

PHYLLIS OF PHILISTIA

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CHAPTER I.

AN ASTRONOMER WITHOUT A TELESCOPE.

"After all," said Mr. Ayrton, "what is marriage?"

"Ah!" sighed Phyllis. She knew that her father had become possessed of a phrase, and that he was anxious to flutter it before her to see how it went. He was a connoisseur in the bric-a-brac of phrases.

"Marriage means all your eggs in one basket," said he.

"Ah!" sighed Phyllis once more. She wondered if her father really thought that she would be comforted in her great grief by a phrase. She did not want to know how marriage might be defined. She knew that all definitions are indefinite. She knew that in the case of marriage everything depends upon the definer and the occasion.

"So you see there is no immediate cause to grieve, my dear," resumed her father.

She did not quite see that this was the logical conclusion of the whole matter; but that was possibly because she was born a woman, and felt that marriage is to a woman what a keel is to a ship.

"I think there is a very good cause to grieve when we find a man like George Holland turning deliberately round from truth to falsehood," said Phyllis sternly.

"And what's worse, running a very good chance of losing his living," remarked the father. "Of course it will have to be proved that Moses and Abraham and David and the rest of them were not what he says they were; and it strikes me that all the bench of bishops, and a royal commissioner or two thrown in, would have considerable difficulty in doing that nowadays."

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"What! You take his part, papa?" she cried, starting up. "You take his part? You think I was wrong to tell him—what I did tell him?"

"I don't take his part, my dear," said Mr. Ayrton. "I think that he's a bit of a fool to run his head into a hornet's nest because he has come to the conclusion that Abraham's code of morality was a trifle shaky, and that Samson was a shameless libertine. Great Heavens! has the man got no notion of the perspective of history?"

"Perspective? History? It's the Bible, papa!"

Indignation was in Phyllis' eyes, but there was a reverential tone in her voice. Her father looked at her—listened to her. In the pause he thought:

"Good Heavens! What sort of a man is George Holland, who is ready to relinquish the love and loveliness of that girl, simply because he thinks poorly of the patriarchs?"

"He attacks the Bible, papa," resumed Phyllis gravely. "What horrible things he said about Ruth!"

"Ah, yes, Ruth—the heroine of the harvest festival," said her father. "Ah, he might have left us our Ruth. Besides, she was a woman. Heavens above! is there no chivalry remaining among men?"

"Ah, if it was only chivalry! But—the Bible!"

"Quite so—the yes, to be sure. But don't you think you may take the Bible too seriously, Phyllis?"

"Oh, papa! too seriously?"

"Why not? That's George Holland's mistake, I fear. Why should he work himself to a fury over the peccadillos of the patriarchs? The principle of the statute of limitations should be applied to such cases. If the world, and the colleges of theology, have dealt lightly with Samson and David and Abraham and Jacob and the rest of them for some thousands of years, why should George Holland rake up things against them, and that, too, on very doubtful evidence? But I should be the last person in the world to complain of the course which he has seen fit to adopt, since it has left you with me a little longer, my dearest child. I did not, of course, oppose your engagement, but I have often asked myself what I should do without you? How should I ever work up my facts, or, what is more important, my quotations, in your absence, Phyllis? On some questions, my dear, you are a veritable Blue-book—yes, an /edition de luxe/ of a Blue-book."

"And I meant to be so useful to him as well," said Phyllis, taking her father's praises more demurely than she had taken his phrases. "I

meant to help him in his work.”

”Ah, what a fool the man is! How could any man in his senses give up a thing of flesh and blood like you, for the sake of proving or trying to prove, that some people who lived five or six thousand years ago—if they ever lived at all—would have rendered themselves liable to imprisonment, without the option of a fine, if they lived in England since the passing of certain laws—recent laws, too, we must remember!”

”Papa!”

”Anyhow, you have done with him, my dear. A man who can’t see that crime is really a question of temperament, and sin invariably a question of geography—well, we’ll say no more about it. At what hour did you say he was coming?”

”Four. I don’t think I shall break down.”

”Break down? Why on earth should you break down? You have a mind to know, and you know your own mind. That’s everything. But of course you’ve had no experience of matters of this sort. He was your first real lover?”

Phyllis’ face became crimson. She retained sufficient presence of mind, however, to make a little fuss with the window-blind before letting it down. Her father stared at her for a moment, and there was rather a long pause before he laughed.

”I said ‘real lover,’ my dear,” he remarked. ”The real lover is the one who talks definitely about dates and the house agent’s commission. As a rule the real lover does not make love. True love is born, not made. But you—Heavens above! perhaps I did an injustice to you—to you and to the men. Maybe you’re not such a tyro after all, Phyllis.”

Phyllis gave a very pretty little laugh—such a laugh as would have convinced any man but a father—perhaps, indeed, some fathers—that she was not without experience. Suddenly she became grave. Her father never loved her so dearly as when that little laugh was flying over her face, leaving its living footprints at the corners of her eyes, at the exquisite curve of her mouth. It relieved her from the suspicion of priggishness to which, now and again, her grave moods and appropriate words laid her open. She was not so proper, after all, her father now felt; she was a girl with the experiences of a girl who has tempted men and seen what came of it.

She spoke:

”It is a very serious thing, giving a man your promise and then—”

"Then finding that your duty to him—to him, mind—forces you to tell him that you cannot carry out that promise," said her father. "Yes, it is a very serious thing, but not so serious as carrying out that promise would be if you had even the least little feeling that at the end of three months he was not a better man than you suspected he was at the beginning. There's a bright side to everything, even a honeymoon; but the reason that a honeymoon is so frequently a failure is because the man is bound to be found out by his wife inside the month. It is better that you found out now, than later on, that you could not possibly be happy with a man who spoke slightly of the patriarchs and their wives. Now I'll leave you, with confidence that you will be able to explain matters to Mr. Holland."

"What! you won't be here?"

Dismay was in the girl's face as she spoke. She had clearly looked for the moral support of her father's presence while she would be making her explanation to the man whom she had, a few months before, promised to marry, but whom she had found it necessary to dismiss by letter, owing to her want of sympathy in some of his recent utterances.

"You won't be here?"

"No; I have unfortunately an engagement just at that hour, Phyllis," replied Mr. Ayrton. "But do you really think there is any need for me to be here? Personally, I fancy that my presence would only tend to complicate matters. Your own feeling, your own woman's instinct, will enable you to explain—well, all that needs explanation. I have more confidence in your capacity to explain since you gave that pretty little laugh just now. Experience—ah, the experience of a girl such as you are, suggests an astronomer without a telescope. Still, there were astronomers before there were telescopes; and so I leave you, my beloved child—ah, my own child once again! No cold hand of a lover is now between us."

It was not until he was some distance down Piccadilly that it occurred to him that he should have pictured the lover with a warm hand; and that omission on his part caused him a greater amount of irritation than anyone who was unaware of his skill in phrase-making could have thought possible to arise from a lapse apparently so trifling.

It was not until he had reached the Acropolis and had referred, in the hearing of the most eminently dull of the many distinguished members of that club, to the possibility of a girl's experiences of man being likened to an astronomer without a telescope, that he felt himself again.

The dull distinguished man had smiled.

CHAPTER II.

HE KNEW THAT IT WAS A TROUBLESOME PROCESS, BECOMING A GOOD CLERGYMAN, SO HE DETERMINED TO BECOME A GOOD PREACHER INSTEAD.

Phyllis sat alone in one of the drawing rooms, waiting until the hour of four should arrive and bring into her presence the Rev. George Holland, to plead his cause to her—to plead to be returned to her favor. He had written to her to say that he would make such an attempt.

She had looked on him with favor for several months—with especial favor for three months, for three months had just passed since she had promised to marry him, believing that to be the wife of a clergyman who, though still young, had two curates to do the rough work for him—clerical charwomen, so to speak—would make her the happiest of womankind. Mr. Holland was rector of St. Chad's, Battenberg Square, and he was thought very highly of even by his own curates, who intoned all the commonplace, everyday prayers in the liturgy for him, leaving him to do all the high-class ones, and to repeat the Commandments. (A rector cannot be expected to do journeyman's work, as it were; and it is understood that a bishop will only be asked to intone three short prayers, those from behind a barrier, too; an archbishop refuses to do more than pronounce the benediction.)

The Rev. George Holland was a good-looking man of perhaps a year or two over thirty. He did not come of a very good family—a fact which probably accounted for his cleverness at Oxford and in the world. He was a Fellow of his college, though he had not been appointed rector of St. Chad's for this reason. The appointment, as is well known (in the Church, at any rate), is the gift of the Earl of Earls court, and it so happened that, when at college together, George Holland had saved the young man who a year or two afterward became Earl of Earls court from a very great misfortune. The facts of the case were these: Tommy Trebovoir, as he was then, had made up his mind to marry a lady whose piquant style of beauty made the tobacconist's shop where she served the most popular in town. By the exercise of a great deal of diplomacy and the expenditure of a little money, Mr. Holland brought about a match between her and quite another man—a man who was not even on a subsidiary path to a peerage, and whose only connection with the university was due to his hiring out horses to those whom he called the "young gents." Tommy was so indignant with his friend for the part he had played in this transaction he ceased to speak to him, and went the length of openly insulting him. Six years afterward, when he had become Earl of Earls court, and had espoused the daughter of a duke,—a lady who was greatly interested in the advance of temperance,

—he had presented George Holland with the living at St. Chad's.

People then said that Lord Earls court was a lesser fool than some of his acts suggested. Others said that the Rev. George Holland had never been a fool, though he had been a Fellow of his college.

They were right. George Holland knew that it was a troublesome process becoming a good clergyman, so he determined to become a good preacher instead. In the course of a year he had become probably the best-known preacher (legitimate, not Dissenting) in London, and that, too, without annoying the church-wardens of St. Chad's by drawing crowds of undesirable listeners to crush their way into the proprietary sittings, and to join in the singing and responses, and to do other undesirable acts. No, he only drew to the church the friends of the said holders, whose contributions to the offertory were exemplary.

His popularity within a certain circle was great; but, as Lord Earls court was heard to say, "He never played to the pit."

He was invited to speak to a resolution at a Mansion House meeting to express indignation at the maintenance of the opium traffic in China.

He was also invited by the Countess of Earls court to appear on the platform to meet the deputation of Chinese who represented the city meeting held at Peking in favor of local option in England; for the great national voice of China had pronounced in favor of local option in England.

Shortly afterward he met Phyllis Ayrton, and had asked her to marry him, and she had consented.

And now Phyllis was awaiting his coming to her, in order that he might learn from her own lips what he had already learned from the letter which he had received from her the day before; namely, that she found it necessary for her own peace of mind to break off her engagement with him.

Phyllis Ayrton had felt for some months that it would be a great privilege for any woman to become the wife of a clergyman. Like many other girls who have a good deal of time for thought,—thought about themselves, their surroundings, and the world in general,—she had certain yearnings after a career. But she had lived all her life in Philistia, and considered it to be very well adapted as a place of abode for a proper-minded young woman; in fact, she could not imagine any proper-minded young woman living under any other form of government than that which found acceptance in Philistia. She had no yearning to startle her neighbors. With a large number of young women, the idea that startling one's neighbors is a career by itself seems to prevail just at present; but Phyllis had no taste in this direction. Writing a book and riding a bicycle were alike outside her

calculations of a scheme of life. Hospital nursing was nothing that she would shrink from; at the same time, it did not attract her; she felt that she could dress quite as becomingly as a hospital nurse in another way.

