Combe,' he answered. 'God forbid!'

'I don't know,' was the reply. 'I am not one in the same degree as my brother Tom,

of course; but I am afraid I have no living faith beyond the region of ghosts and fairies. The idea of Deity is incomprehensible to me, save as that of the "magnified non-natural Man" my teachers have long ago discarded. I think I might still understand the anthropomorphic God of my childhood, but having lost Him I can comprehend no other.'

'The other is not far to seek,' responded Bradley, bending towards her, and speaking eagerly. 'You will find him in Jesus Christ —the living, breathing godhead, whose touch and inspiration we all can feel.'

'I'm afraid *I* can't,' said Miss Combe. 'I can understand Jesus the man, but Christ the God, who walked in the flesh and was crucified, is beyond the horizon of my conception—even of my sympathy.'

'Don't say that,' cried Alma. 'I am sure you believe in our loving Saviour.'

Miss Combe did not reply, but turned her face wearily to the spring sunlight.

'If there is no other life,' she said, after a long pause, 'the idea of Jesus Christ is a mockery. Don't you think so, Mr. Bradley?'

'Not altogether,' replied Bradley, after a moment's hesitation. 'If the life we live here were all, if, after a season, we vanished like the flowers, we should still need the comfort of Christ's message—his injunction to "love one another." The central idea of Christianity is peace and good fellowship; and if our life had raised itself to that ideal of love, it would be an ideal life, and its brevity would be of little consequence.'

Miss Combe smiled. Her keen intelligence

went right into the speaker's mind, and saw the true meaning of that shallow optimism. Bradley noticed the smile, and coloured slightly under the calm, penetrating gaze of the little woman.

'I have always been taught to believe,' said Miss Combe, quietly, 'that the true secret of the success of Christianity was its heavenly promise—its pledge of a future life.'

'Of course,' cried Alma.

'Certainly that promise was given,' said Bradley, 'and I have no doubt that, in some way or another, it will be fulfilled.'

'What do you mean by in some way or another?' asked Miss Combe.

'I mean that Christ's Heaven may not be a heaven of physical consciousness, but of

painless and passive perfection; bringing to the weary peace and forgetfulness, to the happy absolute absorption into the eternal and unconscious life of God.'

'Nirwâna, in short!' said Miss Combe, dryly. 'Well, for my own part, I should not care so much for so sleepy a Paradise. I postulate a heaven where I should meet and know my mother, and where the happy cry of living creatures would rise like a fountain into the clear azure for evermore.'

'Surely,' said Bradley, gently, 'we all hope as much!'

'But do we *believe* it?' returned Miss Combe. 'That is the question. All human experience, all physiology, all true psychology, is against it. The letter of the eternal Universe, written on the open Book of Astronomy,

speaks of eternal death and change. Shall we survive while systems perish, while suns go out like sparks, and the void is sown with the wrecks of worn-out worlds?'

In this strain the conversation continued for some little time longer. Seeing the invalid's tender yearning, Bradley spoke yet more hopefully of the great Christian promise, describing the soul as imperishable, and the moral order of the universe as stationary and secure; but what he said was half-hearted, and carried with it no conviction. He felt for the first time the helplessness of a transcendental Christianity, like his own. Presently he returned, almost unconsciously, to the point from which he had set forth.

'There is something, perhaps,' he said, 'in the Positivist conception of mankind as one

ever-changing and practically deathless Being. Though men perish, Man survives. Children spring like flowers in the dark footprints of Death, and in them the dead inherit the world.'

'That creed would possibly suit me,' returned Miss Combe, smiling sadly again, 'if I were a mother, if I were to live again in my own offspring. I'm afraid it is a creed with little comfort for childless men, or for old maids like myself! No; my selfishness requires something much more tangible. If I am frankly told that I must die, that consciousness ceases for ever with the physical breath of life, I can understand it, and accept my doom; it is disagreeable, since I am rather fond of life and activity, but I can accept it. It is no consolation whatever to reflect that I

am to exist vicariously, without consciousness of the fact, in other old maids to come! The condition of moral existence is—consciousness; without *that*, I shall be practically abolished. Such a creed, as the other you have named, is simple materialism, disguise it as you will.'

'I am not preaching Positivism,' cried Bradley; 'God forbid! I only said there was something in its central idea. Christ's promise is that we shall live again! Can we not accept that promise, without asking "how?"'

'No, we can't; that is to say, *I* can't. It is the "how" which forms the puzzle. Besides, the Bible expressly speaks of the resurrection of the body.'

'A poetical expression,' suggested Bradley.

'Yes; but something more,' persisted the

little woman. 'I can't conceive an existence without those physical attributes with which I was born. When I think of my dead mother, it is of the very face and form I used to know; the same eyes, the same sweet lips, the same smile, the same touch of loving hands. Either we shall exist again *as we are*, or——'

'Of course we shall so exist,' broke in Alma, more and more nervous at the turn the conversation was taking. 'Is it not all beautifully expressed in St. Paul? We sow a physical body, we shall reap a spiritual body; but they will be one and the same. But pray do not talk of it any more. You are not dying, dear, thank God!'

Half an hour later Bradley and Alma left the house together.

'I am sorry dear Agatha has not more

faith,' said Alma, thoughtfully, as they wandered back towards the park.

'I think she has a great deal,' said Bradley, quickly. 'But I was shocked to see her looking so ill and worn. Is she having good medical advice?'

'The best in London. Dr. Harley sees her nearly every day. Poor Agatha! She has not had too much happiness in this world. She has worked so hard, and all alone!'

They entered the park gate, and came again among the greenness and the sunshine. Everything seemed light and happiness, and the air had that indescribable sense of resurrection in it which comes with the early shining of the primrose and the reawakening of the year. Bradley glanced at his companion. Never had she seemed so bright and beautiful!

With the flush of the rose on her cheek, and her eyes full of pensive light, she moved lightly and gracefully at his side.

A lark rose from the grass not far away, and warbled ecstatically overhead. Bradley felt his blood stir and move like sap in the bough at the magic touch of the season, and with kindling eyes he drew nearer to his companion's side.

'Well, dearest, you were a true prophet,' he said, taking her hand and drawing it softly within his arm. 'It has all come to pass, through *you*. The New Church flourishes in spite of those who hate all things new; and I have you—you only—to thank for it all.'

'I want no thanks,' replied Alma. 'It is reward enough to forward the good work, and to make you happy.'

'Happy? Yes, I ought to be happy, should I not?'

'And you are, I hope, dear Ambrose!'

'Yes, I think so. Only sometimes—on a day like this, for example—I cannot help looking back with a sigh to the dear old times at Fensea. A benediction seems to rest upon the quiet country life, which contented me *then* so little. I miss the peaceful fields, the loneliness and rest of the fens, the silence of the encircling sea!'

'And Goody Tilbury's red cloak!' cried Alma, smiling. 'And the scowl of Summerhayes the grocer, and the good Bishop's blessing!'

'Ah, but after all the life was a gentle one till I destroyed it. The poor souls loved me, till I became too much for them. And then,

Alma, the days with *you*! Your first coming, like a ministering angel, to make this sordid earth seem like a heavenly dream! To-day, dearest, it almost seems as if my heaven was behind, and not before, me! I should like to live those blissful moments over again—every one!'

Alma laughed outright, for she had a vivid remembrance of her friend's infinite vexations as a country clergyman.

'That's right,' he said, smiling fondly; 'laugh at me, if you please, but I am quite serious in what I say. Here, in the great world of London, though we see so much of one another, we do not seem quite so closely united as we did yonder.'

'Not so united!' she cried, all her sweet face clouded in a moment.

'Well, united as before, but differently. In the constant storm and stress of my occupation, there is not the same pastoral consecration.

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

In those days, dearest,' he added, sinking his voice to a whisper, 'we used to speak oftener of love, we used to dream—did we not?—of being man and wife.'

She drooped her gentle eyes, which had been fixed upon him earnestly, and coloured softly; then, with a pretty touch of coquetry, laughed again.

'I am not jealous,' she said, 'and since you have another bride——'

'Another bride!' he repeated, with a startled look of surprise.

'I mean your Church,' she said gaily.

'Ah yes,' he said, relieved. 'But do you know I find this same bride of mine a somewhat dull companion, and a poor exchange, at any rate, for a bride of flesh and blood. Dearest, I have been thinking it all over! Why should we not realise our old dream, and live in love together?'

Alma stood silent. They were in a lonely part of the park, in a footway winding through its very centre. Close at hand was one of the wooden benches. With beating heart and heightened colour, she strolled to the seat and sat down.

Bradley followed, placed himself by her side, and gently took her hand.

'Well?' he said.

She turned her head and looked quietly

into his eyes. Her grave fond look brought the bright blood to his own cheeks, and just glancing round to see that they were unobserved, he caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately—on lips that kissed again.

'Shall it be as I wish?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, Ambrose,' she answered. 'What you wish, I wish too; now as always, your will is my law.'

'And when?'

'When you please,' she answered. 'Only before I marry you, you must promise me one thing.'

'Yes! yes!'

'To regard me *still* as only your handmaid; to look upon your Church always as your true Bride, to whom you are most deeply bound.'

'I'll try, dear; but will you be very angry if I sometimes forget her, when I feel your loving arms around me?'

'Very angry,' she said, smiling radiantly upon him.

They rose up, and walked on together hand in hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RUNAWAY COUPLE.

AMBROSE BRADLEY returned home that day like a man in a dream; and it was not till he had sat for a long time, thinking alone, that he completely realised what he had done. But the state of things which led to so amatory a crisis had been going on for a long time; indeed, the more his worldly prosperity increased, and the greater his social influence grew, the feebler became his spiritual resistance to the temptation against which he had fought so long.

It is the tendency of all transcendental forms

of thought, even of a transcendental Christianity, to relax the moral fibre of their recipient, and to render vague and indetermined his general outlook upon life. The harshest possible Calvinism is bracing and invigorating, compared with any kind of creed with a terminology purely subjective.

Bradley's belief was liberal in the extreme in its construction, or obliteration, of religious dogmas; it soon became equally liberal, or lax, in its conception of moral sanctions. The man still retained, and was destined to retain till the end of his days, the very loftiest conception of human duty. His conscience, in every act of existence, was the loadstone of his deeds. But the most rigid conscience, relying entirely on its own insight, is liable to corruption. Certainly Bradley's was. He had not advanced

very far along the easy path which leads to agnosticism, before he had begun to ask himself —What, after all, is the moral law? are not certain forms of self-sacrifice Quixotic and unnecessary? and, finally, why should I live a life of martyrdom, because my path was crossed in youth by an unworthy woman?

Since that nocturnal meeting after his visit to the theatre, Bradley had seen nothing of Mrs. Montmorency, but he had ascertained that she was spending the greater part of her time somewhere abroad. Further investigations, pursued through a private inquiry office, convinced him of two things: first, that there was not the faintest possibility of the lady voluntarily crossing his path again, and, second, that his secret was perfectly safe in the keeping of one whom its disclosure might possibly ruin.

Satisfied thus far of his security, he had torn that dark leaf out of his book of life, and thrown it away into the waters of forgetfulness.

Then, with his growing sense of mastery, grew Alma's fascination.

She could not conceal, she scarcely attempted to conceal, the deep passion of worship with which she regarded him. Had he been a man ten times colder and stronger, he could scarcely have resisted the spell. As it was, he did not resist it, but drew nearer and nearer to the sweet spirit who wove it, as we have seen.

One sunny morning, about a month after the occurrence of that little love scene in Regent's Park, Bradley rose early, packed a small hand valise, and drove off in a hansom to Victoria Station. He was quietly attired in clothes not at all clerical in cut, and without

the white neckcloth or any other external badge of his profession.

Arriving at the station, he found himself just in time to catch the nine o'clock train to Russetdeane, a lonely railway station taking its name from a village three miles distant, lying on the direct line to Eastbourne and Newhaven. He took his ticket, and entered a first-class carriage as the train started. The carriage had no other occupant, and, leaning back in his seat, he was soon plunged in deep reflection.

At times his brow was knitted, his face darkened, showing that his thoughts were gloomy and disturbed enough; but ever and anon, his eyes brightened, and his features caught a gleam of joyful expectation. Whenever the train stopped, which it did very fre-

quently, he shrank back in his corner, as if dreading some scrutinising eye; but no one saw or heeded him, and no one entered the carriage which he occupied alone.

At last, after a journey of about an hour and a half, the train stopped at Russetdeane.

It was a very lonely station indeed, quite primitive in its arrangements, and surrounded on every side by green hills and white quarries of chalk. An infirm porter and a melancholy station-master officiated on the platform, but when Bradley alighted, valise in hand, who should step smilingly up to him but Alma, prettily attired in a quiet country costume, and rosy with the sweet country air.

The train steamed away; porter and station-master standing stone still, and watching it till the last faint glimpse of it faded in

the distance; then they looked at each other, seemed to awake from a trance, and slowly approached the solitary passenger and his companion.

'Going to Russetdeane, measter?' demanded the porter, wheezily, while the station-master looked on from the lofty heights of his superior position.

Bradley nodded, and handed over his valise.

'I have a fly outside the station,' explained Alma; and passing round the platform and over a wooden foot-bridge, to platform and offices on the other side, they found the fly in question—an antique structure of the post-chaise species, drawn by two ill-groomed horses, a white and a roan, and driven by a preternaturally old boy of sixteen or seventeen.

'At what hour does the next down train pass to Newhaven?' asked Bradley, as he tipped the porter, and took his seat by Alma's side.

'The down-train, measter?' repeated the old man. 'There be one at three, and another at five. Be you a-going on?'

Bradley nodded, and the fly drove slowly away along the country road. The back of the boy's head was just visible over the front part of the vehicle, which was vast and deep; so Bradley's arm stole round his companion's waist, and they exchanged an affectionate kiss.

'I have the licence in my pocket, dearest,' he whispered. 'Is all arranged?'

'Yes. The clergyman of the parish is such a dear old man, and quite sympathetic. He

thinks it is an elopement, and as he ran away with his own wife, who is twenty years younger than himself, he is sympathy itself!'

'Did he recognise my name, when you mentioned it?'

'Not a bit,' answered Alma, laughing. 'He lives too far out of the world to know anything or anybody, and, as I told you, he is eighty years of age. I really think he believes that Queen Victoria is still an unmarried lady, and he talks about Bonaparte just as if it were sixty years ago.'

'Alma!'

'Yes, Ambrose!'

'You don't mind this secret marriage?'

'Not at all—since it is your wish.'

'I think it is better to keep the affair private, at least for a little time. You know

how I hate publicity, in a matter so sacred; and since we are all in all to each other——'

He drew her still closer and kissed her again. As he did so, he was conscious of a curious sound as of suppressed laughter, and, glancing up, he saw the eyes of the weird boy intently regarding him.

'Well, what is it?' cried Bradley, impatiently, while Alma shrank away blushing crimson.

The eyes of the weird boy did not droop, nor was he at all abashed. Still indulging in an internal chuckle, like the suppressed croak of a young raven, he pulled his horses up, and pointed with his whip towards the distant country prospect.

'There be Russetdeane church spire!' he said.

Bradley glanced impatiently in the direc tion so indicated, and saw, peeping through a cluster of trees, some two miles off, the spire in question.

He nodded, and ordered the boy to drive on. Then turning to Alma, he saw her eyes twinkling with merry laughter.

'You see we are found out already!' she whispered. 'He thinks we are a runaway couple, and so, after all, we are.'

The carriage rumbled along for another mile, and ever and anon they caught the eyes of the weird boy, peeping backward; but being forewarned, they sat, primly enough, upon their good behaviour.

Suddenly the carriage stopped again.

'Missis!' croaked the weird boy.

'Well?' said Alma, smiling up at him.

'Where be I a-driving to? Back to the "Wheatsheaf"?'

'No; right to the church door,' answered Alma, laughing.

The boy did not reply, but fixing his weather eye on Bradley, indulged in a wink of such preternatural meaning, that Alma was once more convulsed with laughter. Then, after giving vent to a prolonged whistle, he cracked his whip, and urged his horses on.