She wondered, if it should come to the knowledge of the heads of the government of Philistia that she had a yearning to become the wife of a clergyman, would they regard her as worthy to be conducted across the frontier, and doomed to perpetual expatriation. When she began to think out this point, she could not but feel that if she were deserving of punishment,—she looked on expulsion from Philistia as the severest punishment that could be dealt out to her, for she was extremely patriotic,—there were a good many other young women, and women who were no longer young, who were equally culpable. She had watched the faces of quite a number of the women who crowded St. Chad's at every service, and she had long ago come to the conclusion that the desire to become the wife of a clergyman was an aspiration which was universally distributed among the unmarried women of the congregation.

She knew so much, but she was not clever enough to know that it was her observance of this fact that confirmed her in her belief that it would be a blessed privilege for such a woman as she to become the wife of such a clergyman as George Holland. She was not wise enough to be able to perceive that a woman marries a man not so much because she things highly of marriage—although she does think highly of it; not so much because she thinks highly of the man—though she may think highly of him, but simply because she sees that other women want to marry him.

In three months she considered herself blessed among women. She was the one chosen out of all the flock. She did not look around her in church in pride of conquest; but she looked demurely down to her sacred books, feeling that all the other women were gazing at her in envy; and she felt that there was no pride in the thought that the humility of her attitude—downcast eyes, with long lashes shading half her cheeks, meekly folded hands—was the right one to adopt under the circumstances.

And then she saw several of the young women who had been wearing sober shades of dresses for some years,—though in their hearts (and she knew it) they were passionately attached to colors,—appearing like poppies once more, and looking very much the better for the change, too; and she felt that it was truly sad for young women to—well, to show their hands, so to speak. They might have waited for some weeks before returning to the colors of the secular.

She did not know that they felt that they had wasted too much time in sober shades already. The days are precious in a world in which no really trustworthy hair dye may be bought for money.

And then there came to her a month of coldly inquisitive doubt. (This was when people had ceased to congratulate her and to talk, the nice ones, of the great cleverness of George Holland; the nasty ones, of the great pity that so delightful a man did not come of a better family.)

Why should she begin to ask herself if she really loved George Holland; if the feeling she had for him should be called by the name of love, or by some other name that did not mean just the same thing? Of course she had thought a good deal—though her father did not know it—of love. She had seen upon other people the effect of the possession of this gift of love, how it had caused them to forget pain and poverty, and shame, and infamy, and God, and death, and hell. Ah! that was love—that was love! and she had hoped that one day such a gift of love would be given to her; for it was surely the thing that was best worth having in the world! Once or twice she had fancied that it was at the point of being given to her. There had been certain thrilling passages between herself and two men,—an interval of a year between each,—and there had also been a kiss in an alcove designed by her dearest friend, Ella Linton, for the undoing of mankind, a place of softened lights and shadowy palms. It was her recollection of these incidents that had caused her to fumble with the blind cord when her father had been suggesting to her the disadvantages of inexperience in matters of the heart. But the incidents had led to nothing, except, perhaps, a week or two of remorse. But she could not help feeling, when that month of curious doubt was upon her, that the little thrill which she had felt when one man had put his arm around her for an instant, when another man—he was very young—had put his lips upon her mouth—it was a straightforward kiss—suggested a nearer approach to love than she had yet been conscious of in the presence of George Holland. (He had never done more than kiss her hand. Is it on record that any man did more when dressed with the severity of the cleric?)

This was a terrible impression for a young woman to retain before her engagement to a man has passed into its third month. Then she began to wonder if all her previous ideas—all her previous aspirations—were mistaken. She began to wonder if this was the reality of love—this conviction that there was nothing in the whole world that she would welcome with more enthusiasm than an announcement on the part of her father that he was going on a voyage to Australia, and that he meant to take her with him.

And then—

Well, then she threw herself upon her bed and wept for an hour one evening, and for two hours (at intervals) another evening; and then looked up the old published speeches made by a certain cabinet minister in his irresponsible days, on a question which he had recently introduced. Her father was bitterly opposed to the most

recent views of the minister, and was particularly anxious to confront him with his own phrases of thirty years back. She spent four hours copying out the words which were now meant by Mr. Ayrton to confound the utterer.

CHAPTER III.

THE BISHOP KNEW SOMETHING OF MAN, AND HE KNEW SOMETHING OF THE CHURCH; HE EVEN KNEW SOMETHING OF THE BIBLE.

Her father when he came in commended her diligence. He read over those damning extracts, punctuating them with chuckles; he would make an example of that minister who had found it convenient to adopt a course diametrically opposed to the principle involved in his early speeches. He chuckled, reading the extracts while he paced the room, drawing upon his stock of telling phrases, which were calculated to turn the derision of the whole House of Commons upon his opponent.

Thus, being very well satisfied with himself, he was satisfied with her, and kissed her, with a sigh.

"What a treasure you are to me, dearest one!" he said. There was a pause before he added, in a contemplative tone:

"I suppose a clergyman has no need ever to hunt up the past deliverances of another clergyman in order to confound him out of his own mouth. Ah, no; I should fancy not."

Regret was in his voice. He seemed to suggest to her that he believed her powers would be wasted as the wife of a man who, of course, being a clergyman, could have no enemies.

"Dearest papa!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms, and sobbing on his shirt front, "dearest papa, I will not leave you. I don't want to be anyone's wife. I want to be your daughter—only to be your daughter."

He comforted her with kisses and soothing smoothings of the hair. No, no, he said; he would not be selfish. He would remember that a father was the trustee of his child's happiness.

"But I know I can only be happy with you, my father!" she cried; but it was of no avail. He, being a father and not a mother, was unable to perceive what was in the girl's heart. He considered it quite natural that she should be a trifle hysterical in anticipating her new life—

that strange untraveled country! Ah, is there anything more pathetic, he thought, than a girl's anticipations of wifedom? But he would do his duty, and he fancied that he was doing his duty when he put aside her earnest, almost passionate protestations, and told her how happy she would be with the man who was lucky enough to have won the pure treasure of her love.

What could she do? The terrible doubts of that month of doubting broadened into certainties. She knew that she did not love George Holland; but she had not the courage to face Philistia as the girl who did not know her own mind. Philistia was very solid on such points as the sacredness of an engagement between a man and a woman. It was a contract practically as abiding as marriage, in the eyes of Philistia; and, indeed, Phyllis herself had held this belief, and had never hesitated to express it. So nothing was left to her but to marry George Holland. After all, he was a brilliant and distinguished man, and had not a score of other girls wanted to marry him? Oh, she would marry him and give up her life to the splendid duties which devolve upon the wife of a clergyman.

But just as she had made up her mind to face her fate, Mr. Holland's fate induced him to publish the book at which he had been working for some time. It came out just when the girl was becoming resigned to her future by his side, and it attracted even more attention than the author had hoped it would achieve.

The book was titled "Revised Versions," and it was strikingly modern in design and in tone. It purported to deal with several personages and numerous episodes of the Old Testament, not from the standpoint of the comparative philologist; not from the standpoint of the comparative mythologist, but from the standpoint of the modern man of common sense and average power of discrimination; and the result was that the breath of a good many people, especially clergymen, was taken from them, and that the Rev. George Holland became the best-known clergyman in England.

He dealt with the patriarchs in succession, and they fared very badly at his hands. He showed that Abraham had not one good act recorded to his credit, and contrasted his duplicity with the magnanimity of the ruler of Egypt whom he visited. He dwelt upon the Hagar episode, showing that the adulterer was also a murderer by intention, and so forth; while no words could be too strong to apply to Sara, his wife. Isaac did not call for elaborate notice. He could not be accused of any actual crime, but if he was a man of strong personality, he was singularly unfortunate in having failed to impart to his wife any of that integrity which he may have practiced through life. Her methods of dealing with him after they had lived together for a good many years were criminal, considering the largeness of the issue at stake as the result of his blessing. As for Jacob, not a single praiseworthy act of his long life was available to his biographer. His career was

that of the most sordid of hucksters. Of eleven of his sons nothing good is told, but Joseph was undoubtedly an able and exemplary man; the only thing to his discredit being his utter callousness regarding the fate of his father, after he had attained to a high position in Egypt.

The chapter on the patriarchs was followed by one that dealt with the incidents of the Exodus. The writer said that he feared that even the most indulgent critic must allow that the whole scheme of Moses was a shocking one; but he was probably the greatest man that ever lived on the face of the earth, if he was the leader and organizer of a band of depredators who for bloodthirst and rapacity had no parallel in history. How could it be expected that a kingdom founded upon the massacre of men and cemented by the blood of women and children should survive? It had survived only as example to the world of the impossibility of a permanent success being founded upon the atrocious methods pursued by the worst of the robber states of the East. While civilization had been spreading on all sides of them, the people of Israel had remained the worst of barbarians, murdering the men who had from time to time arisen to try and rescue them from the abysses of criminality into which they had fallen,—abysses of criminality and superstition,—until they had filled their cup of crime by the murder of the One whom the world worships to-day.

Incidentally, of course, the character of Samson was dealt with. Delilah was shown to be one of the most heroic of womankind, making greater sacrifices through her splendid patriotism than Joan of Arc. But Samson—

Ruth was also dealt with incidentally. She was the woman who expresses her willingness to give up her God at the bidding of another woman, and who had entered into a plot with that same woman to entrap a man whom they looked to support them.

Then there was David. It was not the Bath-sheba episode, but the Abishag, that the author treated at length—one of the most revolting transactions in history, especially as there is some reason to believe that the unfortunate girl was, when it was perpetrated, already attached to one of the sons of the loathsome, senile sensualist.

Perhaps, on the whole, it was not surprising that after the publication of this book the Rev. George Holland became the best-known clergyman in England, or that the breath of bishops should be taken from them. So soon as some of them recovered from the first brunt of the shock, they met together and held up their hands, saying that they awaited the taking of immediate action by the prelate within whose see St. Chad's was situated. But that particular prelate was a man who had never been known to err on the side of rapidity of action. Nearly a week had passed before he made any move in the matter, and then the move he made was in the direction of the Engadine. He crossed the

Channel with the book under his arm. He determined to read it at his leisure. Being a clergyman, he could not, of course, be expected to have examined, from any standpoint but that of the clergyman, the characters of the persons dealt with in the book, and he was naturally shocked at the freedom shown by the rector of St. Chad's in criticising men whose names have been held in the highest esteem for some thousands of years. He at once perceived that the rector of St. Chad's had been very narrow-minded in his views regarding the conduct of the men whom he had attacked. It occurred to him, as it had to Mr. Ayrton, that the writer had drawn his picture without any regard for perspective. That was very foolish on the part of a man who was a Fellow of his college, the bishop thought; and besides, there was no need for the book—its tendency was not to help the weaker brethren. But to assume that the book would, as some newspaper articles said it would, furnish the most powerful argument that had yet been brought forward in favor of the Disestablishment of Church, was, he thought, to assume a great deal too much. The Church that had survived Wesley, Whitefield, Colenso, Darwin, and Renan would not succumb to George Holland. The bishop recollected how the Church had bitterly opposed all the teaching of the men of wisdom whose names came back to him; and how it had ended by making their teaching its own. Would anyone venture to assert that the progress of Christianity was dependent upon what people thought of the acceptance by David of the therapeutic course prescribed for him? Was the morality which the Church preached likely to be jeopardized because Ruth was a tricky young woman?

The bishop knew something of man, and he knew something of the Church, he even knew something of the Bible; and when he came to the chapter in "Revised Versions" that dealt with the episode of Ruth and Boaz, he flung the book into a corner of his bedroom, exclaiming, "Puppy!"