Through green lanes, sweet with hanging honeysuckle and sprinkled with flowers of early summer; past sleepy ponds, covered with emerald slime and haunted by dragon flies glittering like gold; along upland stretches of broad pasture, commanding distant views of wood-land, thorpe and river; they passed along that sunny summer day; until at last,

creeping along an avenue of ashes and flowering limes, they came to the gate of an old church, where the carriage stopped.

The lovers alighted, and ordering the boy to remain in attendance, approached the church—a time-worn, rain-stained edifice half smothered in ivy, and with rooks cawing from its belfry tower.

They were evidently expected. The clerk, a little old man who walked with a stick, met them at the church door, and informed them that the clergyman was waiting for them in the vestry.

A few minutes later, the two were made man and wife—the solitary spectator of the ceremony, except the officials, being the weird boy, who had stolen from his seat, and left his horses waiting in the road, in order to see what

was going on. The clergyman, ancient and time-worn as his church, mumbled a benediction, and, after subscribing their names in the register and paying the customary fees, they shook hands with him, and came again out into the sunshine.

Whatever the future might bring forth to cloud her marriage path, that bridal morning was like a dream of paradise to Alma Craik. In a private room of the old 'Wheatsheaf,' a room sweet with newly-cut flowers, and overlooking orchards stretching down to the banks of a pretty river, they breakfasted, or lunched, together—on simple fare, it is true, but with all things clean and pure. A summer shower passed over the orchards as they sat by the open window hand in hand; and then, as the sun flashed out again, the trees dript

diamonds, and the long grass glittered with golden dew.

'How sweet and still it is here, my darling! I wish we could stay in such a spot for ever, and never return again to the dreary city and the busy world.'

She crept to his side as he spoke, and rested her head upon his shoulder.

'Are you happy now, dear Ambrose?'

'Quite happy,' he replied.

Presently a buxom serving maid tript in to say that the carriage was waiting: and, descending to the door, they found the vehicle, with Alma's travelling trunk and the clergyman's valise upon the box. The weird boy was still there, jubilant. Somehow or other he had procured a large white rosette, which he had pinned to the breast of his coat. Two or

three sleepy village folk, whom the news of the wedding had partially aroused from their chronic state of torpor, were clustering on the pavement; and the landlord and landlady stood at the door to wish the strange couple God speed.

Away they drove, while one of the slumberous villagers started a feeble cheer. Through the green lanes, along the grassy uplands, they passed back to the railway station, which they reached just in time to catch, as they had planned, the down train to Newhaven.

That afternoon they crossed by the tidal boat to Dieppe, where, in a brand-new hotel facing the sea, they slept that night. They were almost the only visitors, for the summer bathing season had scarcely begun, and they

would have found the place cheerless enough had they been in a less happy mood of mind.

The next day found them wandering about the picturesque old town, visiting the wharves and the old churches, and strolling on the deserted esplanade which faced the sea. They thought themselves unsuspected, but somehow everyone knew their secret—that they were a married couple on their honeymoon. When they returned to the hotel to lunch, they found a bunch of orange-blossoms on the table, placed there by the hands of a sympathetic landlady.

'We must go on farther,' said Bradley, rather irritably. 'I suppose the newly-married alight here often, and being experts in that sort of commodity, they recognise it at a glance.'

So that afternoon they went on to Rouen,

where they arrived as the sun was setting on that town of charming bridges. When their train reached the station, a train arrived almost simultaneously from Paris, and as there was a ten minutes' interval for both upward and downward passengers, the platform was thronged.

Bradley passed through the crowd, with Alma hanging upon his arm. He looked neither to right nor left, but seemed bent on passing out of the station; and he did not notice a dark-eyed lady by whom he was evidently recognised.

On seeing him, she started and drew back among the crowd, leading by the hand a little boy. But when he had passed she looked after him, and more particularly after his beautiful companion.

'It is he, sure enough!' she muttered 'But who is that stylish party in his company? I should very much like to know.'

The lady was 'Mrs. Montmorency,' clad like a widow in complete weeds, and travelling with her little boy, also dressed in funeral black, from Paris to London.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERY.

Bradley and his bride were only absent from London five days; no one missed them, and of course no one suspected that they had gone away in company. Before the next Sunday came round, they were living just as before—she in her own rooms, he in the residence at Regent's Park. This was the arrangement made between them, the clergyman's plea being that it was better to keep their marriage secret for a time, until the New Church was more safely established in public estimation.

Quite happy in the loving secret between them, Alma had acquiesced without a word.

Their only confidant, for the time being, was Miss Combe, who was then staying at Hastings, and to whom Alma wrote in the following terms:

'DEAREST AGATHA,—It is all over, and we are man and wife. No one in the world is to know but *you*, yet awhile. I know you will keep our secret, and rejoice in our happiness.

'It was all decided very hastily. Ambrose thought it better to marry secretly, thinking (foolish man!) that many would misunderstand his motives, and believing that, as an unmarried person, he can better pursue the good work to which we are both devoted. After all, it matters very little. For years we have been one in soul, as you know; and what God long

ago joined man could never have put asunder. Still, it is sweet to know that my hero, my apostle, my Abelard—as I call him, is entirely mine, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse. I am very happy, dear; proud and hopeful, too, as a loving wife can be.

'Write and tell me that you are better. Surely this bright weather should complete your cure, and drive those gloomy thoughts away? In a few days I shall come and see you; perhaps we may come together. So I won't write good bye, but *au revoir!*

'Your loving friend,

'ALMA BRADLEY.

'P.S.—My cousin George is back in town. Just fancy how he would scowl if he were to read the above *signature.*'

It so happened that George Craik,

although he was not so favoured as to read his cousin's signature as a married woman, and although he had no suspicion whatever as yet that she had entered, as she imagined, into the holy estate of matrimony, was scowling in his least amiable frame of mind about the time when Alma wrote the above letter. He had returned to London from Paris a good deal mystified, for, having procured an interview with Mrs. Montmorency, whom (as the reader knows) he had gone over to see, he had elicited nothing from that lady but a flat denial of any knowledge of or connection with his rival the clergyman.

So he came back at once, baffled but not beaten, took to the old club life, attended the different race meetings, and resumed altogether he life of a young gentleman about town.

But although he saw little of his cousin, he (as he himself figuratively expressed it 'kept his eye upon her.' The more he read about Bradley and his doings—which appeared shocking indeed to his unsophisticated mind—the more indignant he felt that Alma, and her fortune, should ever be thrown away on one so unworthy. Meantime he was in the unenviable position of a man surrounded by duns and debts. He had bills out in the hands of the Jews, and he saw no prospect whatever of meeting them. Having far exceeded the very liberal allowance given him by his father, he knew that there was no hope of assistance in that direction. His only chance of social resuscitation was a wealthy marriage, and with his cousin hanging like a tempting bait before him, he felt like a very Tantalus, miserable, indignant and ill-used.

His rooms were in the Albany, and here one morning his father found him, sitting over a late breakfast.

'Well, George,' said the baronet, standing on the hearthrug and glancing round at the highly suggestive prints which adorned the walls; 'well, George, how long is this to last?'

The young man glanced up gloomily as he sipt his coffee.

'What do you mean?' he demanded.

'You know very well. But just look at this letter, which I have received, from a man called Tavistock, this morning.'

And he tossed it over the table to his son. George took it up, looked at it, and flushed crimson. It was a letter informing Sir George Craik that the writer held in his hands a dis-

honoured acceptance of his son's for the sum of three hundred pounds, and that unless it was taken up within a week proceedings in bankruptcy would be instituted.

'D—— the Jew!' cried George. 'I'll wring his neck! He had no right to write to you!'

'I suppose he thought it was the only way,' returned the baronet; 'but he is quite out in his calculations. If you suppose that I shall pay any more of your debts you are mistaken. I am quite tired of it all. You have played all your cards wrong and must take the consequences.'

George scowled more furiously than ever, but made no immediate reply. After a pause, however, he said in an injured way—

'I don't know what you mean by playing

my cards wrong. I have done my best. If my cousin Alma has given me the cold shoulder, because she has gone cranky on religion, it is no fault of mine.'

'I am not astonished that she has thrown you over,' cried Sir George. 'What possible interest could a young girl of her disposition find in a fellow who bets away his last shilling, and covers his room with pictures of horses and portraits of jockeys and ballet girls? If you had had any common sense, you might at least have pretended to take some interest in her pursuits.'

'I'm not a hypocrite,' retorted George, 'and I can't talk atheism.'

'Rubbish! You know as well as I do that Alma is a high-spirited girl, and only wants humouring. These new-fangled ideas

of hers are absurd enough, but irritating opposition will never lead her to get rid of them.'

'She's in love with that fellow Bradley!'

'Nothing of the kind. She is in love with her own wild fancies, which he is wise enough to humour, and you are indiscreet enough to oppose. If there had been anything serious between them, a marriage would have come off long ago; but, absurd as Alma is, she is not mad enough to throw herself away on a mere adventurer like that, without a penny in the world.'

'What is a fellow to do?' pleaded George, dolefully. 'She snubs me more than ever!'

'The more she snubs you the more you ought to pursue her. Show your devotion to her—go to the church—seem to be inte-

rested in her crotchets—and take my word for it, her sympathies will soon turn in your direction.'

Father and son continued to talk for some time in the same strain, and after an hour's conversation Sir George went away in a better humour. George drest himself carefully, and when it was about midday hailed a cab and was driven down to the Gaiety Theatre, where he had an appointment with Miss Dottie Destrange. The occasion was one of those *matinées* when aspiring amateurs attempt to take critical opinion by storm, and the *débutante* this time was a certain Mrs. Temple Grainger, who was to appear as 'Juliet' in the *Hunchback*, and afterwards as 'Juliet' in the famous balcony scene of Shakespeare's play. Mrs. Grainger, whose husband was somewhere

in the mysterious limbo of mysterious husbands, called India, was well known in a certain section of society, and no less a person than His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had promised to be present at her *début.*

George was to join Miss Destrange in the stalls, where he duly found her, and was greeted with a careless smile. The seats all round were thronged with well-known members of society; actresses, actors, critics. The Prince was already in his box, and the curtain was just ringing up.

It is no part of my business to chronicle the success or failure of Mrs. Temple Grainger; but, if cheers and floral offerings signify anything, she was in high favour with her audience. At the end of the second act, George Craik rose and surveyed the house

through his opera glass. As he did so, he was conscious of a figure saluting him from one of the stage boxes, and to his surprise he recognised—Mrs. Montmorency.

She was gorgeously drest in black, and liberally painted and powdered. George bowed to her carelessly; when to his surprise she beckoned him to her.

He rose from his seat and walked over to the side of the stalls immediately underneath her box. She leant over to him, and they shook hands.

'Will you come in?' she said. 'I want to speak to you.'

He nodded, passed round to the back of the box, entered, and took a seat by the lady's side.

'I thought you were still in Paris,' he said.

'I came over about a fortnight ago,' she

replied. 'I suppose you have heard of his lordship's death?'

'Yes. I saw it in the papers.'

'I waited till after the funeral, then I came away. But we won't talk about that; I've hardly got over it yet. I've something else to say to you.'

'Well?'

'Do you remember a question you asked me in Paris—whether I knew anything of a clergyman of the name of Bradley who was paying his addresses to your cousin?'

'Of course I do; and you said——'

'That I only knew him very slightly.'

'Pardon me, but you said you didn't know him at all!'

'Did I? Then I made a slight mistake. I do know the person you mean by sight!'

George Craik looked at the speaker with some astonishment, for he had a good memory, and a very vivid recollection of what she had said to him during their interview.

'I dare say I was *distrait*,' she continued, with a curious smile and a flash of her dark eyes. 'I was in such trouble about poor Ombermere. What I want to tell you is that I saw Mr. Bradley the other day at Rouen, as I was returning from Paris.'

'At Rouen,' repeated George Craik.

'Yes, on the railway platform, in company with a very charming lady, who was hanging on his arm, and regarding him with very evident adoration.'

George pricked up his ears like a little terrier; he smelt mischief of some sort.

'I fancy you must be mistaken,' he said. 'Bradley is not likely to have been travelling across the Channel.'

'I am not at all mistaken,' answered Mrs. Montmorency. 'Mr. Bradley's appearance is peculiar, his face especially, and I am sure it was himself. What I want to find out is, who was his companion?'

'I hardly see what interest that can be to you,' observed George suspiciously, 'since you only know him—by sight!'

'The lady interested me. I was wondering if it could be your charming cousin.'

George started as if he had been shot.

'My Cousin Alma! Impossible! Surely you don't know what you are saying!'

'Oh yes, I do. Tell me, what is your *cousin* like?'

After some slight further urging, George described Alma's personal appearance as closely as possible. Mrs. Montmorency listened quietly, taking note of all the details of the description. Then she tapped George with her fan, and laughed outright.

'Then I was right after all!' she cried. 'It was Miss Alma Craik—that's her name, isn't it?'

'Yes; but, good heavens, it is simply impossible! Alma in company with that scoundrel, over there in France? You must be mistaken!'

But Mrs. Montmorency was quite certain that she had made no mistake in the matter. In her turn she described Alma's appearance so minutely, so cleverly, that her companion became lost in astonished belief. When the

act drop was rung up, he sat staring like one bewitched, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but gazing wildly at Mrs. Montmorency.

Suddenly he rose to go.

'Don't go yet,' whispered the lady.

'I must—I can't stay!' he replied. 'I'll find out from my cousin herself if what you have told me is true.'

'*Après?*'

'*Après!*' echoed the young man, looking livid. 'Why, *après*, I'll have it out with the man!'

Mrs. Montmorency put her gloved hand upon his arm.

'Don't do anything rash, *mon cher*,' she said. 'I think you told me that you loved your cousin, and that you would give a thousand pounds to get her away from your rival?'

'A thousand! twenty thousand! anything!'

'Suppose I could help you?' said Mrs. Montmorency, smiling wickedly.

'Can you? will you? But how!'

'You must give me time to think it over. Find out, in the first place, if what I suspect is true, and then come and tell me all about it!'

George Craik promised, and hurriedly left the theatre, without even waiting to say farewell, or make any apologies, to Miss Destrange. He was determined to call upon his cousin without a moment's delay, and get, if possible, to the bottom of the mystery of her unaccountable appearance, accompanied by Bradley, at the Rouen railway station.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COUSINS.

> Madam, our house's honour is in question!
> I prithee, when you play at wantonness,
> Remember that our blood flows clean and pure,
> In one unbroken and unmuddied line,
> From crystal sources. I'm your champion,
> Madam, against yourself!—*The Will and the Way.*

George Craik was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet when he was moving with set purpose to any object.

As we have already hinted, he possessed a certain bull-dog tenacity, very dangerous to his opponents. And now all the suspicions of a nature naturally suspicious, all the spitefulness of a disposition naturally spiteful, being

fully and unexpectedly aroused, his furious instinct urged him to seek, without a moment's breathing-time, the presence of his refractory cousin.

Coupled with his jealous excitement was a lofty moral indignation.

The family credit was at stake—so at least he assured himself—and he had a perfect right to demand an explanation. Had he reflected a little, he might have known that Alma was the last person in the world to give any explanation whatever if peremptorily demanded, or to admit her cousin's right to demand it; her spirit was stubborn as his own, and her attitude of intellectual superiority was, he should have known by old experience, quite invincible.

Quitting the theatre, he leapt into a

hansom, and was driven direct to Alma's rooms. It was by this time about five in the afternoon, and he made certain of finding his cousin at home.

He was mistaken. Miss Craik was out, and had been out the greater part of the day.

'Do you know where I can find her?' he asked of the domestic, a smart servant maid.

'I don't know, sir,' was the reply. 'She went out in the morning with Mr. Bradley, and has not been home to lunch.'

'Does she dine at home?'

'Yes, sir—at seven.'

'Then I will wait for her.' And so saying he walked into the drawing-room and sat down.

He had cooled a little by this time, and before Alma made her appearance he had time

to cool a good deal more. Fidgetting impatiently in his chair, he began to ask himself how he could best approach the subject on which he had come. He regretted now that he had not called for his father and brought him with him; that, no doubt, would have been the most diplomatic course to adopt. The more he thought over the information he had received, the more he questioned its authenticity; and if, after all, the actress had made a mistake, as he began to suspect and fear, what a fool he would be made to look in his cousin's eyes! The prospect of being made to appear absurd sent a thrill of horror through his blood; for this young person, as has already been seen, dreaded, above all things in the world, the shaft of ridicule.