And then there came before his eyes a vision of a field of yellow corn, ripe for the harvest. The golden sunlight gleamed upon the golden grain through which the half-naked brown-skinned men walked with their sickles. The half-naked brown-skinned women followed the binders, gleaning the ears, and among the women was the one who had said, "Entreat me not to leave thee." He had read that old pastoral when he was a child at the knee of his mother. It was surely the loveliest pastoral of the East, and its charm would be in no wise impaired because a man who failed to appreciate the beauty of its simplicity, had almost called Ruth by the worst name that can be applied to a woman.

The bishop did not mind what George Holland called Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Samson, but Ruth—to say that Ruth—

The bishop said "Puppy!" once again. (He had trained himself only to think the adjectives which laymen find appropriate to use in such a case as was under his consideration.)

But he made up his mind to take no action whatever against the Rev. George Holland on account of the book. If the Rev. George Holland fancied that he was to be persecuted into popularity, the Rev. George Holland was greatly mistaken, and the bishop had a shrewd idea that the rector of St. Chad's was greatly mistaken.

(It may be mentioned that he came to this determination when he had read the book through, and found it was so cleverly written that it included no heretical phrase in all its pages.)

But so soon as Phyllis Ayrton had read the first review of the book that fell into her hands, she felt inexpressibly shocked. Great Heavens! Was it possible that she was actually at that moment engaged to marry the man who had written such a book—a book that held up Delilah to admiration, and that abased Ruth? (It was singular how everyone settled upon Ruth in this connection.)

She did not pause to analyze her feelings—to try and find out if she was really so fond of Ruth as to make Ruth's insult her own; but without a moment's delay, without a word of consultation with her father, she sat down at her desk and wrote a letter to George Holland, asking him to release her from her promise to marry him; and adding that if he should decline to do so it would make no difference to her; she would consider the engagement between them at an end all the same.

She felt, when that letter was posted, as if a great weight were lifted from her mind—from her heart. Then a copy of "Revised Versions" arrived for her from the author, and with the ink still wet upon the pen with which she had written that letter to him, she caught up the book and covered it with kisses.

Had he seen that action her lover would have been thoroughly satisfied. A young woman must be very deeply in love with a man when she kisses the cover of a book which he has just published. That is what George Holland would have thought, having but a superficial acquaintance with the motives that sway young women.

Later in the day he had replied to her letter, and had appointed four o'clock on the following afternoon as the hour when he trusted she would find it convenient to see him, in order to give him an opportunity of making an explanation which he trusted would enable her to see that "Revised Versions," so far from being the dreadful book she seemed to imagine it to be, was in reality written with a high purpose.

She had not shrunk from an interview with him. She had sent him a line to let him know that she would be at home at four o'clock; and now she sat in her drawing room and observed, without emotion, that in five minutes that hour would strike.

The clock struck, and before the last tone had died away, the footman announced the Rev. George Holland.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE HAD NO RIGHT TO ACCUSE HIM OF READING THE BIBLE DAILY.

Phyllis shook hands with her visitor. He sought to retain her hand, as he had been in the habit of doing, as he stood beside her with something of a proprietary air. He relinquished her hand with a little look of surprise—a sort of pained surprise. She was inexorable. She would not even allow him to maintain his proprietary air.

"Do sit down, Mr. Holland," she said.

"What! 'Mr. Holland' already? Oh, Phyllis!"

He had a good voice, full of expression—something beyond mere musical expression. People (they were mostly women) said that his voice had soul in it, whatever they meant by that.

She made no reply. What reply could she make? She only waited for him to sit down.

"Your letter came as a great shock to me, Phyllis," said he, when he had seated himself, not too close to her. He did not wish her to fancy that he was desirous of having a subtle influence of propinquity as an ally. "A great shock to me."

"A shock?" said she. "A shock, after you had written that book?"

"I fancied you would understand it, Phyllis—you, at least. Of course I expected to be misrepresented by the world—the critics—the clerics—what you will—but you— You had not read it when you wrote that letter to me—that terrible letter. You could not have read it."

"I had only read one notice of it—that was enough."

"And you could write that letter to me solely as the evidence of one wretched print? Oh, Phyllis!"

Pain was in his voice. It may have been in his face as well, but she did not see it; his face was averted from her.

"Yes," she said quietly; "I wrote that letter, Mr. Holland. You see, the paper gave large extracts from the book. I did not come to my

conclusion from what the newspaper article said, but from what you had said in your book—from the quoted passages.”

”They did not do me justice. I did not look for justice at their hands. But you, Phyllis—”

”I have read your book now, Mr. Holland—”

”Ah, let me plead with you, Phyllis—not ’Mr. Holland,’ I entreat of you.”

”And my first thought on reading it was that I had not written to you so strongly as I should have done.”

”My dear Phyllis, do not say that, I beg of you. You cannot know how you pain me.”

”To be misunderstood by you—/you/.”

She got upon her feet so quickly that it might almost be said she sprang up.

”/You/ must have misunderstood /me/ greatly, Mr. Holland, if you fancied that you could write such a book as you wrote and not get such a letter from me. The Bible—Ruth—and you a clergyman—reading it daily in the church— Oh! I cannot tell you all that I thought—all that I still think.”

He did not correct the mistake she had made. She had no right to accuse him of reading the Bible daily in his church. He was not in the habit of doing that—it was his curates who did it. He watched her as she stood at a window with her back turned to him. Her hands were behind her. Her breath came audibly, for she had spoken excitedly.

Then he also rose and came beside her.

”I wrote that book, as I believed you would perceive when you had read it, in order to remove from the minds of the people—those people who have not given the matter a thought—the impression—I know it prevails—that our faith—the truth of our religion—is dependent upon the acceptance as good of such persons as our very religion itself enables us to pronounce evil. My aim was to show that our faith is not built upon such a foundation of impurity—of imperfection. The spirit which prevails nowadays—the modern spirit—it is the result of the development of science. This scientific spirit necessitates the consideration of all the elements of our faith from the standpoint of reason.”

”Faith—reason?”

”If the Church is to appeal to all men, its method must be scientific. It is sad to think of all that the Church has lost in the past through the want of wisdom of those who had its best interests at heart, and believed they were doing it good service by opposing scientific research. They fancied that the faith would not survive the light of truth. They professed to believe that the faith was strong enough to work miracles—to change the heart of man, and yet that it would be jeopardized by the calculations of astronomers. The astronomers were prohibited from calculating; the geologists were forbidden to unearth the mysteries of their science, lest the discovery of the truth should be detrimental to the faith. They believed that the truth was opposed to the faith. Warning after warning the Church received that the two were one; that man would only accept the truth, whether it came from the lips of the churchman or from the investigations of science. Grudgingly the Church became tolerant of the seekers after truth—men who were not greatly concerned in the preservation of the mummy dust of dogma. But how many thousand persons are there not, to-day, who think that the Church is on one side, and the truth on the other? The intolerant attitude of the Church, still maintained in these days, when the spirit of science pervades every form of thought, has been productive of probably the largest body that ever existed in the country, of sensible men and women, who never enter a church door. They want to know whatsoever things are true; they do not want to be dredged with the mummy dust of dogma.”

”But the Bible—the Bible!”

”It is necessary for me to tell you all that I feel on this subject; all that I have felt for several years past—ever since I left the divinity school behind me, and went into the world of thinking men and women. It is necessary to tell these men and women in unmistakable language that our faith aims at a perfect type of manhood—at the perfection of truth. It is necessary to tell them that we do not regard, except with abhorrence, such types of men as have for centuries been held up to admiration simply because they have for centuries been the objects of admiration, of imitation, of veneration, on the part of the debased people who gave us the earlier books of the Bible. The memory of Jacob became the dominant influence among the Hebrew nation; hence the continuous curse that rested upon them, the curse that rests upon the cheat, the defrauder of his own household, his brother, his father, his uncle. It is necessary to say that the world should know that our religion is founded upon truth, purity, self-sacrifice—that it abhors the cheat and the sensualist. It is necessary to proclaim to the world our abhorrence of the cult whose highest development was the Pharisee. The aim of the religion of Christ is to produce the perfect man, and to root out the Pharisee. When the Church ceases to connive at falsehood and sensualism; when it openly professes its abhorrence of the religion of the Hebrews; then, and then only, will it become the power in the earth which the exponent of Christianity should become. Humanity had been crying out

for the religion of humanity, that is, Christianity, for centuries, but the Church tells it that true religion is an amalgamation of the loveliness of Christianity and the barbarity of Judaism—an impossible amalgamation, and one which millions of poor souls have perished in a vain attempt to accomplish. Humanity wants Christ, and Christ only, and that the Church has hitherto refused to give; hence the millions of thinking men and women, believers in the religion of Christ, who remain forever outside the walls of the Church; hence, also, that terrible record of murder and massacre, perpetrated through long ages with the sanction of the Church. Where, in the religion of Christ, can one find the sanction for massacre? It is nowhere to be found except in the Psalms of the senile sensualist—in the commands of Moses, the leader of the marauders of the desert. Christ swept away the barbarities of the teaching of Moses. He perceived how miserably it had failed; how it had retarded all that was good in man, and sanctioned all that was evil. He perceived how it had kept the nation in a condition of barbarity; how it had made it the prey of the civilized nations around it; how it had made the Hebrew nations the contempt of civilization; and yet the Church that calls itself the Church of Christ has not yet had the courage to offer humanity anything but that impossible task—the amalgamation of the law that came by Moses and the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ.”

He spoke with all the fervor of the preacher, with pale face, brilliant eyes, and clenched hands; but in a voice adapted to a drawing room. Phyllis of Philistia could not but admit that, in the phrase of Philistia he had spoken in perfect taste. He had not alluded definitely to the boldness of Ruth or to the calorific course accepted by the aged David. He had spoken in those general terms which are adopted by the clergymen who never err against good taste as defined by the matrons of Philistia.

She did not know whether she admired him or detested him. But she was certain that she did not love him. He might be right in all that he had said, but she had freed herself from him. He might be destined to become one of the most prominent men of the last ten years of the century, but she would never marry him.

She stood face to face with him when he had spoken.

There was a long silence.

A gleam, a very faint gleam of triumph came to his eyes.

”Good-bye,” said she, flashing out her hand to him, and with her eyes still fixed upon his face.

CHAPTER V.

IN LOVE THERE ARE NO GOOD-BYES.

He was so startled that he took a step backward. She remained with her hand outstretched.

Was that only the result of the eloquent expression of his views—that outstretched hand which was offered to him for an instant only as a symbol of its withdrawal from him forever?

”You cannot mean—”

”Good-by,” said she.

”Have I not explained all that seemed to you to stand in need of explanation?” he asked.

”The book—the book remains. I asked for no explanation,” said she.

”But you are too good, too reasonable, to dismiss me in this fashion, Phyllis. Why, even the bishop—/would sit upon a fence to see how the book would be received by the public before taking action against the author/,” was what was in his mind, but he stopped short, and then added a phrase that had no reference to the bishop. ”Can you ever have loved me?” was the phrase which he thought should appeal to her more forcibly than any reference to the bishop’s sense of what was opportune.

She took back her hand, and her eyes fell at the same moment that her face flushed.

He felt that he had not been astray in his estimate of the controversial value—in the eyes of a girl, of course—of the appeal which he made to her. A girl understands nothing of the soundness of an argument on a Biblical question (or any other), he thought; but she understands an appeal made to her by a man whom she had loved, and whom she therefore loves still, though something may have occurred to make her think otherwise.

”Can you ever have loved me?” he said again, and his voice was now more reproachful.

There was a pause before she said:

”That is the question which I have been asking myself for some time—ever since I read about that book. Oh, please, Mr. Holland, do not stay any longer! Cannot you see that if, after you have made an

explanation that should satisfy any reasonable person, I still remain in my original way of thinking, I am not the woman who should be your wife?"

"You would see with my eyes if you were my wife," he said, and he believed that she would, so large an amount of confidence had he in his own power to dominate a woman.

"Ah!" she said, "you have provided me with the strongest reason why I should never become your wife, Mr. Holland."

"Do not say that, Phyllis!" he cried, in a low voice, almost a piteous voice. "I must have you with me in this great work which I feel has been given me to accomplish. I am prepared to make any sacrifice for the cause which I have at heart—the cause to which I mean to devote the rest of my life; but you—you—I must have you with me, Phyllis. Don't give me an answer now. All I ask of you is to think over the whole matter from the standpoint of one who loves the truth, and who does not fear the result of those who are investigators. A few years ago the geologists were regarded as the enemies of the faith. Later the evolutionists were looked on with abhorrence. Had any clergyman ventured to assent to that doctrine which we now know to be the everlasting truth of the scheme of earthly life propounded by the Creator, he would have been compelled to leave the Church. I do not know what will happen to me, my Phyllis. No, no! do not say anything to me now. All that I ask of you is to think—think—think."

"That is it—that is your modern scientific spirit!" she cried. "You, and such as you, say 'think—think—think' to us—to poor women and men who are asking for comfort, for protection against the evil of the world. You say 'think—think—think,' when you should say pray—pray—pray.' Where are you going to end? you have begun by taking from us our Bible. What do you propose to give us in exchange for it? No—no, don't answer me. I did not mean to enter into the question with you—to enter into any question with you. I have no right to do so."

"You have every right, Phyllis. If I should cause offence to the least of the little ones of the flock with which I have been intrusted, it would be better that a millstone were hanged round my neck and that I were cast into the sea. You have a right to ask and it is laid on me to answer."

"Then I decline to avail myself of the privilege; I will ask you nothing, except to say good-by."

"I will not say it, Phyllis, and I will not hear you say it. Three months ago you told me that you loved me."

"And I fancied that I did, but now—"

"Ah! you think that you have the power to cease loving at a moment's notice? You will find out your mistake, my child. In love there are no good-bys. I take your hand now, but not to say good-by; I feel that you are still mine—that you will be mine more than ever when you think—think—and pray."

"Ah! You ask me to pray?"

"Pray—pray for me, child. I need the prayers of such as you, for I feel that my hour of deepest trial is drawing nigh. Do you fancy that I am the man to take back anything that I have written? Look at me, Phyllis; I tell you here that I will stand by everything that I have written. Whatever comes of it, the book remains. Even if I lose all that I have worked for,—even if I lose you,—I will still say 'the book remains.' I am ready to suffer for it. I say in all humility that I believe God will give me grace to die for it."

She had given him her hand. He was still holding it when he spoke his final sentence, looking, not into her face, but into a space beyond it. His eyes more than suggested the eyes of a martyr waiting undaunted for the lighting of the fagots. Suddenly he dropped her hand. He looked for a moment into her face. He saw that the tears were upon it. He turned and walked out of the room without a word.

No word came from her.

He knew that he had left her at exactly the right moment. She was undoubtedly annoyed by the publication of the book; but that was because she had read some reviews of it, and was, girl-like, under the impression that the murmur of the reviewers was the mighty voice that echoes round the world. He felt that she would think differently when his real persecution began. He looked forward with great hope to the result of his real persecution. She would never hold out against that. If the bishop would only take action at once and attempt to deprive him of his pastorate, there was nothing that he might not look for.

And then he reflected that on the following Sunday the church would be crowded to the doors. She would see that. She would see the thousands of the fashionable women—he hoped even for men—who would fill every available seat, every available standing place in the church, and who would all be anxious to hear his defense. That would show her that the publication of this book had raised him far above the heads of the ordinary clergyman who droned away, Sunday after Sunday, in half empty churches to congregations that never became interested. Yes, for many Sundays St. Chad's would be crowded to the doors. And then he trusted that the bishop would take action against him, and in proportion to the severity of his persecution on the one hand would be his popularity on the other hand.

All this would, he felt, advance the cause which he had at heart; for

he was thoroughly sincere in his belief that the views which he advocated in "Revised Versions" were calculated to place the Church on a firmer basis, and to cause it to appeal to those persons who, having been inculcated with the spirit of modern scientific inquiry, never entered a church porch.

He had not been guilty of an empty boast when he had expressed to her his readiness to die for the principles which he had enunciated with considerable clearness in his book; but, at the same time, when he was walking down Piccadilly he could not avoid the feeling that if he were only subjected to a vigorous persecution—a high-class persecution, of course, with the bishop at the head of it, he would be almost certain to win back Phyllis. Her desertion of him was undoubtedly a blow to him; but he thought that, after all, it was not unnatural that such a girl as she should be somewhat frightened at the boldness of the book which he had published. He had seen the day, not so very long ago, when he would have been frightened at it himself. At any rate he felt sure that Phyllis would be able to differentiate between the case of the author of "Revised Versions" and the case of the mediocre clergyman who defied his bishop on a question of—what was the question?—something concerning the twirling of his thumbs from east to west, instead of from west to east; yes, or an equally trivial matter. He trusted that she was too discriminating a girl to bracket him with that wretched, shallow-minded person who endeavored to pose as a martyr, because he would not be permitted to do whatever he tried to insist on doing. Mr. Holland thought it had something to say to the twirling of his thumbs at a certain part of the service for the day, but if anyone had said that his memory was at fault—that the contumacious curate only wanted to make some gestures at the psychological, or, perhaps, the spiritual, moment, he would not have been surprised. He had always thought that curate a very silly person. He thanked his God that he was not such a man, and he thought that he might trust Phyllis to understand the difference between the position which he assumed and the posturing of the silly curate.

His knowledge of her powers of discrimination was not at fault. Phyllis never for a moment thought of him as posturing. She did him more than justice. She regarded him as terribly in earnest; no man unless one who was terribly in earnest could have written that book—a book which she felt was bound to alienate from him all the people who had previously honored him and delighted to listen to his preaching. Someone had said in her hearing that the preaching of George Holland was, compared to the preaching of the average clergyman, as the electric light is to the gas—the gas of a street lamp. She had flushed with pleasure,—that had been six months ago,—when it first occurred to her that to be the wife of a distinguished clergyman, who was also a scholar, was the highest vocation to which a woman could aspire. She had told her father of this testimony to the ability of the rector of St. Chad's—pride had been in her voice and eyes.

"The man who said that was a true critic," her father had remarked. "Electric light? Quite so. In the absence of sunlight the electric light does extremely well for the requirements of the average man and woman. Your critic said nothing about volts?"

That was how her father became irritating to her occasionally—leading up to some phrase which he had in his collection of bric-a-brac. "Volts!"

Yes, she felt that the sincerity of George Holland would alienate from him all the people who had previously held him in high esteem. Although she was a daughter of Philistia, it had never occurred to her that there is such a thing as a */succes scandale/*, and that the effect of such an incident in connection with the rector of a fashionable church rarely leads to his isolation.

She did George Holland more than justice, for she could not conceive his looking forward to a crowded and interested attendance at his church on the following Sunday and perhaps many successive Sundays. She could not conceive his thinking what effect the noticing of such an attendance would have upon her. To her, as to most girls, the heroic man is all heroic. The picture of the Duke of Marlborough taking a list of the linen to be sent to the wash while his troops were getting into position for a great battle is one from which they turn away. She could not think of George Holland's calculating upon the effect of a crowded church, with newspaper reporters scattered throughout the building, taking down every word that might fall from his lips. She regarded him as a man who had been compelled, by the insidious influence of what he called scientific thought, to write a shocking book; but one that he certainly believed was destined to effect a great reform in the world. Her eyes had filled with tears as he stood before her with the gleam of martyrdom in his eyes, and for an instant she felt a woman's impulse—that was a factor which George Holland had taken into consideration before he had spoken—to give both her hands to him and to promise to stand by his side in his hour of trial. But she thought of Ruth and restrained herself. Before he had reached the door she thought of him as the man from whom she had managed to escape before it was too late.

She wondered if any of those young women of the church, who had gone back to their butterfly garments on hearing that Mr. Holland had asked her to marry him, would hunt out the sober garments which they had discarded and wear them when they would hear that she was not going to marry Mr. Holland.

She rather thought that they would get new dresses and hats of the right degree of sobriety. Fashions change so quickly between February and May.

And then there was the question of sleeves!

Anyhow they would, she felt, regard themselves as having another chance. That was how they would put it.

Only for an instant did she become thoughtful. Then she sprang to her feet from the sofa on which she had thrown herself when her tears were threatening, and cried:

”Let them have him—let them all have him—all—all!”

That would have been absurd.

CHAPTER VI.

IF A GIRL REALLY LOVES A MAN SHE WILL MARRY HIM, EVEN THOUGH HE SHOULD WRITE A BOOK.

Phyllis meant the half hour which would elapse before her tea was brought to her to be a very grateful space. She meant to dwell upon the achievement of her freedom, for the feeling that she was free was very sweet to her. The fetters that had bound her had been flung away, and she now only had a splendid sense of freedom. So sweet was this sense that she made up her mind that in future it would never do for her to run any such risk as that to which she had just subjected herself. How could she ever have been such a fool as to promise to marry George Holland? That was what she was asking herself as she lay back on the pillows of the French sofa, and listened to the soft sound of the carriage wheels of the callers at the other houses in the square.

What a singular wish that was of hers—to become the wife of a clergyman! It seemed very singular to her just now. Just now she did not want to become the wife of anyone, and she hoped that no one would ask her. She did not want the worry of it. Ah, she would be very careful in the future: she would take very good care that the fact of other girls wanting to marry one particular man would not make her anxious to have him all to herself.

Before her resolutions on this very important point had been fully considered in all their bearings, her maid entered to ask if she was at home. The butler had sent a footman to her to make that inquiry, the fact being that her particular friend, Mrs. Linton, had called to see her.

Phyllis jumped up, saying:

"Of course I am home to Mrs. Linton. She will have tea with me."

She went to a glass to see if the tears which had been in her eyes—they had not fallen—had left any traces that the acuteness of Ella Linton might detect. The result of her observation was satisfactory; she would not even need to sit with her back to the light.

Then Mrs. Linton was announced, and flowed into the arms of her friend Phyllis, crying:

"Of course I knew that you would be at home to me, my beloved, even though you might be in the midst of one of those brilliant speeches which you write out for your father to deliver in the House and cause people to fancy that he is the wittiest man in place—so unlike that dreadful teetotal man who grins through the horse collar and thinks that people are imposed on. Now let me look at you, you lucky girl! You are a lucky girl, you know."

"Yes," said Phyllis, "you have called on me. We shall have tea in a minute. How good of you to come to me the first day you arrived in town! How well you are looking, my Ella!"

"So glad you think so," said Ella. "I haven't aged much during the eight months we have been apart. I have had a very good time on the whole, and so had Stephen, though he was with me for close upon a month, poor little man! But it is you, Phyllis, it is you who are the girl of the hour. Heavens! you were farsighted! Who could have imagined that he would become so famous all in a moment? I must confess that when you wrote to me that letter telling me of your engagement, and how happy you were, I was a little cross. I could not clearly see you the wife of a parson, even so presentable a parson as Mr. Holland. Oh, of course I wrote you the usual exuberant letter—what would be the good of doing anything else? But now that he has become famous—Oh, I want you to bring him with you to my first At Home—Tuesday week. It's very short notice, I know, but you must come, and bring him. You are both certain to be in great demand. Why do you shake your head that way? You need not say that you are engaged for Tuesday week."