Time slipped by, and George Craik grew

more and more uneasy. At last seven o'clock struck, and Alma had not appeared.

Growling to himself like an irritable dog, the young man rose and touched the electric bell.

'My cousin is very late,' he said to the servant when she appeared.

'Yes, sir; she is very uncertain.'

'It is seven o'clock. You said she dined at seven.'

'Yes, sir. But sometimes she does not return to dinner, If she is not here at the hour we don't expect her.'

George Craik uttered an angry exclamation.

'Where the deuce can she be?' he cried, scowling ominously.

'I can't say, sir,' returned the servant

smiling. 'Miss Craik is most uncertain, as I told you. She may be dining out—with Mr. Bradley.'

The young man seized his hat, and began striding up and down the room. Then he stopped, and seeing a curious smile still lingering on the servant's face, said sharply:

'What are you laughing at? This is no laughing matter. I tell you I must see my cousin!'

'I'm very sorry, sir, but——'

George moved towards the door.

'I'll go and look for her,' he said. 'If she returns before I find her, tell her I'll come the first thing in the morning.'

And, fuming savagely, he left the house. His temper, never very amiable, was now aroused to the extreme point of irritation, and

the servant's suggestion that Alma might at that very moment be in his rival's company roused in him a certain frenzy. It was scandalous; it was insufferable. If he could not have it out that night with her, he would seek the clergyman, and force him to some sort of an avowal. Bent on that purpose, he hurried away towards Bradley's house.

He passed on foot round Regent's Park, and came to the neighbourhood of the New Church and the adjoining house where Bradley dwelt. It was quite dark now, and the outskirts of the park were quite deserted. As he approached the house he saw the street-door standing open, and heard the sound of voices. He pricked up his ears and drew back into the shadow.

A light silvery laugh rose upon the air,

followed by the low, deep tones of a man's voice. Then the door was closed, and two figures stepped out into the road, crossing to the opposite side, under the shadow of the trees.

They passed across the lamplight on the other side of the way, and he recognised his cousin's figure, arm-in-arm with that of the clergyman. They passed on, laughing and talking merrily together.

Keeping them well at a distance, he quietly followed.

They passed round the park, following the road by which he himself had come. Happy and unsuspicious, they continued to talk as they went; and though he was not near enough to follow their conversation, he heard enough to show him that they were on the tenderest and most loving terms.

More than once he felt inclined to stride forward, confront them, and have it out with his rival; but, his courage failing him, he continued to follow like a spy. At last they reached the quiet street where Alma dwelt, and paused on the doorstep of her house.

He drew back, waited, and listened.

'Will you not come in?' he heard his cousin say.

He could not hear the reply, but it was accompanied by a kiss and an embrace, which made the jealous blood boil and burn along his veins.

'Good-night, dearest!' said Alma.

'Good night, my darling!' answered the deep voice of the clergyman.

Then the two seemed to embrace and kiss

again, and the next moment the house door opened and closed.

George Craik stepped forward, and stood waiting on the pavement for Bradley to pass, right under the light of a street lamp. Almost immediately Bradley came up quietly, and they were face to face.

The clergyman started, and at first George Craik thought that he was recognised; but the next moment Bradley passed by, without any sign of recognition, and before the other could make up his mind what to do, he was out of sight.

George Craik looked at his watch; it was still early, and he determined at once to interview his cousin. He knocked at the door and asked for her; she heard his voice and came out into the lobby, charmingly attired in an

evening dress of the 'crushed strawberry' tint, so much favoured by ladies of æsthetic leaning. Never had she looked more bright and beautiful. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling, and she looked radiantly happy.

'Is it you, George?' she cried. 'What brings you so late? I hope no one is ill. My uncle——'

'O, *he's* all right!' answered George, entering the drawing-room. 'No one is ill, or dead, or that kind of thing; so make your mind easy. Besides, it's only nine o'clock, and you don't call *that* late, do you?'

His manner was peculiar, and she noticed that he hardly looked her in the face. Closing the room door, she stood facing him on the hearthrug, and by his side she looked a queen. The miserable young man was immediately

submerged in the sense of inferiority irksome to him, and he looked at once cowed and savage.

'Well, George, what is it?' continued Alma. 'I suppose it's some new trouble about yourself. Uncle told me the other day you were rather worried about money, and I offered to help you out of it if I could.'

George threw himself on a sofa and leant forward, sucking the end of his cane.

'It isn't that,' he replied. 'If it were, you know I shouldn't come to you.'

'Why not?'

'Because I have no right, Alma; you have never given me any right. I hope you don't think me mean enough to sponge upon you because you happen to be my cousin, and much richer than I am! But I *am* your cousin, after all, and I think I have a right to

protect you, when I see you likely to get into trouble.'

This was quite a magnificent speech for George Craik; for anger and moral indignation had made him eloquent. Alma looked down upon him in all the pleasurable pride of her beauty, half smiling; for to her poor George was always a small boy, whose attempts to lecture her were absurd. Her arms and neck were bare, there were jewels on her neck and heaving bosom, her complexion was dazzlingly clear and bright, and altogether she looked superb. There was a large mirror opposite to her, covering half the side of the room; and within it another Alma, her counterpart, shone dimly in the faint pink light of the lamps, with their rose-coloured shades.

George Craik was obtuse in some respects,

but he did not fail to notice that his cousin was unusually resplendent. She had never been extravagant in her toilette, and he had seldom seen her in such bright colours as on the present occasion. Everything about her betokened an abundant happiness, which she could scarcely conceal.

'What do you mean by getting into trouble?' she inquired carelessly. 'Surely I am old enough to take care of myself.'

'I don't think you are,' he answered. 'At any rate, people are talking about you, and—and I don't like it!'

Alma shrugged her white shoulders.

'Why shouldn't people talk, if it pleases them? But what are they saying?'

The ice was broken, and now was the time for George to take the plunge. He

hesitated seriously for a moment, and then proceeded.

'They are saying scandalous things, and I think you ought to know.'

'About *me*, George?'

'About you and that man Bradley.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Alma, and she laughed quite joyously.

'It's no laughing matter,' cried Craik angrily. 'It's a matter that concerns our family, and our family honour. I tell you they couple your name with his in a way that makes a fellow shudder. That is why I came here to remonstrate with you. I heard this afternoon that you and this man were seen in Normandy together, at a time when everybody supposed you to be here in London.'

Alma started and flushed crimson. Was

her secret discovered? For her own part, she did not much care; indeed, she would have rejoiced greatly to publish her great happiness to all the world; but she respected Bradley's wishes, and was resolute in keeping silence.

The young man rose to his feet, and continued eagerly:

'Let me tell you, Alma, that I don't believe a word of it. I know you are indiscreet, of course; but I am sure you would never compromise yourself or us in any way. But it's all over the place that you were seen together over at Rouen, and I want you to give me the authority to say it's an infernal lie!'

Alma was rather disconcerted. She was at a loss how to reply. But she was so secure in her own sense of happy safety, that she was

more amused than annoyed by her cousin's indignation.

'Suppose it were the truth, George? Where would be the harm?'

'Good God! you don't mean to tell me it *is* true!'

'Perhaps not,' was the quiet reply. 'I don't mean to answer such accusations, one way or the other.'

George Craik went livid.

'But you don't deny it!'

'Certainly not. Let people talk what nonsense they please; it is quite indifferent to me.'

'Indifferent!' echoed George Craik. 'Do you know your character is at stake? Do you know they say that you are this man's mistress?'

Even yet, Alma betrayed less anger and

astonishment than one might have thought possible; for, though the infamous charge shocked her, she was too confident in her own security, in the knowledge of her happy secret, which she could at any moment publish to the world, to be greatly or deeply moved. But if the matter of her cousin's discourse failed to disconcert her, its manner irritated her not a little. She made an eager movement towards the door as if to leave the room; but, wheeling, round suddenly, she raked him from head to foot with a broadside from her scornful eyes.

'And I suppose *you* are quite ready to accept such a calumny!' she cried scornfully.

'Nothing of the sort,' returned George. 'I'm sure you'd never go as far as that!'

She gave a gesture of supreme disdain, and

repeated the sense word for word with contemptuous emphasis.

'You're sure I'd never go as far as that! How good and kind of you to have so much faith in me! Do you know that every syllable you utter to me is an insult and an outrage, and that if Mr. Bradley heard you talk as you have done, he would give you the whipping you so richly deserve!'

Here George Craik's self-control gave way; his face grew black as thunder, and clenching his fist, he gave vent to an angry oath.

'D—— him! I should like to see him try it on. But I see what it is. He has dragged you down to his level at last, the infernal atheist! He thinks nothing sacred, and his New Church, as he calls it, is as foul as himself. O, *I* know! He preaches that marriage isn't a

sacrament at all, but only a contract to be broken by the will of either party; and as you agree with him in everything, I suppose you agree with him in *that*, and are his mistress after all!'

'That is enough!' exclaimed Alma, who was now pale as death. 'Leave this place at once, and never let me see your face again.'

'I won't go till I have spoken my mind; and don't make any mistake; I shall speak it to him as well as to you!'

'If you have any sense left, you will do nothing of the kind.'

'Won't I? Wait and see!' returned George, perfectly beside himself with rage. 'As for you, I wonder you have the courage to look me in the face. I followed you both to-night, and watched you; I saw you embracing and kissing, and it turned me sick with

shame. There, the secret's out! I shall speak to my father, and see what *he* has to say about your goings on.'

As he spoke, Alma approached him and looked him steadily in the face. She was still ghastly pale, and her voice trembled as she spoke, but her entire manner expressed, not fear, but lofty indignation.

'It is like you to play the spy! It is just what I should have expected! Well, I hope you are satisfied. I love Mr. Bradley; I have loved him since the day we first met. Will you go now?'

George Craik seized his hat and stick, and crossed to the door, where he turned.

'I will take care all the world knows of your shameless conduct!' he cried. 'You have brought disgrace upon us all. As for

this man, he shall be exposed; he shall, by—! He is a scoundrel not fit to live!'

Without replying, Alma pointed to the door; and, after one last look of concentrated rage, George Craik rushed from the house. She heard the outer door close behind him, but still stood like marble, holding her hand upon her heart. Then, with a low cry, she sank shuddering into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

The scene which we have described had tortured her delicate spirit more than she at first knew; and her cousin's bitter taunts and reproaches, though they missed their mark at first, had struck home in the end. She was a woman of infinite sensitiveness, exceeding sweetness of disposition; and she could not bear harsh words, even from one she cordially

despised. Above all, she shrank, like all good women, even the most intellectual, before the evil judgment of the world. Could it be true, as George Craik had said, that people were connecting her name infamously with that of Bradley? If so, then surely it was time to let all the world know her happiness.

She drew forth from her bosom a photographic miniature of Bradley, set in a golden locket. For a long time she looked at it intently, through a mist of loving tears. Then she kissed it fondly.

'He loves me!' she murmured to herself. 'I will tell him what they are saying, and then he will know that it is time to throw away all disguise. Ah! how proud I shall be when I can stand by his side, holding his hand, and say "This is my husband!"'

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE VESTRY.

The Nemesis of Greece wore—nothing,
A naked goddess without clothing,
Quite statue-like in form and feature;
Ours, Adam, is a different creature:
She wears neat boots of patent leather,
A hat of plush with ostrich feather,
Her lips are painted, and beneath
You see the gleam of ivory teeth.
She, though the virtuous cut her daily,
Drinks her champagne, and warbles gaily;
But at the fatal hour she faces
Her victim, folds him in embraces,
With dainty teeth in lieu of knife
Bites through the crimson thread of life!

Mayfair: a Medley.

THE next day was Sunday, and one of those golden days when all things seem to keep the happy Sabbath. The chestnuts in the great

avenue of Regent's Park were in full bloom, and happy throngs were wandering in their shade. On the open green spaces pale children of the great city were playing in the sunlight, and filling the air with their cries.

There was a large attendance at the temple of the New Church that morning. It had been whispered about that the Prime Minister was coming to hear the new preacher for the first time; and sure enough he came, sitting, the observed of all observers, with his grave keen eyes on the preacher, and holding his hand to his ear to catch each syllable. Sprinkled among the ordinary congregation were well-known politicians, authors, artists, actors, journalists.

Bradley's text that day was a significant and, as it ultimately turned out, an ominous

one. It was this—'What God has joined, let no man put asunder.'

Not every day did the preacher take his text from the Christian Bible; frequently enough, he chose a passage from the Greek tragedians, or from Shakespeare, or from Wordsworth; on the previous Sunday, indeed, he had scandalised many people by opening with a quotation from the eccentric American, Walt Whitman—of whose rhapsodies he was an ardent admirer.

As he entered the pulpit, he glanced down and met the earnest gaze of the Prime Minister. Curiously enough, he had that very morning, when revising his sermon, been reading the great statesman's 'Ecclesiastical Essays,' and more particularly the famous essay on 'Divorce;'—wherein it is shown by numberless

illustrations, chiefly from the Christian fathers, that marriage is a permanent sacrament between man and woman, not under any circumstances to be broken, and that men like Milton, who have pleaded so eloquently for the privilege of divorce, are hopelessly committed to Antichrist. Now, as the reader doubtless guesses, Bradley ranged himself on the side of the blind Puritan, and endeavoured to show that marriage, although indeed a sacrament, was one which could be performed more than once in a life-time. He argued the matter on theological, on moral, and as far as he could on physiological, grounds ; and he illustrated his argument by glancing at the lives of Milton himself and even of Shelley. As his theme became more and more delicate, and his treatment of it more fearless, he saw the face of the great

politician kindle almost angrily. For a moment, indeed, the Prime Minister seemed about to spring to his feet and begin an impassioned reply, but suddenly remembering that he was in a church, and not in the House of Commons, he relapsed into his seat and listened with a gloomy smile.

It was a curious sermon, and very characteristic of both the place and the man. People looked at one another, and wondered whether they were in a church at all. Two elderly unmarried ladies, who had come out of curiosity, got up indignantly and walked out of the building.

Bradley paused and followed them with his eyes until they had disappeared. Then suddenly, as he glanced round the congregation and resumed his discourse, he looked full into

the eyes of the goddess Nemesis, who was regarding him quietly from a seat in the centre of the church.

Nemesis in widow's weeds, exquisitely cut by a Parisian *modiste*, and with a charming black bonnet set upon her classic head. Nemesis with bold black eyes, jet black hair, and a smiling mouth. In other words, Mrs. Montmorency, seated by the side of George Craik and his father the baronet.

The preacher started as if stabbed, and for a moment lost the thread of his discourse; but controlling himself with a mighty effort, he proceeded. For a few minutes his thoughts wandered, and his words were vague and incoherent; but presently his brain cleared, and his voice rose like loud thunder, as he pictured to his hearers those shameless women,

from Delilah downwards, who have betrayed men, wasted their substance, and dragged them down to disgrace and death. Were unions with such women, then, eternal? Was a man to be tied in this world, perhaps in another too, to foulness and uncleanness, to a hearth where there was no sympathy, to a home where there was no love? In words of veritable fire, he pictured what some women were, their impurity, their treachery, their mental and moral degradation; and, as a contrast, he drew a glorious picture of what true conjugal love should be—the one fair thing which sanctifies the common uses of the world, and turns its sordid paths into the flower-strewn ways that lead to heaven.

Alma, who was there, seated close under the pulpit, listened in a very rapture of sympa-

thetic idolatry; while Mrs. Montmorency heard both denunciation and peroration with unmoved complacency, though her lips were soon wreathed in a venomous and dangerous smile.

The sermon ended, a prayer was said and a hymn sung; then Bradley walked with a firm tread from the pulpit and entered the vestry. Once there his self-possession left him, and, trembling like a leaf from head to foot, he sank upon a seat.

His sin had come home to him indeed, at last. At the very moment when he was touching on that fatal theme, and justifying himself to his own conscience, Nemesis had arisen, horrible, shameless, and forbidding; had entered the very temple of his shallow creed, smiling and looking into his eyes; had come

to remind him that, justify himself as he might, he could never escape the consequence of his rash contempt of the divine sanction.

He had scarcely realised the whole danger of his situation, when he heard a light foot-tread close to him, and, looking up with haggard face, saw Alma approaching. She had used her customary privilege, and entered at the outer door, which stood open.

'Ambrose!' she cried, seeing his distress, 'what is the matter?'

He could not reply, but turned his head away in agony. She came close, and put her arms tenderly around him.

'I was afraid you were ill, dear—you went so pale as you were preaching.'

'No, I am not ill,' he managed to reply.

'I felt a little faint, that was all. I think I need rest; I have been overworking.'

'You must take a holiday,' she answered fondly. 'You must go right away into the country, far from here; and I—I shall go with you, shall I not?'

He drew her to him, and looked long and lovingly into her face, till the sense of her infinite tenderness and devotion overcame him, and he almost wept.

'If I could only go away for ever!' he cried. 'If I could put the world behind me, and see no face but yours, my darling, till my last hour came, and I died in your faithful arms. Here in London, my life seems a mockery, a daily weariness, an air too close and black to breathe in freedom. I hate it, Alma! I hate everything in the world but *you!*'

Alma smiled, and, smoothing back his hair with her white hand, kissed his forehead.

'My Abelard must not talk like that! Every day you continue to fulfil your ministry, your fame and influence grow greater. How eloquent you were to-day! I heard the Prime Minister say that you were the most wonderful preacher he had ever heard, and that though he disagreed with your opinions ——'

'Do not speak of it!' he cried, interrupting her eagerly. 'I care for no one's praise but yours. Oh! Alma what would it all be to me, if I were to lose your love, your good esteem!'

And he held her to him passionately, as if fearing some violent hand might snatch her away. At that moment he heard the sound of a door opening, and looking up saw,

standing on the threshold of the vestry, Mrs. Montmorency.

He started up wildly, while Alma, turning quickly, saw the cause of his alarm.

'I beg your pardon,' said the newcomer with a curious smile. 'I knocked at the door, but you did not hear me; so I took the liberty to enter.'

As she spoke, she advanced into the room, and stood complacently looking at the pair. The sickly smell of her favourite scent filled the air, and clung about her like incense around some Cytherean altar.

'Do you—do you—wish to speak to me?' murmured Bradley with a shudder.

'Yes, if you please,' was the quiet reply. 'I wish to ask your advice as a clergyman, in a matter which concerns me very closely. It is

a private matter, but, if you *wish* it, this lady may remain until I have finished.'

And she smiled significantly, fixing her black eyes on the clergyman's face.

'Can you not come some other time?' he asked nervously. 'To-day I am very busy, and not very well.'

'I shall not detain you many minutes,' was the reply.

Bradley turned in despair to Alma, who was looking on in no little surprise.

'Will you leave us? I will see you later on in the day.'

Alma nodded, and then looked again at the intruder, surveying her from head to foot with instinctive dislike and dread. She belonged to a type with which Alma was little familiar. Her eyebrows were blackened, her lips

painted, and her whole style of dress was *prononcé* and extraordinary.

The eyes of the two women met. Then Alma left the vestry, unconsciously shrinking away from the stranger as she passed her by.

Bradley followed her to the door, closed it quietly, and turning, faced his tormentor.

'What brings you here?' he demanded sternly. 'What do you want with me?'

'I'm not quite sure,' replied Mrs. Montmorency, shrugging her shoulders. 'Before I try to tell you, let me apologise for interrupting your *tête-à-tête* with that charming lady.'

'Do not speak of her! She is too good and pure even to be mentioned by such as you.'

Mrs. Montmorency's eyes flashed viciously, and she showed her teeth, as animals, wild or only half tame, do when they are dangerous.

'You are very polite,' she returned. 'As to her goodness and her purity, you know more about them than I do. She seems fond of you, at any rate; even fonder than when I saw you travelling together the other day, over in France.'

This was a home-thrust, and Bradley at once showed that he was disconcerted.

'In France! travelling together!' he repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'What I saw. You don't mean to deny that I saw you in Normandy some weeks ago, in company with Miss Craik?'

He took an angry turn across the room,

and then, wheeling suddenly, faced her again.

'I mean to deny nothing,' he cried with unexpected passion. 'I wish to have no communication whatever with you, by word or deed. I wish never to see your face again. As to Miss Craik, I tell you again that I will not discuss her with you, that I hold her name too sacred for you even to name. What has brought you back, to shadow my life with your infamous presence? Our paths divided long ago; they should never have crossed again in this world. Live your life; I mean to live mine; and now leave this sacred place, which you profane.'

But though her first impulse was to shrink before him, she remembered her position, and stood her ground.

'If I go, I shall go straight to her, and tell her that I am your wife.'

'It is a falsehood—you are no wife of mine.'

'Pardon me,' she answered with a sneer, 'I can show her my marriage lines.'

As she spoke, he advanced upon her threateningly, with clenched hands.

'Do so, and I will kill you. Yes, kill you! And it would be just. You have been my curse and bane; you are no more fit to live than a reptile or a venomous snake, and before God I would take your wicked life.'

His passion was so terrible, so overmastering, that she shrank before it, and cowered. He seized her by the wrist, and continued in the same tone of menace:

'From the first, you were infamous. In

an evil hour we met; I tried to lift you from the mud, but you were too base. I thought you were dead. I thought that you might have died penitent, and I forgave you. Then, after long years, you rose again, like a ghost from the grave. The shock of your resurrection nearly killed me, but I survived. Then, I remembered your promise—never willingly to molest me; and hearing you had left England, I breathed again. And now you have returned!—Woman, take care! As surely as we are now standing in the Temple of God, so surely will I free myself from you for ever, if you torment me any more.'

He was mad, and scarcely knew what he was saying. Never before in his whole life had he been so carried away by passion. But the woman with whom he had to deal was no

coward, and his taunts awoke all the angry resentment in her heart. She tore herself free from his hold, and moved towards the vestry door.

'You are a brave man,' she said, 'to threaten a woman! But the law will protect me from you, and I shall claim my rights!'

Pale as death, he blocked her passage.

'Let me pass!' she cried.

'Not yet. Before you go, you shall tell me what you mean to do!'

'Never mind,' she answered, setting her lips together.

'I *will* know. Do you mean to proclaim my infamy to the world?'

'I mean,' she replied, 'to prevent you from passing yourself off as a free man, when you are bound to *me*. Our marriage has never

been dissolved; you can never marry another woman, till you are divorced from me.'

He threw his arms up into the air, and uttered a sharp despairing cry:

'O God, my God!'

Then, changing his tone to one of wild entreaty, he proceeded:

'Woman, have pity! I will do anything that you wish, if you will only keep our secret. It is not for my own sake that I ask this, but for the sake of one who is innocent, and who loves me. I have never injured you; I tried to do my duty by you; our union has been annulled over and over again by your infidelities. Have pity, for God's sake, have pity!'

She saw that he was at her mercy, and, woman-like, proceeded to encroach.

'Why did you preach at me from the pulpit?' she demanded. 'I am not a saint, but I am as good as most women. They say that, though you are a clergyman, you don't even believe in God at all. Everyone is saying you are an atheist, and this church of yours, which you call sacred, is a wicked place. Yet you set yourself up as my superior. Why should you? I am as good as you; perhaps better. You pass yourself off as a free man, because you are running after a rich woman; and you have taken money from her, everyone knows that. I think she ought to know the truth concerning you, to know that she can never be anything more than your mistress—never your wife. You say I am infamous. I think *you* are more infamous, to deceive a lady you pretend to love.'

She paused, and looked at him. He stood trembling like a leaf, white as death. Every word that she uttered went like a knife into his heart.

'You are right,' he murmured. 'I should not have reproached you; for I have behaved like a villain. I should have told Miss Craik the whole truth.'

'Just so; but you have left that disagreeable task to me!'

'You will not tell her! No, no! It will break her heart.'

Mrs. Montmorency shrugged her shoulders.

'Promise me at least one thing,' he cried. 'Give me time to think how to act. Keep our secret until I see you again.'

And as he spoke, he stretched out his arms imploringly, touching her with his trembling

hands. After a moment's hesitation, she replied:

'I think I can promise that!'

'You do? you will?'

'Well, yes; only let me warn you to treat me civilly. I won't be insulted, or preached at; remember that.'

So saying, she left the vestry, leaving the miserable clergyman plunged in desolation, and more dead than alive.

CHAPTER XVII.

COUNTERPLOT.

Master L. Good morrow, Mistress Light-o'-Love.

Mistress L. Good morrow, Master Lackland. What's the news?

Master L. News enow, I warrant. One Greatheart hath stolen my sweetling away to a green nook i' the forest, where an old hermit hath made them one. Canst thou give me a philtre to poison the well wherein they drink—or a charm to steal upon them while they sleep i' the bower, and slay them? Do so, good dame, and by Hecate's crows I will make thee rich, when I come unto mine own.—*The Game at Chess: a Comedy.*

Mrs. Montmorency passed out into the sunshine, and speedily found herself on the quiet carriage-way which encircles Regent's Park. Living not far away, she had come without her victoria, in which she generally took the air; and as she strolled along, her dress and

general style were sufficiently peculiar to attract considerable attention among the passers-by. For her dress, as usual, was resplendent.

> She carried on her back and round her neck
> A poor man's revenue.

Amorous shop-walkers, emancipated for the day, stared impudently into her face, and wheeled round on their heels to look at her. Shop-girls in their Sunday finery giggled as they passed her. Quite unconscious of and indifferent to the attention she attracted, she walked lightly on, holding up a black parasol lavishly ornamented with valuable lace.

As she walked, she reflected. In reality, she was rather sorry for Bradley than otherwise, though she still resented the indignant and scornful terms in which he had described her

class to his congregation. But she was not malicious for the mere sake of malice; and she was altogether too indifferent to Bradley personally to feel the slightest interest in his affairs. She knew she had used him ill, that he and she were altogether unfit persons ever to have come together, and no persuasion whatever would have made her resume her old position in relation to him. Thus, unless she could gain something substantial by molesting him and reminding society of her existence, she was quite content to let him alone.

As she reached the south side of the park, she heard a footstep behind her, and the next moment George Craik joined her, out of breath.

'Well?' he said questioningly.

'Well!' she repeated, smiling.

'Did you see him?'

'Yes. I found him in the vestry of his church, and reminded him that we had met before.'

'Just so,' said the young man; 'but now I want you to tell me, as you promised to do, exactly what you know about him. I've put this and that together, and I suppose there used to be something between you. Is it anything which gives you a hold upon the scoundrel *now?*'

'Perhaps,' she replied quietly. 'However, I've made up my mind not to tell you anything more at present.'

'But you promised,' said the young man, scowling.

'I dare say I did, but ladies' promises are seldom kept, *mon cher*. Besides, what do you

want me to tell, and, above all, what am I to get by siding with you against him?'

'If you can do or say anything to convince my cousin he is a rascal,' said George eagerly, 'if you can make her break off her friendship with him, my father would pay you any amount of money.'

'I'm not hard up, or likely to be. Money is of no consequence. Really, I think this is no affair of mine.'

'But what's the mystery?' demanded the other. 'I mean to find out, whether you tell me or not; and I have my suspicions, mind you! Dottie Destrange tells me that you were once *married*. Is that true? and is this the man? I'd give a thousand pounds to hear you answer, "yes."'

Mrs. Montmorency smiled, and then laughed aloud, while George Craik continued:

'Even if you could show that you and Bradley once lived together, I think it would serve the purpose. I know my cousin's temper. She thinks the fellow a saint, but if he were once degraded in her opinion, she would throw him over like a shot.'

'And take you in his place, you think?'

'Perhaps; I don't know.'

'What a fool you must think me!' said Mrs. Montmorency, sarcastically. 'I am to rake up all my past life, make myself the common talk of the world, all to oblige *you*. Can't do it, *mon cher*. It wouldn't be fair, either to myself or to the man.'

At that moment a hansom passed, and she beckoned to the driver with her parasol.

'*Au revoir*,' she cried, stepping into the vehicle. 'Come and see me in a few days, and I shall have had time to think it over.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SOLAR BIOLOGIST.

What's this? Heyday! Magic! Witchcraft!
Passing common hedge and ditch-craft!
You whose soul no magic troubles,
Crawling low among the stubbles,
Thing compact of clay, a body
Meant to perish,—think it odd, eh?
Raise your eyes, poor clod, and try to
See the tree-tops, and the sky too!
There's the sun with pulses splendid
Whirling onward, star attended!
Child of light am I, the wizard,
Fiery-form'd from brain to gizzard,
While for *you*, my sun-craft spurning,
Dust thou art, to dust returning!

Joke and Hysteria: a Medley.[1]

LIKE most men famously or infamously familiar in the mouths of the public, the Rev. Ambrose

[1] NOTE.—A joke, and a very poor one, which an honoured and great master must forgive, since the joker himself has laboured more than most living men to spread the fame of the master and to do him honour.—R. B.

Bradley was a good deal troubled with busybodies, who sometimes communicated with him through the medium of the penny post, and less frequently forced themselves upon his privacy in person. The majority demanded his autograph; many sought his advice on matters of a private and spiritual nature; a few requested his immediate attention to questions in the nature of conundrums on literature, art, sociology, and the musical glasses. He took a good deal of this pestering good-humouredly, regarding it as the natural homage to public success, or notoriety; but sometimes he lost his temper, when some more than common impertinence aroused his indignation.

Now, it so happened that on the very evening of his painful interview with Mrs.

Montmorency, he received a personal visit from one of the class to which we are alluding; and as the visit in question, though trivial enough in itself, was destined to lead to important consequences, we take leave to place it upon special record. He was seated alone in his study, darkly brooding over his own dangerous position, and miserably reviewing the experiences of his past life, when the housemaid brought in a card, on which were inscribed, or rather printed, these words:—

Professor Salem Mapleleafe,

Solar Biologist.

'What is this?' cried Bradley irritably. 'I can see nobody.'

As he spoke a voice outside the study door answered him, in a high-pitched American accent—

'I beg your pardon. I shan't detain you two minutes. I am Professor Maple-leafe, representing the Incorporated Society of Spiritual Brethren, New York.'

Simultaneously there appeared in the doorway a little, spare man with a very large head, a gnome-like forehead, and large blue eyes full of troubled 'wistfulness' so often to be found in the faces of educated Americans. Before the clergyman could utter any further remonstrance this person was in the room, holding out his hand, which was small and thin, like that of a woman.

'My dear sir, permit me to shake you by the hand. In all America, and I may add in all England, there is no warmer admirer than myself of the noble campaign you are leading against superstition. I have lines of introduc

tion to you from our common friends and fellow-workers, Ellerton and Knowlesworth.'

And he mentioned the names of two of the leading transcendental thinkers of America, one an eccentric philosopher, the other a meditative poet, with whom Bradley had frequently corresponded.

There was really no other way out of the dilemma short of actual rudeness and incivility, than to take the letters, which the little Professor eagerly handed over. The first was brief and very characteristic of the writer, meaning as follows :—

'See Mapleleafe. He talks nonsense, but he is a man of ideas. I like him. His sister, who accompanies him, is a sibyl.'

The other was less abrupt and unusual, though nearly as brief.

'Let me introduce to your notice Professor Mapleleafe, who is on a visit to Europe with his charming sister. You may have heard of both in connection with the recent developments in American spiritualism. The Professor is a man of singular experience, and Miss Mapleleafe is an accredited clairvoyante. Such civility as you can show them will be fully appreciated in our circle here.'

Bradley glanced up, and took a further survey of the stranger. On closer scrutiny he perceived that the Professor's gnome-like head and wistful eyes were associated with a somewhat mean and ignoble type of features, an insignificant turn-up nose, and a receding chin; that his hair, where it had not thinned away, was pale straw-coloured, and that his eyebrows and eyelashes were almost white.

His small, shrunken figure was clad in shabby black.