"I will not say that I am engaged at all, in any sense," said Phyllis, with a very shallow laugh, at laugh that sounded like a ripple among pebbles; her usual laugh was like a ripple upon a silver sand.

"In any sense—for Tuesday week?"

Ella raised her eyebrows to the extent of the eighth of an inch. She lowered them in a moment, however, for the tea was being brought in. It required two able-bodied men (in plush) to carry in a dainty little silver tray, with a little silver tea-pot of a pattern that

silversmiths, for reasons which have never been fully explained, call "Queen Anne." One of the men, however, devoted himself to the care of the hot cakes of various subtle types which were inclosed in silver covered dishes.

With the lowering of her eyebrows Mrs. Linton's voice lost its previous inflection.

"I have been fortunate enough to hit upon something distinctly new in that way"—she indicated the muffin dishes. "A cake that may be eaten hot without removing one's gloves."

"What a boon!" cried Phyllis. "You got it at Vienna, of course."

"Of course. You will learn all about it when you come."

The able-bodied men withdrew, and before the door was quite closed behind them, Ella was gazing at her friend, her face alight with inquiry.

"Now pray explain yourself," she whispered. "Not engaged in any sense—those were your words. What do they mean?"

"Take them literally, my Ella," said Phyllis.

"Literally? But you wrote to me that you had engaged yourself to marry Mr. Holland?"

"And now I tell you by word of mouth that I have disengaged myself."

"Good Heavens! You, I fancied, would be the last girl in the world to promise to marry a man and then back out of it."

"That was what I myself fancied up till Monday last."

"But how can you have changed your mind? Isn't it very unfortunate—just when the man has become famous?"

"How could it be otherwise, Ella, when the man wrote so horrible a book as that?"

"Horrible? Is it horrible? I had no idea. I'm no judge of what is horrible in theology, or metaphysics, or whatever it is. But I do profess to know when a man has made a hit, whether in theology or anything else; and I perceive quite clearly that your Mr. Holland—well, not your Mr. Holland, has made a distinct hit. What sort of face is that you're making at me? Oh, I see. It's the face of the orthodox at the mention of something not quite orthodox. Pshut! don't be a goose, Phyllis."

"I don't intend. Have I not told you that I'm not going to marry Mr. Holland?"

"That is like one of the phrases which you give to your father, so that the people might think him clever. Orthodox! Who cares nowadays for what is dully orthodox? Who ever heard of a hero in orthodoxy nowadays? The thing is impossible. There may be, of course, thousands of orthodox heroes, but one never hears anything of them. The planets Jupiter and Saturn and Mercury and Mars and the rest of them come and go at their appointed seasons, and no one ever gives them a second thought, poor old respectable things! but the moment a comet appears in the sky everyone rushes out to gaze at it, and the newspapers deal with it from day to day, and the illustrated papers give its portrait. Nothing could be more unorthodox than your comet. Oh, Phyllis, my child, don't talk nowadays of orthodoxy or the other—what do they call it?—heterodoxy. Mr. Holland's name will be in everyone's mouth for the next year at least, and if his bishop or a friendly church warden prosecutes him, and the thing is worked up properly, he ought to be before the public for the next five years."

"Oh, Ella!"

"I'm not overstating the case, I assure you, my dear. A man was telling me about one Colenso—he was, so far as I could gather, a first-class man at algebra and heresy and things like that. He was Bishop of Zanzibar or Uganda or some place, and he wrote a book about Moses—showing that Moses couldn't have written something or other. Well, he took a bit of prosecuting, five or six years, I believe, and he didn't go nearly so far as Mr. Holland does in that book of his. All this time people talked about little else but Colenso, and his books made him a fortune. That was before our time, dear—when the newspapers weren't worked as they are now. Block printing has made more heroes than the longest campaign on record. Yes, Mr. Courtland said so two days ago. I think I'll try some more of that lovely cake: it's like warm ice, isn't it? Oh, you'll not be so foolish as to throw over your Mr. Holland."

"It is already done," said Phyllis. "I'm so glad that you like the cake. It is very subtle. What a delightful idea—warm ice!"

"Never mind the cake. I want to hear more of this matter of Mr. Holland," said Ella. "Do you mean to tell me plainly that you threw over Mr. Holland because he wrote a book that will bring him fame and fortune?"

"I have thrown over Mr. Holland because he has written a book to make people have contempt for the Bible," said Phyllis.

"Then all I can say is that you were never in love with the man," cried Ella.

"You may say that if you please."

"I do say it. If a girl really loves a man, she will marry him even though he should write a book against Darwin. If a girl really loves a man she will stand by him all the closer when he is undergoing a course of honorable persecution, with his portrait in every paper that one picks up."

"I dare say that is true enough," assented Phyllis. "Perhaps I never did really love Mr. Holland. Perhaps I only fancied I cared for him because I saw that so many other girls—took to wearing chocolates and grays and kept their sleeves down just when sleeves were highest."

"Of course it was only natural that you should wish to—well, colloquially, to wipe the eyes of the other girls. How many girls, I should like to know, begin to think of a man as a possible husband until they perceive that the thoughts of other girls are turned in his direction?"

"At any rate, whatever I may have done long ago—"

"Three months ago."

"Three months ago. Whatever I may have done then, I know that I don't love him now."

"Don't be too sure, my dear Phyllis. If there is one thing more than another about which a woman should never be positive, it is whether or not she loves a particular man. What mistakes they make! No, I'll never believe that you turned him adrift simply because he wrote something disparagingly about Solomon, or was it David? And I did so want you and him for my next day; I meant it to be such a /coup/, to have returned to town only a week and yet to have the most outrageously unorthodox parson at my house. Ah, that would indeed have been a /coup/! Never mind, I can at least have the beautiful girl who, though devoted to the unorthodox parson, threw him over on account of his unorthodoxy."

"Yes, you are certain of me—that is, if you think I should—if it wouldn't seem a little—"

"What nonsense, Phyllis! Where have you been living for the past twenty-three years that you should get such a funny notion into your head? Do you think that girls nowadays absent themselves from felicity awhile when they find it necessary to become—well, disengaged—yes, or divorced, for that matter?"

"I really can't recollect any case of—"

"Of course you can't. They don't exist. The proper thing for a woman to do when she gets a divorce is to take a box at a theatre and give the audience a chance of recognizing her from her portraits that have already appeared in the illustrated papers. The block printing has done that too. There's not a theatre manager in London who wouldn't give his best box to a woman who has come straight from the divorce court. The managers recognize the fact that she is in the same line as themselves. But for you, my dear Phyllis—oh, you will never do him the injustice to keep your throwing over of him a secret."

"Injustice? Oh, Ella!"

"I say injustice. Good gracious, child! cannot you see that if it becomes known that the girl who had promised to marry him has broken off her engagement to him simply because he has written that book, the interest that attaches to him on account of his unorthodoxy will be immeasurably increased?"

"I will not do him the injustice of fancying for a moment that he would be gratified on this account. Whatever he may be, Ella, he is at least sincere and single-minded in his aims."

"I have no doubt of it, my only joy. But however sincere a man may be in his aims, he still cannot reasonably object to the distinction that is thrust upon him when he has done something out of the common. The men who make books know that that sort of thing pays. Someone told me the other day—I believe it was Herbert Courtland—that it is the men who write books embodying a great and noble aim who make the closest bargains with their publishers. I heard of a great and good clergyman the other day who wrote a Life of Christ, and then complained in the papers of his publishers having only given him a miserable percentage on the profits. That is how they talk nowadays; the profit resulting from the Life of Christ is to be measured in pounds, shillings, and pence."

"Mr. Holland is not a man of this stamp, Ella."

"I'm sure he is not. At the same time if he isn't prosecuted for heterodoxy no one will be more disappointed than Mr. Holland, unless, indeed, it be Mr. Holland's publisher. Who would begrudge the martyr his halo, dear? Even the most sincere and single-minded martyr has an eye on that halo. The halo of the up-to-date martyr is made up of afternoon teas provided by fair women, and full-page portraits in the illustrated papers."

"And all this leads to—what?"

"It leads to—let me see—oh, yes, it leads to your appearance at my little gathering. Of course, you'll come. Believe me, you'll not feel the least uncomfortable. You will be The Girl who Sacrificed her Love

for Conscience' Sake. That's a good enough qualification for distinction on the part of any girl in these hard times. But I might have known long ago that you would play this part. That sweetly pathetic voice, with that firm mouth and those lovely soft gray eyes that would seem to a casual observer to neutralize the firmness of the mouth. Oh, yes, my Phyllis, you have undoubtedly /la physionomie du role/."

"What /role/?"

"The /role/ of the girl who is on the side of the Bible."

"I am certainly on the side of the Bible."

"And so am I. So I will look for you to be by my side on Tuesday week, and as often as you please in the meantime. By the way, you will probably meet Herbert Courtland at our house. He is the New Guinea man, you know."

"Of course I know. You talk of wanting heroes in orthodoxy at your house, while you have Mr. Courtland, the New Guinea explorer, drinking his tea at your elbow? Oh, go away!"

"I hope you will like him. We saw a good deal of him in Italy, and will probably see a good deal of him here."

"I'm certain to like him: you like him."

"Ah, that's what you said to the young women who put off their colors and took to sackcloth in the presence of Mr. Holland. Don't be too sure that you will like any man because other women like him. Now, I have, as usual, remained too long with you. I'm greatly impressed with the situation of the moment. I don't say that I think you are wrong, mind you. Girls should always be on the side of the Bible. At any rate you have, I repeat, /la physionomie du role/, and you can't be far astray if you act up to it. Good-bye, my dearest."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEFENSE OF HOLLAND.

Ella Linton drove to a certain shop not far from Piccadilly,—the only shop where the arranging of feathers is treated as a science independent of the freaks of fashion,—and at the door she met a tall man with the complexion of mahogany but with fair hair and mustache. People nudged one another and whispered his name as they walked past

him before standing at the shop window, pretending to admire the feathers, but in reality to glance furtively round at the man.

The name that they whispered to one another after the nudge was Herbert Courtland.

He took off his hat—it was a tall silk one, but no one who knew anything could avoid feeling that it should have been a solar toupee—when Mrs. Linton stepped from her victoria.

”Oh, you here!” said she. ”Who on earth would expect to see you here?”

”You,” said he.

”What?”

”You asked me a question. I answered it.”

She laughed as they walked together to the door of the feather shop.

”It appears to me that you have a very good opinion of yourself and a very bad one of me,” she remarked, smiling up to his face.

”That’s just where you make a mistake,” said he.

”How?”

”If I did not think well of you I should not have ordered Parkinson to make you a fan of the tail of the meteor.”

”Oh, Bertie, you have done that?”

”Why should I not do it?”

”But it is the only one in the world.”

”Ah, that’s just it. You are the only one in the world.”

She laughed again, looking up to his face.

”Well, we’ll have a look at it, anyway,” said she.

They went into the shop to see the tail feathers of that wonderful meteor-bird which Herbert Courtland had just brought back from New Guinea with him—the most glorious thing that nature had produced and a great explorer had risked his life to acquire, in order that Mrs. Linton might have a unique feathered fan.

About the same time the Rev. George Holland met in the same thoroughfare his friend and patron, the Earl of Earls court.

"By the Lord Harry, you've done for yourself now, my hearty!" cried the earl. "What the blazes do you mean by attacking the Word of God in that fashion?"

"Tommy," said the Rev. George Holland, smiling a patronizing smile at his patron, "Tommy, my friend, if you take my advice you'll not meddle with what doesn't concern you. You're a peer; better leave the Word of God to me. I'm not a peer, but a parson."