To complete the oddity of his appearance, he carried an eye-glass, dangling from his neck by a piece of black elastic; and as Bradley eyed him from head to foot, he fixed the glass into his right eye, thereby imparting to his curious physiognomy an appearance of jaunty audacity not at all in keeping with his general appearance.

'You come at a rather awkward time,' said Bradley. 'I seldom or never receive visits on Sunday evening, and to-night especially——'

He paused and coughed uneasily, looking very ill at ease.

'I understand, I quite understand,' returned the Professor, gazing up at him in real or assumed admiration. 'You devote your

seventh-day evening to retirement and to meditation. Well, sir, I'm real grieved to disturb you; but sister and I heard you preach this morning, and I may at once tell you that for a good square sermon and elocution fit for the Senate, we never heard anyone to match you, though we've heard a few. After hearing you orate, I couldn't rest till I presented my lines of introduction, and that's a fact. Sister would have come to you, but a friendly spirit from the planet Mars dropt in just as she was fixing herself, and she *had* to stay.'

Bradley looked in surprise at the speaker, beginning to fancy that he was conversing with a lunatic; but the Professor's manner was quite commonplace and matter-of-fact.

'Have you been long in Europe?' he asked, hardly knowing what to say.

'Two months, sir. We have just come from Paris, where we were uncommon well entertained by the American circle. You are aware, of course, that my sister has transcendental gifts?'

'That she is clairvoyante? So Knowlesworth says in his letter. I may tell you at once that I am a total disbeliever in such matters. I believe spiritualism, even clairvoyance, to be mere imposture.'

'Indeed, sir?' said the Professor, without the slightest sign of astonishment or irritation. 'You don't believe in solar biology?'

'I don't even know what that means,' answered Bradley with a smile.

'May I explain, sir? Solar biology is the science which demonstrates our connection with radiant existences of the central luminary

of this universe; our dependence and interdependence as spiritual beings on the ebb and flow of consciousness from that shining centre; our life hitherto, now, and hereafter, as solar elements. We are sunbeams, sir, materialised; thought is psychic sunlight. On the basis of that great principle is established the reality of our correspondence with spiritual substances, alien to us, existing in the other solar worlds.'

Bradley shrugged his shoulders. His mood of mind at that moment was the very reverse of conciliatory towards any form of transcendentalism, and this seemed arrant nonsense.

'Let me tell you frankly,' he said, 'that in all such matters as these I am a pure materialist.'

'Exactly,' cried the Professor. 'So are we, sir.'

'Materialists?'

'Why, certainly. Spiritualism *is* materialism; in other words, everything is spirit matter. All bodies, as the great Swedenborg demonstrated long ago, are spirit; thought is spirit—that is to say, sir, sunlight. The same great principle of which I have spoken is the destruction of all religion save the religion of solar science. It demolishes Theism, which has been the will-o'-the-wisp of the world, abolishes Christianity, which has been its bane. The God of the universe is solar Force, which is universal and pantheistic.'

'Pray sit down,' said Bradley, now for the first time becoming interested. 'If I understand you, there is no personal God?'

'Of course not,' returned the little man, sidling into a chair and dropping his eyeglass. 'A personal God is, as the scientists call it, merely an anthropomorphic Boom. As the great cosmic Bard of solar biology expresses it in his sublime epic :

> The radiant flux and reflux, the serene
> Atomic ebb and flow of force divine,
> This, this alone, is God, the Demiurgus;
> By this alone we are, and still shall be.
> O joy! the Phantom of the Uncondition'd
> Fades into nothingness before the breath
> Of that eternal ever-effluent Life
> Whose centre is the shining solar Heart
> Of countless throbbing pulses, each a world!

The quotation was delivered with extraordinary rapidity, and in the off hand matter-of-fact manner characteristic of the speaker. Then, after pausing a moment, and fixing his glass again, the Professor demanded eagerly :

'What do you think of that, sir?'

'I think,' answered Bradley, laughing contemptuously, 'that it is very poor science, and still poorer poetry.'

'You think so, really?' cried the Professor, not in the least disconcerted. 'I think I could convince you by a few ordinary manifestations, that it's at any rate common sense.'

It was now quite clear to Bradley that the man was a charlatan, and he was in no mood to listen to spiritualistic jargon. What both amused and puzzled him was that two such men as his American correspondents should have franked the Professor to decent society by letters of introduction. He reflected, however, that from time immemorial men of genius, eager for glimpses of a better life and a serener state of things, had been led 'by the nose,' like Faust, by charlatans. Now, Bradley, though

an amiable man, had a very ominous frown when he was displeased; and just now his brow came down, and his eyes looked out of positive caverns, as he said:

'I have already told you what I think of spiritualism and spiritualistic manifestations. I believe my opinion is that of all educated men.'

'Spiritualism, as commonly understood, is one thing, sir,' returned the Professor quietly; 'spiritualistic materialism, or solar science, is another. Our creed, sir, like your own, is the destruction of supernaturalism. If you will permit me once more to quote our sublime Bard, he sings as follows:—

> All things abide in Nature; Form and Soul,
> Matter and Thought, Function, Desire, and Dream,
> Evolve within her ever-heaving breast;
> Within her, we subsist; beyond and o'er her
> Is naught but Chaos and primæval Night.

> The Shadow of that Night for centuries
> Projected Man's phantasmic Deity,
> Formless, fantastic, hideous, and unreal;
> God is Existence, and as parts of God
> Men ebb and flow, for evermore divine.

'If you abolish supernaturalism,' asked the clergyman impatiently, 'what do you mean by manifestations?'

'Just this,' returned the little man glibly, 'the interchange of communications between beings of this sphere and beings otherwise conditioned. This world is one of many, all of which have a two-fold existence—in the sphere of matter, and in the sphere of ideas. Death, which vulgar materialists consider the end of consciousness, is merely one of the many phenomena of change; and spiritualistic realities being indestructible——'

Bradley rose impatiently.

'I am afraid,' he exclaimed, 'that I cannot

discuss the matter any longer. Our opinions on the subject are hopelessly antagonistic, and to speak frankly, I have an invincible repugnance to the subject itself.'

'Shared, I am sorry to say, by many of your English men of science.'

'Shared, I am glad to say, by most thinking men.'

'Well, well, sir, I won't detain you at present,' returned the Professor, not in the least ruffled. 'Perhaps you will permit me to call upon you at a more suitable time, and to introduce my sister?'

'Really, I——' began Bradley with some embarrassment.

'Eustasia Mapleleafe is a most remarkable woman, sir. She is a medium of the first degree; she possesses the power of prophecy,

of clairvoyance, and of thought-reading. The book of the Soul is open to her, and you would wonder at her remarkable divinations.'

'I must still plead my entire scepticism,' said Bradley coldly.

'I guess Eustasia Mapleleafe would convert you. She was one of your congregation to-day, and between ourselves is greatly concerned on your account.'

'Concerned on my account!' echoed the clergyman.

'Yes, sir. She believes you to be under the sway of malign influences, possibly lunar or stellar. She perceived a dark spectrum on the radiant orb of your mind, troubling the solar effluence which all cerebral matter emits, and which is more particularly emitted by the phosphorescent cells of the human brain.'

Bradley would by this time have considered that he was talking to a raving madman, had not the Professor been self-contained and matter-of-fact. As it was, he could hardly conceive him to be quite sane. At any other time, perhaps, he might have listened with patience and even amusement to the fluent little American ; but that day, as the reader is aware, his spirit was far too pre-occupied.

His face darkened unpleasantly as the Professor touched on his state of mind during the sermon, and he glanced almost angrily towards the door.

'May I bring my sister?' persisted the Professor. 'Or stay—with your leave, sir, I'll write our address upon that card, and perhaps you will favour her with a call.'

As he spoke, he took up his own card

from the table, and wrote upon it with a pencil.

'That's it, sir—care of Mrs. Piozzi Baker, 17 Monmouth Crescent, Bayswater.'

So saying, he held out his hand, which Bradley took mechanically, and then, with a polite bow, passed from the room and out of the house.

Bradley resumed his seat, and the meditations which his pertinacious visitor had interrupted; but the interruption, irritating as it was, had done him good. Absurd as the Professor's talk had been, it was suggestive of that kind of speculation which has invariably a fascination for imaginative men, and from time to time, amidst his gloomy musings over his own condition, amidst his despair, his dread, and his self-reproach, the clergyman found

himself reminded of the odd propositions of the so-called biologist.

After all, there was something in the little man's creed, absurd as it was, which brought a thinker face to face with the great phenomena of life and being. How wretched and ignoble seemed his position, in face of the eternal Problem, which even spiritualism was an attempt to solve! He was afraid now to look in the mirror of Nature, lest he should behold only his own lineament, distorted by miserable fears. He felt, for the time being, infamous. A degrading falsehood, like an iron ring, held him chained and bound.

Even the strange charlatan had discovered the secret of his misery. He would soon be a laughing-stock to all the world; he, who had aspired to be the world's teacher and prophet,

who would have flown like an eagle into the very central radiance of the sun of Truth!

He rose impatiently, and paced up and down the room. As he did so, his eye fell upon something white, lying at the feet of the chair where his visitor had been sitting.

He stooped and picked it up. He found it to be a large envelope, open, and containing two photographs. Hardly knowing what he did, he took out the pictures, and examined them.

The first rather puzzled him, though he soon realised its character. It represented the little Professor, seated in an armchair, reading a book open upon his knee; behind him was a shadowy something in white floating drapery, which, on close scrutiny, disclosed the outline of a human face and form, white and vague

like the filmy likeness seen in a smouldering fire. Beneath this picture was written in a small clear hand,—'Professor Maplelcafe and Azaleus, a Spirit of the Third Magnitude, from the Evening Star.'

It was simply a curious specimen of what is known as 'Spirit-Photography.' The clergyman returned it to its envelope with a smile of contempt.

The second photograph was different; it was the likeness of a woman, clad in white muslin, and reclining upon a sofa.

The figure was *petite*, almost fairy-like in its fragility; the hair, which fell in masses over the naked shoulders, very fair; the face, elfin-like, but exceedingly pretty; the eyes, which looked right out from the picture into those of the spectator, were wonderfully large, lustrous

and wild. So luminous and searching were these eyes, so rapt and eager the pale face, that Bradley was startled, as if he were looking into the countenance of a living person.

Beneath this picture were written the words—'Eustasia Mapleleafe.'

The clergyman looked at this picture again and again, with a curious fascination. As he did so, holding it close to the lamplight, a peculiar thrill ran through his frame, and his hand tingled as if it touched the warm hand of some living being. At last, with an effort, he returned it also to the envelope, which he threw carelessly upon his desk.

It was quite clear that the Professor had dropt the pictures, and Bradley determined to send them by that night's post. So he sat down, and addressed the envelope according to

the address on the card; but before sealing it up, he took out the photographs and inspected them again.

A new surprise awaited him.

The photograph of the Professor and his ghostly familiar remained as it had been; but the photograph of the woman, or girl, was mysteriously changed—that is to say, it had become so faint and vague as to be almost unrecognisable. The dress and figure were dim as a wreath of vapour, the face was blank and featureless, the eyes were faded and indistinct.

The entire effect was that of some ghostly presence, fading slowly away before the vision.

Bradley was amazed, in spite of himself, and his whole frame shook with agitation.

He held the sun-picture again to the lamp-light, inspecting it closely, and every instant it seemed to grow fainter and fainter, till nothing remained on the paper but a formless outline, like the spirit-presence permanent on the other photograph.

By instinct a superstitious or rather a nervous man, Bradley now felt as if he were under the influence of some extraordinary spell. Already unstrung by the events of the day, he trembled from head to foot. At last, with an effort, he conquered his agitation, sealed up the photographs, and rang for the servant to put the letter in the post.

Although he suspected some trick, he was greatly troubled and perplexed; nor would his trouble and perplexity have been much lessened, if at all, had he been acquainted with

the truth—that the little Professor had left the photographs in the room not by accident, but intentionally, and for a purpose which will be better understood at a later period of the present story.

CHAPTER XIX.

EUSTASIA MAPLELEAFE.

O eyes of pale forget-me-not blue,
Wash'd more pale by a dreamy dew!
O red red lips, O dainty tresses,
O heart the breath of the world distresses!
O little lady, do they divine
That they have *fathomed* thee and thine?
Fools! let them fathom fire, and beat
Light in a mortar; ay, and heat
Soul in a crucible! Let them try
To conquer the light, and the wind, and the sky!
Darkly the secret faces lurk,
We know them least where most they work;
And here they meet to mix in thee,
For a strange and mystic entity,
Making of thy pale soul, in truth,
A life half trickery and half truth!

Ballads of St. Abe.

Monmouth Crescent, Bayswater, is one of those forlorn yet thickly populated streets

which lie under the immediate dominion of the great Whiteley, of Westbourne Grove. The houses are adapted to limited means and large families; and in front of them is an arid piece of railed-in ground, where crude vegetable substances crawl up in the likeness of trees and grass. The crescent is chiefly inhabited by lodging-house and boarding-house keepers, City clerks, and widows who advertise for persons 'to share the comforts of a cheerful home,' with late dinners and carpet balls in the evening. It is shabby-genteel, impecunious, and generally depressing.

To one of the dingiest houses in this dingy crescent, Professor Mapleleafe, after his interview with our hero, cheerfully made his way.

He took the 'bus which runs along Maryle-

bone Road to the Royal Oak, and thence made his way on foot to the house door. In answer to his knock the door was opened by a tall red-haired matron wearing a kitchen apron over her black stuff dress. Her complexion was sandy and very pale, her eyes were bold and almost fierce, her whole manner was self-assertive and almost aggressive; but she greeted the Professor with a familiar smile, as with a friendly nod he passed her by, hastening upstairs to the first floor.

He opened a door and entered a large room furnished in faded crimson velvet, with a dining-room sideboard at one end, cheap lithographs on the walls, and mantelpiece ornamented with huge shells and figures in common china.

The room was quite dark, save for the

light of a small paraffin lamp with pink shade; and on a sofa near the window the figure of a young woman was reclining, drest in white muslin, and with one arm, naked almost to the shoulder, dabbling in a small glass water tank, placed upon a low seat, and containing several small water-lilies in full bloom.

Anyone who had seen the photograph which the Professor had left behind him in the clergyman's house, would have recognised the original at a glance. There was the same *petite* almost child-like figure, the same loose flowing golden hair, the same elfin-like but pretty face, the same large, wild, lustrous eyes. But the face of the original was older, sharper, and more care-worn than might have been guessed from the picture. It was the face of a woman of about four- or five-and-twenty,

and though the lips were red and full-coloured, and the eyes full of life and lightness, the complexion had the dulness of chronic ill-health.

The hand which hung in the water, playing with the lily-leaves, was thin and transparent, but the arm was white as snow and beautifully rounded.

The effect would have been perfectly poetic and ethereal, but it was spoiled to some extent by the remains of a meal which stood on the table close by—a tray covered with a soiled cloth, some greasy earthenware plates, the remains of a mutton chop, potatoes and bread.

As the Professor entered, his sister looked up and greeted him by name.

'You are late, Salem,' she said with an

unmistakeable American accent. 'I was wondering what kept you.'

'I'll tell you,' returned the Professor. 'I've been having a talk with Mr. Ambrose Bradley, at his own house. I gave him our lines of introduction. I'm real sorry to find that he's as ignorant as a redskin of the great science of solar biology, and the way he received me was not reassuring—indeed, he almost showed me the door.'

'You're used to that, Salem,' said Eustasia with a curious smile.

'Guess I am,' returned the Professor dryly; 'only I did calculate on something different from a man of Bradley's acquirements, I did indeed. However, he's just one of those men who believe in nothing by halves or quarters, and if we can once win him over

to an approval of our fundamental propositions, he'll be the most valuable of all recruits to new causes—a hot convert.'

The woman sighed—a sigh so long, so weary, that it seemed to come from the very depths of her being, and her expression grew more and more sad and *ennuyée*, as she drew her slender fingers softly through the waters of the tank.

'Ain't you well to-night, Eustasia?' inquired the Professor, looking at her with some concern.

'As well as usual,' was the reply. 'Suppose European air don't suit me; I've never been quite myself since I came across to this country.'

Her voice was soft and musical enough, and just then, when a peculiar wistful light

filled the faces of both, it was quite possible to believe them to be brother and sister. But in all other outward respects, they were utterly unlike.

'Tell me more about this young clergyman,' she continued after a pause. 'I am interested in him. The moment I saw him I said to myself he is the very image of—of——

She paused without finishing the sentence, and looked meaningly at her brother.

'Of Ulysses E. Stedman, you mean?' cried the Professor, holding up his forefinger. 'Eustasia, take care! You promised me never to think of him any more, and I expect you to keep your word.'

'But don't you see the resemblance?'

'Well, I dare say I do, for Ulysses was

well-looking enough when he wasn't in liquor. Don't talk about him, and don't think about him! He's buried somewhere down Florida way, and I ain't sorry on your account neither.'

'Killed! murdered! and so young!' cried the girl, with a cry so startling, and so full of pain, that her brother looked aghast. As he spoke, she drew her dripping right hand from the tank and placed it wildly upon her forehead. The water-drops streamed down her face like tears, while her whole countenance looked livid with pain.

'Eustasia!'

'I loved him, Salem! I loved him with all my soul!'

'Well, I know you did,' said the little man soothingly. 'I warned you against him, but

you wouldn't listen. Now that's all over; and as for Ulysses being murdered, he was killed in a free fight, he was, and he only got what he'd given to many another. Don't you take on, Eustasia! If ever you marry, it will be a better man than he was.'

'Marry?' cried the girl with a bitter laugh. 'Who'd marry *me?* Who'd ever look at such a thing as I am? Even he despised me, Salem, and thought me a cheat and an impostor. Wherever we go, it's the old story. I hate the life; I hate myself. I'd rather be a beggar in the street than what I am.'

'Don't underreckon yourself, Eustasia! Don't underreckon your wonderful gifts!'

'What are my gifts worth?' said Eustasia. 'Can they bring *him* back to me? Can they bring back those happy, happy days we spent

together? Haven't I tried, and tried, and tried, to get a glimpse of his face, to feel again the touch of his hand; and he never comes — he will never come—never, never! I wish I was with him in the grave, I do.'

Her grief was truly pitiable, yet there was something querulous and ignoble in it too, which prevented it from catching the tone of true sorrow. For the rest, the man whose memory awakened so much emotion had been pretty much what the Professor described him to be—a handsome scoundrel, with the manners of a gentleman and the tastes of a rowdy. A professional gambler, he had been known as one of the most dangerous adventurers in the Southern States, having betrayed more women, and killed more men, than any person in his district. A random shot had at

last laid him low, to the great relief of the respectable portion of the community.

The Professor eyed his sister thoughtfully, waiting till her emotion had subsided. He had not long to wait. Either the emotion was shallow itself, or Eustasia had extraordinary power of self-control. Her face became comparatively untroubled, though it retained its peculiar pallor; and reaching out her hand, she again touched the water and the lilies swimming therein.

'Salem!' she said presently.

'Yes, Eustasia.'

'Tell me more about this Mr. Bradley. Is he married?'

'Certainly not.'

'Engaged to be married?'

'I believe so. They say he is to marry

Miss Craik, the heiress, whom we saw in church to-day.'

Eustasia put no more questions; but curiously enough, began crooning to herself, in a low voice, some wild air. Her eyes flashed and her face became illuminated; and as she sang, she drew her limp hand to and fro in the water, among the flowers, keeping time to the measure. All her sorrow seemed to leave her, giving place to a dreamy pleasure. There was something feline and almost forbidding in her manner. She looked like a pythoness intoning oracles :—

> Dark eyes aswim with sibylline desire,
> And vagrant locks of amber!

Her voice was clear though subdued, resembling, to some extent, the purring of a cat.

'What are you singing, Eustasia?'

'"In lilac time when blue birds sing," Salem.'

'What a queer girl you are!' cried the Professor, not without a certain wondering admiration. 'I declare I sometimes feel afraid of you. Anyone could see with half an eye that we were brother and sister only on one side of the family. Your mother was a remarkable woman, like yourself. Father used to say sometimes he'd married a ghost-seer; and it might have been, for she hailed from the Highlands of Scotland. At any rate, you inherit her gift.'

Eustasia ceased her singing, and laughed again—this time with a low, self satisfied gladness.

'It's all I do inherit, brother Salem,' she

said; adding, in a low voice, as if to herself, 'But it's something, after all.'

'Something!' cried the Professor. 'It's a Divine privilege, that's what it is! To think that when you like you can close your eyes, see the mystical coming and going of cosmic forces, and, as the sublime Bard expresses it,

> Penetrate where no human foot hath trod
> Into the ever-quickening glories of God,
> See star with star conjoin'd as soul with soul,
> Swim onward to the dim mysterious goal,
> Hear rapturous breathings of the Force which flows
> From founts wherein the eternal godhead glows!

I envy you, Eustasia; I do, indeed.'

Eustasia laughed again, less pleasantly.

'Guess you don't believe all that. Sometimes I think myself that it's all nervous delusion.'

'Nervous force you mean. Well, and what is nervous force but solar being? What

you see and hear is as real as—as real as—spiritual photography. Talking of that, I gave Mr. Bradley one of your pictures, taken under test conditions.'

'You gave it him?'

'Dropt it in his room, where he's certain to find it.'

'Why did you do that?' demanded the girl almost sharply.

'Why? Because, as I told you, I want to win him over. Such a man as he is will be invaluable to us, here in England. He has the gift of tongues, to begin with; and then he knows any number of influential and wealthy people. What we want now, Eustasia, is money.'

'We always have wanted it, as long as I can remember.'

'I don't mean what you mean,' cried the Professor indignantly. 'I mean money to push the great cause, to propagate the new religion, to open up more and more the arcanum of mystic biology. We want money, and we want converts. If we can win Bradley over to our side, it won't be a bad beginning.'

'Who is to win him over? I?'

'Why, of course. You must see him, and when you do, I think it is as good as done. Only mind this, Eustasia! Keep your head cool, and don't go spooning. You're too susceptible, you are! If I hadn't been by to look after you, you'd have thrown yourself away a dozen times.'

Eustasia smiled and shook her head. Then, with a weary sigh, she arose.

'I'll go to bed now, Salem.'

'Do—and get your beauty-sleep. You'll want all your strength to-morrow. We have a séance at seven, at the house of Mrs. Upton. Tyndall is invited, and I calculate you'll want to have all your wits about you.'

'Good night!'

'Good night,' said the Professor, kissing her on the forehead; then, with a quiet change from his glib, matter-of-fact manner to one of real tenderness, he added, looking wistfully into her eyes, 'Keep up your spirits, Eustasia! We shan't stay here long, and then we'll go back to America and take a long spell of rest.'

Eustasia sighed again, and then glided from the room. She was so light and fragile that her feet seemed to make no sound, and in her white floating drapery she seemed almost like a ghost.

Left alone, the Professor sat down to the table, drew out a pencil and number of letters, and began making notes in a large pocket-book.

Presently he paused thoughtfully, and looked at the door by which Eustasia had retreated.

'Poor girl!' he muttered. 'Her soul's too big for her body, and that's a fact. I'm afraid she'll decline like her mother, and die young.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE THUNDERCLAP.

The Mighty and the Merciful are one;
The morning dew that scarcely bends the flowers,
Exhal'd to heaven, becomes the thunderbolt
That strikes the tree at noon.

Judas Iscariot: a Drama.

THERE are moments in a man's life when all the forces of life and society seem to conspire for his destruction; when, look which way he will, he sees no loophole for escape; when every step he takes forward seems a step downward towards some pitiless Inferno, and when to make even one step backward is impossible, because the precipice down which he has been

thrust seems steep as a wall. Yet there is still hope for such a man, if his own conscience is not in revolt against him; for that conscience, like a very angel, may uplift him by the hair and hold him miraculously from despair and death. Woe to him, however, if he has no such living help! Beyond that, there is surely no succour for him, beyond the infinite mercy, the cruel kindness, of his avenging God.

The moment of which I speak had come to Ambrose Bradley.

Even in the very heyday of his pride, when he thought himself strong enough to walk alone, without faith, almost without vital belief, his sins had found him out, and he saw the Inferno waiting at his feet. He knew that there was no escape. He saw the powers of evil arrayed on every side against him. And cruellest of all

the enemies leagued for his destruction, was the conscience which might have been his sweetest and surest friend.

It was too late now for regrets, it was too late now to reshape his course. Had he only exhibited a man's courage, and, instead of snatching an ignoble happiness, confided the whole truth to the woman he loved, she might have pitied and forgiven him; but he had accepted her love under a lie, and to confide the truth to her now would simply be to make a confession of his moral baseness. He dared not, could not, tell her; yet he knew that detection was inevitable. Madly, despairingly, he wrestled with his agony. and soon lay prostrate before it, a strong man self-stripped of his spiritual and moral strength.

Not that he was tamely acquiescent; not that he accepted his fate as just.

On the contrary, his whole spirit rose in revolt and indignation. He had tried to serve God—so at least he assured himself; he had tried to become a living lesson and example to a hard and unbelieving world; he had tried to upbuild again a Temple where men might worship in all honesty and freedom; and what was the result? For a slight fault, a venial blunder, of his own youth, he was betrayed to a punishment which threatened to be everlasting.

His intellect rebelled at the idea.

With failing strength he tried to balance himself on the satanic foothold of revolt. His doubts thickened around him like a cloud. If there was a just God, if there was a God at all, why had he made such a world?

In simple truth, the man's fatal position was

entirely the consequence of his once lack of moral courage.

He had missed the supreme moment, he had lacked the supreme sanction, which would have saved him, even had his danger been twenty-fold more desperate than it had been. Instead of standing erect in his own strength, and defying the Evil One, who threatened to hurl him down and destroy him, he had taken the Evil One's hand and accepted its support. Yes, the devil had helped him, but at what a cost!

'Get thee behind me, Satan!' he should have said. It was the sheerest folly to say it now.

He cowered in terror at the thought of Alma's holy indignation. He dreaded not her anger, which he could have borne, but her disenchantment, which he could not bear.

Her trust in him had been so absolute, her self-surrender so supreme; but its motive had been his goodness, her faith in his unsullied truth. She had been his handmaid, as she had called herself, and had trusted herself to him, body and soul. So complete had been his intellectual authority over her, that even had he told her his secret and thereupon assured her that he was morally a free man, though legally fettered, she would have accepted his genial pleading and still have given him her love. He was quite sure of that. But he had chosen a course of mere deception, he had refused to make her his confidant, and she had married him in all faith and fervour, believing there was no corner in all his heart where he had anything to conceal.

It was just possible that she might still

forgive him ; it was simply impossible that she could ever revere and respect him, as she hitherto had done.

Does he who reads these lines quite realise what it is to fall from the pure estate of a loving woman's worship? Has he ever been so throned in a loving heart as to understand how kingly is the condition—how terrible the fall from that sweet power? So honoured and enthroned, he is still a king, though he is a beggar of all men's charity, though he has not a roof to cover his head; so dethroned and fallen, he is still a beggar, though all the world proclaims him king.

Mephistopheles Minor, in the shape of gay George Craik, junior, scarcely slept on his discovery, or rather on his suspicions. He

was now perfectly convinced that there was some mysterious connection between the clergyman and Mrs. Montmorency; and as the actress refused for the time being to lend herself to any sort of open persecution, he determined to act on his own responsibility. So he again canvassed Miss Destrange and the other light ladies of his acquaintance, and receiving from them further corroboration of the statement that Mrs. Montmorency had been previously married, he had no doubt whatever that Ambrose Bradley was the man who had once stood to her in the relation of a husband.

Armed with this information, he sought out his father on the Monday morning, found him at his club, told him of all he knew, and asked his advice.

'My only wish, you know,' he explained, 'is to save Alma from that man, who is evidently a scoundrel. So I thought I would come to you at once. The question is, what is to be done?'

'It's a horrible complication,' said the baronet, honestly shocked. 'Do you actually mean to tell me that you suspect an improper relationship between Alma and this infernal infidel?'

'I shouldn't like to go as far as that; but they were seen travelling together, like man and wife, in France.'

'Good heavens! It is incredible.'

'I should like to shoot the fellow,' cried George furiously. 'And I would, too, if this was a duelling country. Shooting's too good for him. He ought to be hung!'

The upshot of the conversation was that father and son determined to visit Alma at once together, and to make one last attempt to bring her to reason. At a little after midday they were at her door. The baronet stalked in past the servant, with an expression of the loftiest moral indignation.

'Tell Miss Craik that I wish to see her at once,' he said.

It was some minutes before Alma appeared. When she did so, attired in a pink morning *peignoir* of the most becoming fashion, her face was bright as sunshine; but it became clouded directly she met her uncle's eyes. She saw at a glance that he had come on an unpleasant errand.

George Craik sulked in a corner, waiting for his father to conduct the attack.

'What has brought you over so early, uncle?' she demanded. 'I hope George has not been talking nonsense to you about me. He has been here before on the same errand, and I had to show him the door.'

'George has your interest at heart,' returned the baronet, fuming; 'and if you doubt his disinterestedness, perhaps you will do me the justice to believe that *I* am your true friend, as well as your relation. Now my brother is gone, I am your nearest protector. It is enough to make your father rise in his grave to hear what I have heard.'

'What have you heard?' cried Alma, turning pale with indignation. 'Don't go too far, uncle, or I shall quarrel with you as well as George; and I should be sorry for that.'

'Will you give me an explanation of your

conduct—yes or no?—or do you refuse my right to question you? Remember, Alma, the honour of our family—your father's honour—is in question.'

'How absurd you are!' cried Alma, with a forced laugh. 'But there, I will try to keep my temper. What is it that you want to know?'

And she sat down quietly, with folded hands, as if waiting to be interrogated.

'Is it the fact, as I am informed, that you and Mr. Bradley were seen travelling alone together, some weeks ago, in Normandy?'

Alma hesitated before speaking; then, smiling to herself, she said,

'Suppose it is true, uncle—what then?'

The baronet's face went red as crimson, and he paced furiously up and down the room.

'What then? Good heavens, can you ask that question? Do you know that your character is at stake? Then you do not deny it?'

'No; for it is true.'

Father and son looked at one another; then the baronet proceeded:

'Then all the rest is true. You are that man's mistress!'

The shot struck home, but Alma was prepared for it, and without changing her attitude in the least, she quietly replied:

'No, uncle; I am *that man's wife!*'

'His wife!' ejaculated father and son in the same breath.

'Yes. We were married some weeks ago, and after the wedding, went for a few days to France. There! I intended to keep the secret,

till I was free to tell it; but gross, cruel importunity has wrung it from me. Do not think, however,' she continued, rising to her feet and exchanging her self-possessed manner for one of angry wrath, 'that I shall ever forgive you, either of you, for your shameful suspicions concerning me. You might have spared me so many insults. You might have known me better. However, now you know the truth, perhaps you will relieve me from any further persecution.'

Father and son exchanged another look.

'Do you actually affirm that you are married?' exclaimed the baronet.

'Actually,' returned the young lady with a sarcastic bow.

Thereupon George Craik sprang to his feet, prepared to deliver the *coup de grâce.*

'Tell her the truth, father!' he exclaimed. 'Tell her that she is no more married than I am!'

'What does he mean?' cried Alma, looking at her uncle. 'Is he mad?'

'He means simply this, Alma,' said Sir George, after a prompting glance from his son. 'If you have gone through the marriage ceremony with this man, this infidel, you have been shamefully betrayed. The scoundrel was unable to marry again, if, as we have reason to believe, his first wife is still living!'

The two men, father and son, had struck their blow boldly but very cruelly, and it came with full force on the devoted woman's head. At first Alma could scarcely believe her ears; she started in her chair, put out her hands quickly as if to ward off another savage attack,

and then shrank in terror, while every vestige of colour in her cheeks faded away.

Sir George stood gazing down at her, also greatly agitated, for he was well-bred enough to feel that the part he was playing was unmanly, almost cowardly. He had spoken and acted on a mere surmise, and even at that moment, amidst the storm of his nervous indignation, the horrible thought flashed upon him that he might be wrong after all.