"I'll not leave it with you; it isn't safe," said the peer. "Anything more damnably atheistical than that book of yours I never read."

"And you didn't read it, Thomas; you know you only read a screeching review of it, and you didn't even read that through," said the parson.

"Who told you that?" asked the patron. "Well, at any rate I read what you said about Ruth. It was quite scandalous! Ruth! Good Lord! what character is safe nowadays? One of the loveliest of the women of the Bible—my wife says so. She knows all about them. And the best painters in the world have shown her standing among the field of oats. By the Lord, sir, it's sheer blasphemy! and worse than that, it's making people—good, religious people, mind, not the ruck—it's making them ask why the blazes I gave you the living. It's a fact."

"I'm sorry for you, Tommy—very sorry. I'm also sorry for your good religious people, and particularly sorry for the phraseology of their earnest inquiries on what I am sure is a matter of life and death to them—spiritually. That's my last word, Thomas."

"And you were doing so well at the Joss-house, too." Lord Earls court was shaking his head sorrowfully, as he spoke. "We were all getting on so comfortably. That was what people said to me—they said—"

"Pardon me, I'm a parson, therefore I'm not particular; but I can't stand the way your good religious people express themselves."

"They said, 'It's so d— pleasant to get hold of a parson who can be trusted in the pulpit—sermons with a good healthy moral tone, and so forth. You might bring your youngest daughter to St. Chad's in the certainty that she would hear nothing that would make her ask uncomfortable questions when she got home.' It's a fact, they said that; and now you go and spoil all. The bishop will have a word to say to you some of these days, my lad. He ran away to the Continent, they tell me, when your book was published, and it's perfectly well known that he never runs away unless things look serious. When the bishop is serious, those that can't swim had best take to the boats."

"I'll ask you for a seat in your yacht, Tommy. Meantime kindest regards to her ladyship."

"Oh! by the way, it's not true, is it, that the girl has thrown you over on account of the book?"

For an instant there came a little flush to the face of the Rev. George Holland; then he shifted his umbrella from one hand to the other, saying:

"If you mean Phyllis, all I can say in reply is that she is the best and the truest girl alive at present. I've an engagement at a quarter-past six."

"Well, good-by. It was my missus who said that the girl would throw you over on account of that book."

"Ah! Good-by."

"Honestly speaking, George, old man, I think you've made a mistake this time. People don't mind much about Jacob and Jonah and Jeremiah and the whole job lot of Sheenies; but they do mind about Ruth. Hang it all man! she was a woman."

"Ah! so was Jezebel, and yet—ah! good-by. I'll be late for my appointment."

"See you on Sunday," said the earl, with a broadish smile.

And so he did.

So did the largest congregation that had ever assembled within the venerable walls of St. Chad's. They heard him also, and so did the dozen reporters of the morning papers who were present—some to describe, with the subtle facetiousness of the newspaper reporter, the amusing occurrences incidental to the church service of the day, and others to take down his sermon to the extent of half a column to be headed "The Rev. George Holland Defends Himself." One reporter, however, earned an increase in his salary by making his headline, "The Defense of Holland." It was supposed that casual readers would fancy that the kingdom of Holland had been repelling an invader, and would not find out their mistake until they had read half through the sermon.

George Holland had not been mistaken when he had assumed that his appearance in the church and his sermon this day would attract a large amount of attention. As a matter of fact the building was crowded with notable persons: Cabinet ministers (2), judges of the superior courts (4), company promoters (47), actors and actresses (3), music hall and variety artists (22), Royal Academician (1). Literature was represented by a lady who had written a high-church novel, and fashion by the publisher who had produced it. Science appeared in the person

of a professional thought-reader (female). These were all strangers to St. Chad's, though some of them could follow the service quite easily. The habitués of the church included several peers, the members of a foreign embassy, a few outside brokers, quite a number of retired officers of both services, and some Members of Parliament and the London County Council.

One of the chaplains of the bishop occupied a seat in the aisle; according to the facetious newspaper he held a watching brief.

The rector was, of course, oblivious of his brilliant entourage. He could not even tell if Phyllis or her father were present. (As a matter of fact both were in their accustomed seats in their own pew.) He, as usual, took but a small part in the ritual—as Lord Earlscourt once remarked, George Holland wasn't such a fool as to keep a dog and do the barking himself. (It has already been stated that he had a couple of excellent curates.) But the sermon was preached by himself, as indeed it usually was after the morning service.

It was the most brilliant of all his efforts. He took as his text the words, "All Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable," and he had no difficulty in showing how vast was the profit to be derived from a consideration of every portion of the sacred volume, it appeared to him, than the account given of the early history of the Hebrew race. That account appealed as an object lesson to all nations on the face of the earth. It allowed every people to see the course which the children of Israel had pursued at various periods of their existence and to profit by such observation. The Hebrews were a terrible example to all the world. If they were slaves when in the land of Egypt, that was their own fault. Milton had magnificently expressed the origin of slavery:

"He that hath light within his own clear breast
May walk i' the noontide and enjoy bright day,
But he that hides dark deeds and foul thoughts . . .
Himself is his own dungeon."

The bondage of Egypt was, he believed, self-imposed. There is no account available, he said, of the enslavement of the Children of Israel by the Egyptians, but a careful consideration of the history of various peoples shows beyond the possibility of a mistake being made, that only those become enslaved who are best fitted for enslavement. A king arose that knew not Joseph—a king who could not believe that at any time there was belonging to that race of strangers a man of supreme intelligence. The Israelites bowed their heads to the yoke of the superior race, the Egyptians, and took their rightful place as slaves. After many days a man of extraordinary intelligence appeared in the person of Moses. A patriot of patriots, he gave the race their God—they seemed to have lived in a perfectly Godless condition in Egypt; and their theology had to be constructed for them by their

leader, as well as their laws: the laws for the desert wanderers, and a decalogue for all humanity. He was equal to any emergency, and he had no scruples. He almost succeeded in making a great nation out of a horde of superstitious robbers. Had he succeeded the record would have thrown civilization back a thousand years. Happy it was for the world that the triumph of crime was brief. The cement of bloodshed that kept the kingdom of Israel together for a time soon dissolved. Captivity followed captivity. For a thousand years no improvement whatever took place in the condition of the people—they had no arts; they lived in mud huts at a period when architecture reached a higher level than it had ever attained to previously. When the patriot prophets arose, endeavoring to reform them with words of fire—the sacred fire of truth—they killed them. One chance remained to them. They were offered a religion that would have purified them, in place of the superstition that had demoralized them, and they cried with one voice, as everyone who had known their history and their social characteristics knew they would cry, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." That was from the earliest period in the history of the race the watchword of the Hebrews. Not the man, but the robber. All that is good and noble and true in manhood—the mercy, the compassion, the self-sacrifice that are comprised in true manhood—they cast beneath their feet, they spat upon, they crucified; but all of the Barabbas in man they embraced. Thus are they become a hissing in the earth, and properly so; for those who hiss at the spirit which has always animated Judaism show that they abhor a thing that is abhorrent. "All Scripture is profitable," continued the preacher, "and practically all that is referred to in the text is an indictment of Judaism. The more earnestly we hold to this truth the greater will be the profit accruing to us from a consideration of the Scripture. But what more terrible indictment of the Hebrew systems could we have than that which is afforded us in the record that the father of the race had twelve sons? He had. But where are ten of them now? Swept out of existence without leaving a single record of their destruction even to their two surviving brethren." He concluded his sermon by stating that he hoped it would be clearly understood that he recognized the fact that in England those members of the Hebrew community who had adopted the methods, the principles, the truths of Christianity even though they still maintained their ancient form of worship in their synagogues, were on a line with civilization. They searched their scriptures and these scriptures had been profitable to them, inasmuch as they had been taught by those scriptures how impossible it was for that form of superstition known as Judaism to be the guide for any people on the face of the earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

I HOPE THAT YOU WILL NOT EVENTUALLY MARRY AN INFIDEL.

Some of the congregation were greatly disappointed. They had expected a brilliant and startling attack upon some other Bible personages who had hitherto been looked on with respect and admiration. But the sermon had only attacked the Jewish system as a whole, and everyone knows that there is nothing piquant in an attack, however eloquent it may be, upon a religious system in the abstract. One might as well find entertainment in an attack upon the Magnetic Pole or a denunciation of the Precession of the Equinoxes. No one cared, they said, anything more about the failure of the laws of Moses than one did about such abstractions as the Earth's Axis, or the Great Glacial Epoch. It was quite different when the characters of well-known individuals were subjected to an assault. People could listen for hours to an attack upon celebrated persons. If Mr. Holland's book had only dealt with the characteristics of the religion of the Jews, it would never have attracted attention, these critics said. It had called for notice simply because of its trenchant remarks in regard to some of those Bible celebrities who, it was generally understood, were considered worthy of admiration.

Why could Mr. Holland not have followed up the course indicated in his book by showing up some of the other persons in the Bible? it was asked. There were quite a number of characters in the Bible who were regarded as estimable. Why could he not then have followed up his original scheme of "showing them up?"—that was the phrase of the critics. There was Solomon, for instance. He was usually regarded as a person of high intellectual gifts; but there was surely a good deal in his career which was susceptible of piquant treatment. And then someone said that Noah should have a chapter all to himself, also Lot; and what about the spies who had entered Jericho? Could the imagination not suggest the story which they had told to their wives on their return to the camp, relative to the house in which they had passed all their spare time? They supposed that Jericho was the Paris of the high class Jews of those days.

Then the conversation of these critics drifted on to the Paris of to-day, and the sermon and its lessons were forgotten as easily as is an ordinary sermon. But all the same it was plain that the clergyman had fallen short of what was expected of him upon this occasion. His book had gone far, and it was felt that he should have gone one better than his book, so to speak. Instead of that his sermon had been one to which scarcely any exception could be taken.

But the bishop's chaplain, who had watched at intervals of praying, came to the conclusion that the rector of St. Chad's was a good deal

cleverer than the majority of youngish clergymen who endeavor to qualify for prosecution. It may be unorthodox to cross one's arms with the regularity of clockwork on coming to certain words in the service, and young clergymen had been prosecuted for less; but it was not unorthodox to speak evil of the Jews—for did not the Church pray for the Jews daily? and can anyone insult a man more than by praying for him—unless, of course, he is a king, in which case it is understood that no insult is intended?

The bishop's chaplain prepared a report of the sermon for his lordship, pointing out its general harmony, broadly speaking, with the tenets of the Church.

Mr. Ayrton also seemed to perceive a sort of cleverness in the sermon. There was nothing in it that was calculated to shock even the most susceptible hearer. Indeed, it seemed to Mr. Ayrton that there was a good deal in it that was calculated to soothe the nerves of those who had been shocked by the book. He said something to this effect to his daughter as they walked homeward. He was rather anxious to find out what chance George Holland had of being restored to his daughter's favor.

But Phyllis was firm in her condemnation of the methods of Mr. Holland.

"He attacks the Jews as a race in order to ridicule the statement in the Bible that they were God's chosen people, and they were, you know, papa," she said.

"They took so much for granted themselves, at any rate," said her father, with some show of acquiescence.

"But they were, and they are to be restored to their own land," said Phyllis.

"Are they, my dear? I should like to see the prospectus of that enterprise."

"You are mocking, papa. They are to be restored; it says so in the Bible quite clearly."

"I am not mocking, Phyllis. If gold is discovered in Palestine, the Jews may go there in some numbers; but, take my word for it, they won't go otherwise. They couldn't live in their own land, assuming that it is their own, which is going pretty far. Palestine wouldn't support all the Jews alive at present; it's a wretched country—I know it well. Besides, they don't want to return to it, and furthermore, we couldn't spare them."