'"His first wife is still living!"' repeated Alma with a quick involuntary shudder, scarcely able to realise the words. 'Uncle, what do you mean? Have *you* gone mad, as well as George? Of whom are you speaking? Of—of Mr. Bradley?'

'Of that abominable man,' cried the baronet, 'who, if my information is correct, and if there

is law in the land, shall certainly pay the penalty of his atrocious crime! Do not think that we blame *you*,' he added more gently; 'no, for you are not to blame. You have been the dupe, the victim of a villain!'

Like a prisoner sick with terror, yet gathering all his strength about him to protest against the death-sentence for a crime of which he is innocent, Alma rose, and trembling violently, still clutching the chair for support, looked at her uncle.

'I do not believe one word of what you say! I believe it is an infamous falsehood. But whether it is true or false, I shall never forgive you in this world for the words you have spoken to me to-night.'

'I have only done my duty, Alma!' returned Sir George, uneasily, moving as he

spoke towards her and reaching out his arms to support her. 'My poor child—courage! George and I will protect and save you.'

Hereupon Mephistopheles junior uttered a sullen half-audible murmur, which was understood to be a solemn promise to punch the fellow's head—yes, smash him—on the very earliest opportunity!

'Don't touch me!' exclaimed Alma. 'Don't approach me! What is your authority for this cruel libel on Mr. Bradley? You talk of punishment. It is you that will be punished, be sure of that, if you cannot justify so shameful an accusation.'

The two men looked at each other. If, after all, the ground should give way beneath them! But it was too late to draw back or temporise.

'Tell her, father,' said George, with a prompting look.

'You ask our authority for the statement,' replied the baronet. 'My dear Alma, the thing is past a doubt. We have seen the—the *person*.'

'The person? What person?'

'Bradley's *wife!*'

'He has no wife but me,' cried Alma. 'I love him—he is my husband!'

Then, as Sir George shrugged his shoulders pityingly, she leant forward eagerly, and demanded in quick, spasmodic gasps:—

'Who is the woman who wrongs my rights? Who is the creature who has filled you with this falsehood? Who is she? Tell me!'

'She is at present passing under the name of Montmorency, and is, I believe, an actress.'

As he spoke, there came suddenly in Alma's remembrance the vivid picture of the woman whom she had seen talking with the clergyman in the vestry, and simultaneously she was conscious of the sickly odour of scent which had surrounded her like a fume of poison. Alma grew faint. Some terrible and foreboding presence seemed overpowering her. She thought of the painted face, the shameless dress and bearing of the strange woman, of Bradley's peculiar air of nervous uneasiness, of the thrill of dislike and repulsion which had run momentarily through her own frame as she left them together. Overcome by an indescribable and sickening horror, she put her hand to her forehead, tottered, and seemed about to fall.

Solicitous and alarmed, the baronet once

more approached her as if to support her. But before he could touch her she had shrunk shuddering away.

Weak and terrified now, she uttered a despairing moan.

'Oh! why did you come here to tell me this?' she cried. 'Why did you come here to break my heart and wreck my life? If you had had any pity or care for me, you would have spared me; you would have left me to discover my misery for myself, Go now, go; you have done all you can. I shall soon know for myself whether your cruel tale is false or true.'

'It is true,' said Sir George. 'Do not be unjust, my child. We could not, knowing what we did, suffer you to remain at the mercy of that man. Now, be advised. Leave the

affair to us, who are devoted to you ; we will see that you are justified, and that the true culprit is punished as he deserves.'

And the two men made a movement towards the door.

'Stop!' cried Alma. 'What do you intend to do?'

'Apply for a warrant, and have the scoundrel apprehended without delay.'

'You will do so at your peril,' exclaimed Alma, with sudden energy. 'I forbid you to interfere between him and me. Yes, I forbid you! Even if things are as you say—and I will never believe it till I receive the assurance from his own lips, never!—even if things are as you say, the wrong is mine, not yours, and I need no one to come between me and the man I love.'

'The man you love!' echoed Sir George in amazement. 'Alma, this is infatuation!'

'I love him, uncle, and love such as mine is not a light thing to be destroyed by the first breath of calumny or misfortune. What has taken place is between him and me alone.'

'I beg your pardon,' returned her uncle, with a recurrence to his old anger. 'Our good name—the honour of the house—is at stake; and if you are too far lost to consider these, it is my duty, as the head of the family, to act on your behalf.'

'Certainly,' echoed young George between his set teeth.

'And how would you vindicate them?' asked Alma, passionately. 'By outraging and degrading *me?* Yes; for if you utter to any other soul one syllable of this story, you drag

my good name in the mire, and make me the martyr. I need no protection, I ask no justification. If necessary I can bear my misery, as I have borne my happiness, in silence and alone.'

'But,' persisted Sir George, 'you will surely let us take some steps to——'

'Whatever I do will be done on my own responsibility. I am my own mistress. Uncle, you must promise me—you must swear to me —to do nothing without my will and consent. You can serve me yet; you can show that you are still capable of kindliness and compassion, by saving me from proceedings which you would regret, and which I should certainly not survive.'

Sir George looked at his son in fresh perplexity. In the whirlwind of his excite-

ment he had hardly taken into calculation the unpleasantness of a public exposure. True, it would destroy and punish the man, but, on the other hand, it would certainly bring disgrace on the family. Alma's eccentricities, both of opinion and of conduct, which he had held in very holy horror, would become the theme of the paragraph-maker and the leader-writer, and the immediate consequence would be to make the name of Craik ridiculous. So he stammered and hesitated.

George Craik, the younger, however, had none of his father's scruples. He cared little or nothing now for his cousin's reputation. All he wanted was to expose, smash, pulverise, and destroy Bradley, the man whom he had always cordially detested, and who had subjected him to innumerable indignities on the part of his

cousin. So, seeing Alma's helplessness, and no longer dreading her indignation, he plucked up heart of grace and took his full part in the discussion.

'The fellow deserves penal servitude for life,' he said, 'and in my opinion, Alma, it's your *duty* to prosecute him. It is the only course you can take in justice to yourself and your friends. I know it will be deucedly unpleasant; but not more unpleasant than going through the Divorce Court, which respectable people do every day.'

'Silence!' exclaimed his cousin, turning upon him with tremulous indignation.

'Eh? what?' ejaculated George.

'I will not discuss Mr. Bradley with *you*. To my uncle I will listen, because I know he has a good heart, and because he is my dear

father's brother; but I forbid *you* to speak to me on the subject. I owe all this misery and humiliation to you, and you only.'

'That's all humbug!' George began furiously, but his father interposed and waved him to silence.

'Alma is excited, naturally excited; in her cooler senses she will acknowledge that she does you an injustice. Hush, George!—My dear child,' he continued, addressing Alma, 'all my son and I desire to do is to save you pain. You have been disgracefully misled, and I repeat, I pity rather than blame you. To be sure you have been a little headstrong, a little opinionated, and I am afraid the doctrines promulgated by your evil genius have led you to take too rash a view of—hum—moral sanctions. Depend upon it, loose ideas in

matters of religion lead, directly and indirectly, to the destruction of morality. Not that I accuse you of wilful misconduct—Heaven forbid! But you have erred from want of caution, from, if I may so express it, a lack of discretion; for you should have been aware that the man that believes in neither Our Maker nor Our Saviour—an—in short, an infidel—would not be deterred by any moral consideration from acts of vice and crime.'

This was a long speech, but Alma paid little or no attention to it. She stood against the mantelpiece, leaning her forehead against it, and trembling with agony; but she did not cry—the tears would not come yet—she was still too lost in amazement, pain, and dread.

Suddenly, as Sir George ended, she looked up and said:—

'The name of this woman, this actress? Where is she to be found?'

'Her name—as I told you, her assumed name—is Montmorency. George can give you her address; but I think, on the whole, you had better not see her.'

'I *must*,' replied Alma, firmly.

Sir George glanced at his son, who thereupon took out a notebook and wrote on one of the leaves, which he tore out and handed to his father.

'Here is the address,' said the baronet, passing the paper on to Alma.

She took it without looking at it, and threw it on the mantelpiece.

'Now pray leave me. But, before you go, promise to do nothing—to keep this matter secret—until you hear from me. I must first ascertain that what you say is true.'

'We will do as you desire, Alma,' returned Sir George; 'only I think it would be better—much better—to let *us* act for you.'

'No; I only am concerned. I am not a child, and am able to protect myself.'

'Very well,' said her uncle. 'But try, my child, to remember that you have friends who are waiting to serve you. I am heart-broken—George is heart-broken—at this sad affair. Do nothing rash, I beseech you; and do not forget, in this hour of humiliation, that there is One above Who can give you comfort, if you will turn humbly and reverently to *Him!*'

With this parting homily the worthy baronet approached his niece, drew her to him, and kissed her benignantly on the forehead. But she shrank away quickly, with a low cry of distress.

'Do not touch me! Do not speak to me! Leave me now, for God's sake!'

After a long-drawn sigh, expressive of supreme sympathy and commiseration, and a prolonged look full of quasi-paternal emotion, Sir George left the room. George followed, with a muttered 'Good-night!' to which his cousin paid no attention.

Father and son passed out into the street, where the manner of both underwent a decided change.

'Well, that's over!' exclaimed the baronet. 'The poor girl bears it far better than I expected; for it is a horrible situation.'

'Then you mean to do as she tells you,' said George, 'and let the scoundrel alone?'

'For the time being, yes. After all, Alma is right, and we must endeavour to avoid a public exposure.'

'It's sure to come out. It's *bigamy*, you

know—*Bigamy*!' he added, with more emphasis and a capital letter.

'So it is—if it is true. At present, you know, we have no proofs whatever—only suspicions. God bless me! how ridiculous we should look if the whole thing turns out a mare's nest after all! Alma will never forgive us! You really feel convinced that there was a previous marriage?'

'I'm sure of it,' returned George. 'And, whether or not——'

He did not finish the sentence; but what he added to himself, spitefully enough, was to the effect that, 'whether or not,' he had paid out his cousin for all her contumelious and persistent snubbing.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONFESSION.

'Dieu, qui, dès le commencement de la création, avez en tirant la femme d'une côte de l'homme établi le grand sacrement du mariage, vous qui l'avez honorée et relevée si haut soit en vous, incarnant dans le sein d'une femme, soit en commençant vos miracles par celui des noces de Cana, vous qui avez jadis accordé ce remède, suivant vos vues, à mon incontinente faiblesse, ne repoussez pas les prières de votre servante : je les verse humblement aux pieds de votre divine majesté pour mes péchés et pour ceux de mon bien-aimé. O Dieu qui êtes la bonté même, pardonnez à nos crimes si grands, et que l'immensité de votre miséricorde se mesure à la multitude de nos fautes. Prenez contre vos serviteurs la verge de la correction, non le glaive de la fureur. Frappez la chair pour conserver les âmes. Venez en pacificateur, non en vengeur; avec bonté plûtot qu'avec justice ; en père miséricordieux, non en maître sévère.'

THE PRAYER OF HÉLOISE (*written for her by* ABELARD).

ALMA remained as her uncle and cousin had left her, leaning against the mantelpiece, with

her eyes fixed, her frame convulsively trembling. Yet her look and manner still would have confirmed Sir George in his opinion that she bore the shock 'better than might have been expected.' She did not cry or moan. Once or twice her hand was pressed upon her heart, as if to still its beating, that was all.

Nevertheless, she was already aware that the supreme sorrow, the fatal dishallucination, of her life had come. She saw all her cherished hopes and dreams, her fairy castles of hope and love, falling to pieces like houses of cards; the idol of her life falling with them, changing to clay and dust; the whole world darkening, all beauty withering, in a chilly wind from the eternity of shadows. If Ambrose Bradley was base, if the one true man she had ever known

and loved was false, what remained? Nothing but disgrace and death.

He had been in her eyes next to God, without speck or flaw, perfectly noble and supreme; one by one he had absorbed all her childish faiths, while in idolatry of passion she had knelt at his feet adoring him—

He for God only, she for God in *him*.

And that godhead had sufficed.

She had given up to him, together with her faith, her hope, her understanding, her entire spiritual life.

Passionate by nature, she had never loved any other human creature; even such slight thrills of sympathy as most maidens feel, and which by some are christened 'experiences,' having been almost or quite unknown to her. She had been a studious, reserved girl, with a

manner which repelled the approaches of beardless young men of her own age; her beauty attracted them, but her steadfast intellectual eyes frightened and cowed the most impudent among them. Not till she came into collision with Bradley did she understand what personal passion meant; and even the first overtures were intellectual, leading only by very slow degrees to a more tender relationship.

Alma Craik, in fact, was of the same fine clay of which enthusiasts have been made in all ages. Born in the age of Pericles, she would doubtless have belonged to the class of which Aspasia was an immortal type; in the early days of Christianity, she would have perhaps figured as a Saint; in its mediæval days as a proselytising abbess; and now, in the days of Christian decadence, she opened her dreamy

eyes on the troublous lights of spiritual Science, found in them her inspiration and her heavenly hope. But men cannot live by bread alone, and women cannot exist without love. Her large impulsive nature was barren and incomplete till she had discovered what the Greek *hetairai* found in Pericles, what the feminine martyrs found in Jesus, what Eloisa found in Abelard; that is to say, the realisation of a masculine ideal. She waited, almost without anticipation, till the hour was ripe.

> Love comes not as a slave
> To any beckoning finger; but, some day,
> When least expected, cometh as a King,
> And takes his throne.

So at last it was with the one love of Alma's life. Without doubt, without fear or question, she suffered her lover to take full sovereignty, and to remain thenceforth throned and crowned.

And now, she asked herself shudderingly, was it all over? Had the end of her dream come, when she had scarcely realised its beginning? If this was so, the beautiful world was destroyed. If Bradley was unworthy, there was no goodness in man; and if the divine type in humanity was broken like a cast of clay, there was no comfort in religion, no certainty of God.

She looked at her watch; it was not far from midnight. She moved from her support, and walked nervously up and down the room.

At last her mind was made up. She put on her hat and mantle, and left the house.

In her hand she clutched the piece of paper which George Craik had given her, and which contained the name and address of Mrs. Montmorency.

The place was close at hand, not far indeed from Bradley's residence and her own. She hastened thither without hesitation. Her way lay along the borders of the park, past the very Church which she had spared no expense to build, so that she came into its shadow almost before she knew.

It was a still and windless night; the skies were blue and clear, with scarcely a cloud, and the air was full of the vitreous pour of the summer moon, which glimmered on the church windows with ghostly silvern light. From the ground there exhaled a sickly heavy odour—the scent of the heated dew-charged earth.

Alma stood for some time looking at the building with the fortunes of which her own seemed so closely and mysteriously blent. Its shadow fell upon her with ominous darkness.

Black and sepulchral it seemed now, instead of bright and full of joy. As she gazed upon it, and remembered how she had laboured to upbuild it, how she had watched it grow stone by stone, and felt the joy a child might feel in marking the growth of some radiant flower, it seemed the very embodiment of her own despair.

Now, for the first time, her tears began to flow, but slowly, as if from sources in an arid heart. If she had heard the truth that day, the labour of her life was done; the place she looked upon was curst, and the sooner some thunderbolt of God struck it, or the hand of man razed it to the ground, the better for all the world.

There was a light in the house close by—in the room where she knew her lover was sit-

ting. She crept close to the rails of the garden, and looked at the light through her tears. As she gazed, she prayed; prayed that God might spare her yet, rebuke the satanic calumny, and restore her lord and master to her, pure and perfect as he had been.

Then, in her pity for him and for herself, she thought how base he might think her if she sought from any lips but his own the confirmation of her horrible fear. She would be faithful till the last. Instead of seeking out the shameless woman, she would go in and ask Bradley himself to confess the truth.

Swift action followed the thought. She opened the gate, crossed the small garden, and rang the bell.

The hollow sound, breaking on the solemn stillness, startled her, and she shrank trembling

in the doorway; then she heard the sound of bolts being drawn, and the next moment the house door opened, and the clergyman appeared on the threshold, holding a light.

He looked wild and haggard enough, for indeed he had been having his dark hour alone. He wore a black dressing jacket with no waistcoat, and the collar of his shirt was open and tieless, falling open to show his powerful muscular throat.