"I believe in the Bible, and I have faith," said Phyllis firmly.

"That's right," said her father. "I hope you may always hold to both. I think that those girls who expect to be regarded as advanced, because they scoff at the Bible and at faith, are quite horrid. I also hope that you will not eventually marry an infidel."

"That would be impossible," said Phyllis firmly.

"Would it?" said her father. "There is a stronger influence at work in most of us, at times, than religion. I wonder if it will make a victim of you, my child, though you did send George Holland about his business."

"I don't quite know what you mean," said Phyllis, with only the slightest possible flush.

And she did not know what he meant until six months had passed; but then she knew.

Seeing that she did not know what he meant, her father thanked Heaven that Heaven had given him a daughter who was unlike other daughters. He prayed that she might never become like other daughters. He thought that it would be good for his daughter to remain without experience of those overwhelming passions which make up the life of a woman and a man.

Phyllis went out a good deal during the week, and everywhere she found herself looked at with interest; sometimes she found herself being examined through a /pince-nez/ as if she were a curious specimen, and a woman or two smiled derisively at her. She did not know what was meant by their curiosity—their derision—until one day an old lady named Mrs. Haddon went up to her and kissed her, saying:

"I made up my mind that I would kiss you, my dear, the first chance I had. God bless you, my child! You have given your testimony as a woman should, in these days of scoffing at the truth."

"Testimony?" said Phyllis, quite puzzled. Had not her father felt a thrill of gratitude on reflecting that she had none of the qualities of the prig about her? "Testimony?"

"You have testified to the truth, Miss Ayrton, and you shall have your reward. You have shown that the truth is more to you than—than love—the love of man—all that women hold sweet in life. You are right Miss Ayrton; and all true women must love and respect you."

Phyllis turned a very brilliant color, and kept her eyes fixed on the parquet pattern of the floor.

The dear old lady said a good deal more to her, all in praise of her act of having given Mr. Holland his /conge/ on account of his having written that shockingly unorthodox book.

By the end of the week Phyllis Ayrton was looked on as quite as much a heroine for having given Mr. Holland his /conge/, as Mr. Holland was a hero for having braved the bishop in writing the book. She wore her laurels meekly, though she had been rather embarrassed when a ray of intelligence appeared among the dark sayings of the dear old lady. She could not help wondering how all the world had become possessed of the knowledge that she had said good-by to her lover. She considered if it were possible that Mr. Holland had spread abroad the account of her ill-treatment of him—he would naturally allude to it as ill-treatment. The quick judgment of Ella Linton had enabled her to perceive how valuable to Mr. Holland was the incident of his rejection by Phyllis. As a beginning of his persecution, its importance could scarcely be overestimated. But it did not take Phyllis long to reassure herself on this matter. It was, of course, Ella who had given the incident publicity. She had done so for two reasons: first, in order that her little afternoon *At Home* might have additional luster attached to it by the presence of a young woman who had, in these days of a marriage market overstocked with young women (and old women, for that matter), thrown over an eligible man for conscience' sake; and secondly, in order that her *At Home* might have additional luster attached to it from the presence of the man who allowed himself to be thrown over by a delightful girl rather than refrain from publishing what he believed to be the truth.

Mrs. Linton achieved both the objects which, as a good hostess, she had in view. Mr. Holland put in an appearance in one of Mrs. Linton's big drawing rooms, and so did Phyllis Ayrton.

Everyone admitted that only a woman of the social capacity—some people called it genius—of Mrs. Linton could accomplish such a feat as the bringing into the same room two persons who had given unmistakable evidence of possessing a conscience apiece—the woman who had sacrificed the man for conscience' sake, and the man who had sacrificed the woman under the same influence. It was a social triumph, beyond doubt.

People talked in whispers of conscience, the advantages and the disadvantages of its possession, and the consensus of opinion was of its being quite appropriate in regard to a clergyman, and that it was not altogether out of place on the part of a spinster, provided that she had counteracting virtues; but, on the whole, it was perhaps wiser to leave the conscience with the Nonconformists.

Phyllis did not see George Holland until she had got halfway up the first of Mrs. Linton's rooms. She did not hear her friend Ella say to someone, in a low voice of apprehension:

"For Heaven's sake, keep them apart! They are just the sort of people to greet each other quite cordially; and if they do, no one here will believe that their engagement is off. People here don't understand how a delicate conscience works."

That was what Ella murmured to a man who had been invited in order that he might make himself generally useful. She gave him his instructions too late, however. Before she had quite completed her greeting of Phyllis, Mr. Holland was beside them.

He had not forced himself forward with any measure of persistency; no one seemed to notice any movement on his part until he had shaken hands with Phyllis, and was chatting with her and Mrs. Linton quite pleasantly—much too pleasantly for a man with a conscience, someone said later in the afternoon; but that was someone who wanted to talk to Phyllis himself.

People watched her when she suffered herself to be gradually withdrawn from the center of the room to a seat that chanced to be vacant, just behind the open door of the conservatory. Could it be possible, they asked one another, that she had indeed given his dismissal to Mr. Holland the previous week? Why, they were chatting together as pleasantly as they had ever chatted. Had not the people who talked so glibly of conscience and its mysterious operations spoken a little too soon? Or had the quarrel been patched up? If so, which of the two had got rid of the conscience that had brought about the original rupture?

These questions were answered at divers places by divers persons, all the time that George Holland and Phyllis Ayrton remained side by side at the entrance to the conservatory, at the further end of which a vocal quartette party sang delightfully—delightfully; sufficiently loud to enable all the guests who wanted to talk to do so without inconvenience, and at the same time not so loud as to become obtrusive. It is so seldom that a quartette party manage to hit this happy medium, people said. They generally sing as if they fancy that people come together to hear them, not remembering that the legitimate object of music at an At Home is to act as an accompaniment to the conversation.

When Phyllis was leaving the house half an hour later, a man was just entering the first drawing room—a man with a face burnt to the color of an old mezzotint.

He looked at her for a moment as he passed her, for her face had suddenly lighted up, as such a face as hers does upon occasions.

The man could scarcely fail to perceive that she knew his name was Herbert Courtland.

But then he was accustomed to be recognized by women as well as men in every part of Europe, since he had returned from New Guinea with the tail feathers of the meteor-bird, which were now being made into a fan for Mrs. Linton.

CHAPTER IX.

MY FATHER HAS HIS IDEAS ON WHAT'S CALLED REALISM.

The last rumble of applause had died away at the Parthenon Theater, but the audience were leaving very slowly; they wished to linger as long as possible within the atmosphere of the building; though, like the atmosphere of many sacred places, that of the Parthenon was, just at that time, a trifle unsavory. The first performance of the drama of "Cagliostro" had just taken place, and, as the first nights at the

Parthenon are invariably regarded as the most exclusive functions of

the year, the stalls and boxes had been crowded. And the distinction which in Mayfair and Belgravia attaches to those who have been in the boxes and stalls on Parthenon first night is not greater than that which, in Bloomsbury and Camden Town, accrues to those who have occupied places—not necessarily seats—in the other parts of the house. It is understood, too, that the good will of Bloomsbury and Camden Town is much more valuable to a play than the best wishes of Mayfair and Belgravia.

The gracious manager had made his customary speech of thanks,—for everything produced at the Parthenon was a success,—and while the general audience were moving away very reluctantly, some distinguished men and women followed the guidance of a strong Irish brogue as a flock follows a bell-wether, through a door that led to the stage. Here the great actor and the ever-charming lady who divided with him the affections of West as well as East, received their guests' congratulations in such a way as made the guests feel that the success was wholly due to their good will.

Mrs. Linton, who was a personage in society,—her husband had found a gold mine (with the assistance of Herbert Courtland) and she had herself written a book of travels which did not sell,—had brought Phyllis with her party to the theater, and they had gone on the stage with the other notabilities, at the conclusion of the performance.

George Holland, having become as great a celebrity as the best of them during that previous fortnight, had naturally received a stall and an invitation to the stage at the conclusion of the performance. He had not been of Mrs. Linton's party, but he lay in wait for that party as they emerged from their box.

Another man also lay in wait for them, and people—outsiders—nudged one another in the theater as the passers down Piccadilly had nudged one another, whispering his name, Herbert Courtland. Others—they were not quite such outsiders—nudged one another when Mrs. Linton laid down her new feather fan on the ledge of the box. It was possibly the loveliest thing that existed in the world at that moment. No artist had ever dreamed of so wonderful a scheme of color—such miracles of color—combinations in every feather from the quill to the spider-web-like fluffs at the tips, each of which shone not like gold but like glass. It was well worth all the nudging that it called forth.

But when Mrs. Linton had picked it up from the ledge, beginning to oscillate it in front of her fair face, the nudging ceased. People looked at the thing with eyes wide with astonishment, but with lips mute.

A more satisfactory evening she had never spent, Mrs. Linton felt; and now the fan was hanging down among the brocaded flowers of her dress, making them look tawdry as she left the box, and noticed how at least two men were lying in wait for her party. There was, however, a frankness in Herbert Courtland's strategy which George Holland's did not possess. Mr. Courtland was looking directly at her; Mr. Holland was pretending to be engrossed in conversation with a man in one of the end stalls.

She lifted a finger and Courtland went to her side. The difficulties of the jungle along the banks of the Fly River were trifling compared with the obstacles he had to overcome in obeying her.

"I had no idea that you would be here," she said.

"Where else should I be?" he said, in so low a tone as to be heard only by her.

"We are so glad," said Mrs. Linton. "I want to present you to my dearest friend, Phyllis Ayrton."

"A woman!" said he.

"Not yet. She has never met a man. She will to-night," said Ella. Then she turned to Phyllis, who was walking beside Lord Earls court. "Come here, Phyllis," she said; "you are the only person in London who doesn't yet know Mr. Herbert Courtland. This is Mr. Courtland."

Thus it was that Phyllis went upon the stage of the Parthenon by the side of Herbert Courtland instead of by the side of George Holland; and the little laugh that Mrs. Linton gave was due to her careful observation of the latter's face when he perceived, as he did in spite of the engrossing nature of his conversation with his friend in the end stall, how his designs had been defeated by her tactics. She would not have minded having Herbert Courtland with her for the hour they might remain at the theater, but she had made up her mind that it was not to Phyllis' advantage that Mr. Holland should continue by her side in public after she had given him his dismissal.

She also perceived, with even greater gratification, that Herbert Courtland was looking nearly as dissatisfied with the result of her tactics as George Holland. If he had looked pleased at being by the side of Phyllis when he expected to be with her—Ella—what would life be worth to her?

But if he was dissatisfied at being with Phyllis instead of Mrs. Linton, he did not consider that any reason for neglecting the former. He wondered if she had any choice in sandwiches—of course she had in champagne. His curiosity was satisfied, and Phyllis was amply provided for.

"You are Mrs. Linton's dearest friend," he remarked casually, as they leaned up against the profile of the Church scene in "Cagliostro," for they were standing in the "wings"—to be exact—on the O. P. side.

"She is my dearest friend, at any rate," said Phyllis.

"You were not at school together. She is four or five years older than you."

"Only three. When she got married she seemed to me to be almost venerable. Three years seemed a long time then."

"But now you fancy that you have formed a right idea of what is meant by three years?"

"Well, a better idea, at any rate."

"You are still a good way off it. But if you have formed a right estimate of a woman's friendship—"

"That's still something, you mean to say? But why did you stop short, Mr. Courtland?"

Phyllis was looking up to his face with a smile of inquiry.