'Alma!' he exclaimed in astonishment. '*You* here, and so late!'

'Yes, it is I,' she answered in a low voice. 'I wish to speak to you. May I come in?'

He could not see her face, but the tones of her voice startled him, as he drew back to let her enter. She passed by him without a word, and hastened along the lobby to the study.

He closed the door softly, and followed her.

The moment he came into the bright lamplight of the room he saw her standing and facing him, her face white as death, her eyes dilated.

'My darling, what is it? Are you ill?' he cried.

But he had no need to ask any question. He saw in a moment that she knew his secret.

'Close the door,' she said in a low voice; and after he had obeyed her she continued, 'Ambrose, I have come here to-night because I could not rest at home till I had spoken to you. I have heard something terrible—so terrible that, had I believed it utterly, I think I should not be living now. It is something that concerns us both—me, most

of all. Do you know what I mean? Tell me, for God's sake, if you know! Spare me the pain of an explanation if you can. Ah, God help me! I see you know!'

Their eyes met. He could not lie to her now.

'Yes, I know,' he replied.

'But it is not true? Tell me it is not true?'

As she gazed at him, and stretched out her arms in wild entreaty, his grief was pitiful beyond measure. He turned his eyes away with a groan of agony.

She came close to him, and, taking his head in her trembling hands, turned his face again to hers. He collected all his strength to meet her reproachful gaze, while he replied, in a deep tremulous voice:—

'You have heard that I have deceived you, that I am the most miserable wretch beneath the sun. You have heard—God help me!—that there is a woman living, other than yourself, who claims to be my wife.'

'Yes! that is what I have heard. But I do not believe—I will not believe it. I have come to have from your own lips the assurance that it is a falsehood. Dear Ambrose, tell me so. I will believe *you*. Whatever *you* tell me, I will believe with all my soul.'

She clung to him tenderly as she spoke, with the tears streaming fast down her face.

Disengaging himself gently, he crossed the room to his desk, and placed his hand upon some papers scattered there, with the ink fresh upon them.

'When I heard you knock,' he said, 'I was

trying to write down, for your eyes to read, what my lips refused to tell, what I could not speak for utter, overpowering shame. I knew the secret must soon be known; I wished to be first to reveal it to you, that you might know the whole unvarnished truth. I was too late, I find. My enemies have been before me, and you have come to reproach me—as I deserve.'

'I have *not* come for that,' answered Alma, sobbing. 'It is too late for reproaches. I only wish to know my fate.'

'Then try and listen, while I tell you everything,' said Bradley, in the same tone of utter misery and despair. 'I am speaking my own death-warrant, I know; for with every word I utter I shall be tearing away another living link that binds you to my already broken heart. I have nothing to say in my own justification;

no, not one word. If you could strike me dead at your feet, in your just and holy anger, it would be dealing with me as I deserve. I should have been strong; I was weak, a coward! I deserve neither mercy nor pity.'

It was strange how calm they both seemed; he as he addressed her in his low deep voice, she as she stood and listened. Both were deathly pale, but Alma's tears were checked, as she looked in despair upon the man who had wrecked her life.

Then he told her the whole story: of how, in his youthful infatuation, he had married Mary Goodwin, how they had lived a wretched life together, how she had fled from him, and how for many a year he had thought her dead. His face trembled and his cheek flushed as he spoke of the new life that had dawned upon

him, when long afterwards he became acquainted with herself; while she listened in agony, thinking of the pollution of that other woman's embraces from which he had passed.

But presently she hearkened more peacefully, and a faint dim hope began to quicken in her soul—for as yet she but dimly apprehended Bradley's situation. So far as she had heard, the man was comparatively blameless. The episode of his youth was a repulsive one, but the record of his manhood was clear. He had believed the woman dead, he had had every reason to believe it, and he had been, to all intents and purposes, free.

As he ceased, he heaved a sigh of deep relief, and her tears flowed more freely. She moved across the room, and took his hand.

'I understand now,' she said. 'O Ambrose,

why did you not confide in me from the first? There should have been no secrets between us. I would freely have forgiven you. . . . . And I forgive you now! When you married me, you believed the woman dead and in her grave. If she has arisen to part us so cruelly, the blame is not yours—thank God for that!'

But he shrank from her touch, and uttering a cry of agony sank into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

'Ambrose!' she murmured, bending over him.

'Do not touch me,' he cried; 'I have more to tell you yet—something that must break the last bond uniting us together, and degrade me for ever in your eyes. Alma, do not pity me; your pity tortures and destroys me, for I do not deserve it—I am a villain! Listen, then!

I betrayed you wilfully, diabolically; for when I went through the marriage ceremony with you I *knew* that Mary Goodwin was still alive!'

'You knew it!—and, knowing it, you——'

She paused in horror, unable to complete the sentence.

'I knew it, for I had seen her with my own eyes—so long ago as when I was vicar of Fensea. You remember my visit to London; you remember my trouble then, and you attributed it to my struggle with the Church authorities. That was the beginning of my fall; I was a coward and a liar from that hour; for I had met and spoken with my first wife.'

She shrank away from him now, indeed. The last remnant of his old nobility had fallen from him, leaving him utterly contemptible and ignoble.

'Afterwards,' he continued, 'I was like a man for whose soul the angels of light and darkness struggle. You saw my anguish, but little guessed its cause. I had tried to fly from temptation. I went abroad; even there, your heavenly kindness reached me, and I was drawn back to your side. Then for a time I forgot everything, in the pride of intellect and newly acquired success. By accident, I heard the woman had gone abroad; and I knew well, or at least I believed, that she would never cross my path again. My love for you grew hourly; and I saw that you were unhappy, so long as our lives were passed asunder. Then in an evil moment I turned to my creed for inspiration. I did not turn to God, for I had almost ceased to believe in Him; but I sought justification from my conscience, which the

spirit of evil had already warped. I reasoned with myself; I persuaded myself that I had been a martyr, that I owed the woman no faith, that I was still morally free. I examined the laws of marriage, and, the wish being father to the thought, found in them only folly, injustice, and superstition. I said to myself, "She and I are already divorced by her own innumerable acts of infamy;" I asked myself, "Shall I live on a perpetual bondslave to a form which I despise, to a creature who is utterly unworthy?" Coward that I was, I yielded, forgetting that no happiness can be upbuilt upon a lie. And see how I am punished! I have lost you for ever; I have lost my soul alive! I, who should have been your instructor in all things holy, have been your guide in all things evil. I have brought

the curse of heaven upon myself. I have put out my last strength in wickedness, and brought the roof of the temple down upon my head.'

In this manner his words flowed on, in a wild stream of sorrowful self-reproach. It seemed, indeed, that he found a relief in denouncing himself as infamous, and in prostrating himself, as it were, under the heel of the woman he had wronged.

But the more he reproached himself, the greater her compassion grew; till at last, in an agony of sympathy and pain, she knelt down by his side, and, sobbing passionately, put her arms around him.

'Ambrose,' she murmured, 'Ambrose, do not speak so! do not break my heart! That woman shall *not* come between us. I do not care for the world, I do not care for the

judgment of men. Bid me to remain with you to the end, and I will obey you.'

And she hid her face, blinded with weeping, upon his breast.

For a time there was silence; then the clergyman, conquering his emotion, gathered strength to speak again.

'Alma! my darling! Do not tempt me with your divine goodness. Do not think me quite so lost as to spare myself and to destroy *you*. I have been weak hitherto; henceforth I will be cruel and inexorable. Do not waste a thought upon me; I am not worth it. To-morrow I shall leave London. If I live, I will try, in penitence and suffering, to atone; but whether I live or die, you must forget that I ever lived to darken your young life.'

As he spoke, he endeavoured gently to

disengage himself, but her arms were wound about him, and he could not stir.

'No,' she answered, 'you must not leave me. I will still be your companion, your handmaid. Grant me that last mercy. Let me be your loving sister still, if I may not be your wife.'

'Alma, it is impossible. We must part!'

'If you go, I will follow you. Ambrose, *you* will not leave me behind you, to die of a broken heart. To see you, to be near you, will be enough; it is all I ask. You will continue the great work you have begun, and I—I will look on, and pray for you as before.'

It was more than the man could bear; he too began to sob convulsively, as if utterly broken.

'O God! God!' he cried, 'I forgot Thee

in mine own vain-glory, in my wicked lust of happiness and power! I wandered farther and farther away from Thy altars, from my childish faith, and at every step I took, my pride and folly grew! But now, at last, I know that it was a brazen image that I worship—nay, worse, the Phantom of my own miserable sinful self. Punish me, but let me come back to Thee! Destroy, but save me! I know now there is no God but One—the living, bleeding Christ whom I endeavoured to dethrone!'

She drew her face from his breast, and looked at him in terror. It seemed to her that he was raving.

'Ambrose! my poor Ambrose! God has forgiven you, as I forgive you. You have been His faithful servant, His apostle!'

'I have been a villain! I have fallen, as

Satan fell, from intellectual vanity and pride. You talk to me of the great work that I have done; Alma, that work has been wholly evil, my creed a rotten reed. A materialist at heart, I thought that I could reject all certitude of faith, all fixity of form. My God became a shadow, my Christ a figment, my morality a platitude and a lie. Believing and accepting everything in the sphere of ideas, I believed nothing, accepted nothing, in the sphere of living facts. Descending by slow degrees to a creed of shallow materialism, I justified falseness to myself, and treachery to *you*. I walked in my blind self-idolatry, till the solid ground was rent open beneath me, as you have seen. In that final hour of temptation, of which I have spoken, a Christian would have turned to the Cross and found salvation. What

was that Cross to me? A dream of the poet's brain, a symbol which could not help me. I turned from it, and have to face, as my eternal punishment, all the horror and infamy of the old Hell.'

Every word that he uttered was true, even truer than he yet realised.

He had refined away his faith till it had become a mere figment. Christ the Divine Ideal had been powerless to keep him to the narrow path, whereas Christ the living Law-giver might have enabled him to walk on a path thrice as narrow, yea, on the very edge of the great gulf, where there is scarcely foothold for a fly. I who write these lines, though perchance far away as Bradley himself from the acceptance of a Christian terminology, can at least say this for the Christian scheme—that

it is complete as a law for life. Once accept its facts and theories, and it becomes as strong as an angel's arm to hold us up in hours of weariness, weakness, and vacillation. The difficulty lies in that acceptance. But for common workaday use and practical human needs, transcendentalism, however Christian in its ideas, is utterly infirm. It will do when there is fair weather, when the beauty of Art will do, and when even the feeble glimmer of æstheticism looks like sunlight and pure air. But when sorrow comes, when temptation beckons, when what is wanted is a staff to lean upon and a Divine finger to point and guide, woe to him who puts his trust in any transcendental creed, however fair!

It is the tendency of modern agnosticism to slacken the moral fibre of men, even more

than to weaken their intellectual grasp. The laws of human life are written in letters of brass on the rock of Science, and it is the task of true Religion to read them and translate them for the common use. But the agnostic is as shortsighted as an owl, while the atheist is as blind as a bat ; the one will not, and the other cannot, read the colossal cypher, interpret the simple speech, of God.

Ambrose Bradley was a man of keen intellect and remarkable intuitions, but he had broadened his faith to so great an extent that it became like one of many ways in a wilderness, leading anywhere, or nowhere. He had been able to accept ideals, never to cope with practicalities. His creed was beautiful as a rainbow, as many-coloured, as capable of stretching from heaven to earth and

earth to heaven, but it faded, rainbow-like, when the sun sank and the darkness came. So must it be with all creeds which are not solid as the ground we walk on, strength-giving as the air we breath, simple as the thoughts of childhood, and inexorable as the solemn verity of death.

Such has been, throughout all success or failure, and such is, practical Christianity. Blessed is he who, in days of backsliding and unbelief, can become as a little child and lean all his hope upon it. Its earthly penance and its heavenly promise are interchangeable terms. The Christian dies that he may live; suffers that he may enjoy; relinquishes that he may gain; sacrifices his life that he may save it. He knows the beatitude of suffering, which no merely happy man can know. We who are

worlds removed from the simple faith of the early world may at least admit all this, and then, with a sigh for the lost illusion, go dismally upon our way.

That night Ambrose Bradley found, to his astonishment, that Alma was still at his mercy, that at a word from him she would defy the world. Therein came his last temptation, his last chance of moral redemption. The Devil was at hand busily conjuring, but a holier presence was also there. The man's soul was worth saving, and there was still a stake.

The game was decided for the time being when the clergyman spoke as follows :—

'My darling, I am not so utterly lost as to let you share my degradation. I do not deserve your pity any more than I have deserved your love. Your goodness only

makes me feel my own baseness twenty-fold. I should have told you the whole truth ; I failed to do so, and I grossly deceived you; therefore it is just that I should be punished and driven forth. I have broken the laws of my country as well as the precepts of my creed. I shall leave England to-morrow, never to return.'

'You must not go,' answered Alma. 'I know that we must separate, I see that it is sin to remain together, but over and above our miserable selves is the holy labour to which you have set your hand. Do not, I conjure you, abandon that! The last boon I shall ask you is to labour on in the church I upbuilt for you, and to keep your vow of faithful service.'

'Alma, it is impossible! In a few days,

possibly in a few hours, our secret will be known, and then——'

'Your secret is safe with me,' she replied, 'and I will answer for my uncle and my cousin—that they shall leave you in peace. It is I that must leave England, not you. Your flight would cause a scandal and would destroy the great work for ever; my departure will be unnoticed and unheeded. Promise me, promise me to remain.'

'I cannot, Alma!—God forbid!—and allow you, who are blameless, to be driven forth from your country and your home!'

'I have no home, no country now,' she said, and as she spoke her voice was full of the pathos of infinite despair. 'I lost these, I lost everything, when I lost *you*. Dearest Ambrose, there is but one atonement possible

for both of us! We must forget our vain happiness, and work for God.'

Her face became Madonna-like in its beautiful resignation. Bradley looked at her in wonder, and never before had he hated himself so much for what he had done. Had she heaped reproaches upon him, had she turned from him in the pride of passionate disdain, he could have borne it far better. But in so much as she assumed the sweetness of an angel, did he feel the misery and self-scorn of a devil.

And, if the truth must be spoken, Alma wondered at herself. She had thought at first, when the quick of her pain was first touched, that she must madden and die of agony; but her nature seemed flooded now with a piteous calm, and her mind hushed itself to

the dead stillness of resignation. Alas! she had yet to discover how deep and incurable was the wound that she had received; how it was to fester and refuse all healing, even from the sacred unguents of religion.

'Promise me,' she continued after a pause, 'to remain and labour in your vocation.'

'Alma, I cannot!'

'You *must*. You say you owe me reparation; let your reparation be this—to grant my last request.'

'But it is a mockery!' he pleaded. 'Alma, if you knew how hollow, how empty of all living faith, my soul had become!'

'Your faith is not dead,' she replied. 'Even if it be, He who works miracles will restore it to life. Promise to do as I beseech you, and be sure *then* of my forgiveness. Promise!'

'I promise,' he said at last, unable to resist her.

'Good-bye!' she said, holding out her hand, which he took sobbing and covered with kisses. 'I shall go away to some still place abroad where I may try to find peace. I may write to you sometimes, may I not? Surely there will be no sin in that! Yes, I will write to you; and you—you will let me know that you are well and happy.'

'O Alma!' he sobbed, falling on his knees before her, 'my love! my better angel! I have destroyed you, I have trampled on the undriven snow!'

'God is good,' she answered. 'Perhaps even this great sorrow is sent upon us in mercy, not in wrath. I will try to think so! Once more, good-bye!'

He rose to his feet, and, taking her tear-drenched face softly between his hands, kissed her upon the brow.

'God bless and protect you!' he cried. 'Pray for me, my darling! I shall need all your prayers! Pray for me and forgive me!'

A minute later, and he was left alone. He would have followed her out into the night, as far as her own door, but she begged him not to do so. He stood at the gate, watching her as she flitted away. Then, with a cry of anguish, he looked towards his empty church standing shadowy in the cold moonlight, and re-entered his desolate home.

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