"I was afraid that you might think I was on the way to preach a sermon on the text of woman's friendship. I pulled myself up just in time.

I'm glad that I didn't frighten you."

"Oh, no; you didn't frighten me, Mr. Courtland. I was only wondering how you would go on—whether you would treat the topic sentimentally or cynically."

"And what conclusion did you come to on the subject?"

"I know that you are a brave man—perhaps the bravest man alive. You would, I think, have treated the question seriously—feelingly."

He laughed.

"The adoption of that course implies courage certainly. All the men of sentimentality—which is something quite different from sentiment, mind you—have taken to writing melodrama and penny novelettes. You didn't hear much sentimentality on this stage to-night, or any other night, for that matter."

"No; it would have sounded unreal. A Parthenon audience would resent what they believed to be a false note in art; and a Parthenon audience is supposed to be the concentration of the spirit of the period in thought and art; isn't it?"

"I don't know. I'm half a savage. But I like to think the best of a

Parthenon audience; you and I formed part of that concentration

to-night—yes, I like to think the best of it. I suppose we know—we, the Parthenon audience, I mean—what our feelings are on the art of acting—the art of play-writing."

"I shouldn't like to have to define my feelings at a moment's notice."

"One must make a beginning, and then work up gradually to the definition."

"For instance—"

"Well, for instance, there's something that people call realism nowadays."

"My father has his ideas on what's called realism," Phyllis laughed. " 'Realism in painting is the ideal with a smudge.' "

"I should like to hear what you think of it?"

He also laughed sympathetically.

"Oh, I only venture to think that realism is the opposite to reality."

"And, so far as I can gather, your definition is not wanting in breadth—no, nor in accuracy. Sentimentality is the opposite to sentiment."

"That is a point on which we agreed a moment ago. My father says that sentiment is a strong man's concealment of what he feels, while sentimentality is a weak man's expression of what he doesn't feel."

"And the Parthenon audience—you and I—laugh at the latter—that is, because we have practiced some form of athletics. The bicycle has given its /coup de grace/ to sentimentality. That man over there with the head and face like a lion's, and that woman whose face is nature illuminated, have long ago recognized the shallowness of sentimentality—the depths of sentiment. We could not imagine either of them striking a false note. They have been the teachers of this generation—the generation to which you belong. Great Heavens! to think that for so many years human passion should be banished from art, though every line of Shakspeare is tremulous with passion! Why, the word was absolutely banished; it was regarded as impure."

"I know that—I was at a boarding school. The preceptresses regarded as impure everything that is human."

"Whereas, just the opposite is the case?"

"I didn't say that, Mr. Courtland."

"You could scarcely say it. I am only beginning to think it, and I have lived among savages for years. That man with the lion's face has not feared to deal with passion. All actors who have lived since Garrick have never gone further than to illustrate passion in the hands of a man; but that lion-man, whose stage we are now standing on, shows us not the passion in the hands of a man, but the man in the hands of the passion. The man who tears the passion to tatters is the robustious periwig-pated fellow; the actor, who shows us the man torn in tatters by the passion, is the supreme artist. I am no authority on modern literature; but I must confess that I was astonished at the change that a few years have brought about. I was in a proper position for noticing it, having been practically without books for two years."

"Is it a change for the better, do you think, Mr. Courtland?"

"I feel certain that it is for the better. I refer, of course, only to the books of those real investigators—real artists. I refer to the

fountain-heads, not to the hydrants laid down by the water companies at the end of about ten miles of foul piping. I don't like the product of the hydrants. I like the springs, and, however natural they may be, I don't find anything impure in them. Why I love the Bible is because it is so very modern."

"You don't think, then, that it is yet obsolete, Mr. Courtland?"

"No book that deals so truly with men and women can ever be obsolete, the fact being that men and women are the same to-day as they were ten thousand years ago, perhaps ten million years ago, though I'm not quite so sure of that. The Bible, and Shakspeare, and Rofudingding, a New Guinea poet, who ate men for his dinner when he had a chance, and, when he had finished, sang lyrics that stir the hearts of all his fellow-islanders to this day,—he lived a hundred years ago,—dealt with men and women; that is why all are as impressive to-day as they were when originally composed. Men and women like reading about men and women, and it is becoming understood, nowadays, that the truth about men and women can never be contemptible."

"Ah, but how do we know that it is the truth?"

"Therein the metaphysician must minister to himself. I cannot suggest to you any test of the truth, if you have none with you. Everyone capable of pronouncing a judgment on any matter must feel how truthfully the personages in the Bible have been drawn."

"Yes; the Bible is the Word of God."

"I believe that it is, most certainly. That profound wisdom; that toleration of the weaknesses of men; that sympathy with men, who cannot fathom the mysteries of life, and the struggle for life of all things that love life; that spirit I call God, and I don't think that a better name has been found for it."

"It—for /it/? You think of God as merely a force of nature?"

"Just the contrary. God is the spirit that lives in warfare with nature. Great Heavens! isn't that the truth of which the whole Bible is the allegory? Nature and nature's laws constitute the Devil. God is the opposing Force. It is a law of nature to kill off the weak, to crush that which has fallen in the struggle. It is God who helps the weak—who helps the feeble."

"But merely a force?"

"Oh, I have no private opinion on that part of the question. I am not like that modern philosopher who fancied he had solved the whole problem by spelling God with a small g. But don't you think that we have gone quite far enough in our exchange of confidence for a first

meeting? You are what the Italians call */simpatica/*—that is, more than merely sympathetic. You look at one, and lead one on to confide in you as one does not confide in most girls. You are a thoroughly dangerous young woman, Miss Ayrton, though you are Mrs. Linton's dearest friend. By the way, can you make her confide in you?"

There seemed to be a measure of curiosity, not to say anxiety, in the tone of this inquiry.

"Well, she makes me confide in her. I wonder if that is just the same thing," said Phyllis.

"It's not exactly the same thing," said he. "But it's the proper course for dearest friends to adopt toward each other. For the maintenance of a firm friendship between any two persons, only one should confide; the other should be strictly the confidante. By the way, I wonder what is the average duration of the dearest friendship between two women."

"Why should it have any limits?" said Phyllis gravely. "What is the duration of the friendship between two men?"

"It mostly depends on when the woman makes her appearance," said he, with a laugh.

"Ah! So that— Ah, never mind. Ella was my dearest friend before Mr. Linton put in an appearance."

"And he was mine before she put in an appearance," said he.

"I didn't know that," said Phyllis.

"There, you see, is my contention borne out," said he. "You are the one who confides; she is the one who receives the confidences, and respects them, I'm sure. I hope that you will do the same, Miss Ayrton. Don't let anyone know that I confided in you all that I think on the subject of the old Adam and the new Eve."

"No one except Ella Linton, and you know that I can keep nothing from her if we are to remain dearest friends. Perhaps she knows already the limits of your belief, Mr. Courtland."

"She does—she does."

At that moment Ella Linton came up with Lord Earls court.

"Has Mr. Courtland been telling you all about the bird of paradise?" she asked of Phyllis, while she waved the tail feathers of the loveliest of the birds of paradise before her face.

"The bird?—not the /bird/," laughed Phyllis.

"But the topic was paradise?" Ella joined in the laugh—yes, to some extent.

"I talked of Adam—the old one of that name," said Mr. Courtland.

"And Eve—the new one of that name," said Phyllis.

"Theology is in the air!" cried Ella. "Even the stage of a theater is not free from the taint. It must be the case of Mr. Holland. Where is Mr. Holland, by the way, Lord Earls court?"

"I haven't seen him for some time. He must have gone away. I'm not Mr. Holland's keeper, thank Heaven!" said Lord Earls court, with heartfelt devoutness.

"Now you know that everyone holds you accountable for what he has done!" said Ella.

"Then that's just where everyone makes a mistake," said he. "Great Lord! is it your idea of British justice to persecute the wrong man? Why doesn't the bishop do his duty? What do we pay him for?"

"We won't abandon our charity at the call of theology," said Ella.

"Theology—represented by Lord Earls court," said Mr. Courtland.

"You don't know how I've been abused during the past fortnight, indeed you don't," moaned Lord Earls court. "Why, there's my own wife, she abused me like a cab-driver because George Holland had been with us on the platform when the Chinese teetotalers came here to protest against the public houses in England; she says that his backsliding will put back the cause a quarter of a century. Then there are the other churchwardens; they look on me as if I had been making a suggestion to raffle the sacred plate. George Holland has a run for his money, but I've had no fun out of it."

"It does seem hard," said Courtland. "But it's plain that the case calls for persecution, and why not persecute you? Someone must be persecuted, you'll admit."

"Then why the—"

"I thought that your good old Bunyip would look in on us before long," said Courtland. "There's no possibility of discussing delicate points in theology without him."

"I think we had better go home," said Ella.

"We must have some consideration for our host," said Courtland. "We didn't all play the part of /Cagliostro/ to-night."

During the movement of her circle and the adjustment of wraps, preparatory to the delivery of a valedictory word of congratulation to the great actor, Ella said in a low tone to Herbert Courtland:

"Cagliostro? No; we didn't all play the part; but—well, Cagliostro was a weaver of spells."

There was a pause before he said:

"Yes, but the art did not die with him. He had a daughter to whom he taught his art."

"Not that I ever heard of," said she. "What do you think of Phyllis Ayrton?"

"I think that she is the dearest friend of my dearest friend," he replied.

"And I should like her to become the dearest friend of my dearest friend."

"That would be impossible," he said.

Then the felicitous valedictory word was said to the great actor and actress, and Mrs. Linton's carriage received Phyllis. Lord Earls court took a seat in Mr. Courtland's hansom.

"What do you think about Mr. Courtland?" inquired Ella of her dearest friend, as they lay back with their heads very close together.

There was a long pause before Phyllis replied:

"I really don't know what I think about him. He is, I suppose, the bravest man alive at present."

"What? Is that the result of your half hour's chat with him?"

"Oh, dear, no! but all the same, it's pleasant for a girl to feel that she has been talking to a brave man. It gives one a sense of—of—is it of being quite safe?"

"Good gracious, no! just the opposite—that is— Oh, you don't understand."

"No, I don't."

"Never mind. Tell me what he talked about?"

"Oh, everything! God."

"I know that it was in the air. He has ideas, I believe. He never talked on that topic to me. I hope you found him to be quite sound, theologically."

"But it seems rather funny, doesn't it?" said Phyllis; "but I really don't think that when I was listening to him I considered for a moment whether he was sound or the opposite in his views."

"Funny? It would have been rather funny if you had done that," laughed Ella. "The question that a healthy girl—and you are a healthy girl, Phyllis—asks herself after talking to such a man as Herbert Courtland is not, Is his theology sound? What healthy girl cares the fraction of a farthing about the theology of a man with a face like Herbert Courtland's and arms like Herbert Courtland's? You talked with him for half an hour, and then come to me and say that you suppose he is the bravest man alive in the world. That was right—quite right. That is just what every healthy girl should say. We understand a man's thews and sinews; we likewise understand what bravery in a man is, but what do we know, or, for that matter, care about his theology, whether it is sound or the opposite? Nothing. We don't even care whether he has any theology or not."

"Good gracious, Ella! one would fancy that you thought—"

"Thought what?"

"I don't quite know. You see I met Mr. Courtland quite casually, just as I met a dozen men at various places during the week. Why should you question me more closely about him than about the dozen other men? He only talked a little more widely, and perhaps wildly. His bravery is no more to me than his theology."

"Of course it isn't, Phyllis. But there was the case of George Holland—"

"That is very different, Ella. I had engaged myself to marry George Holland. It would be impossible for me to marry any man who had shown his contempt for—for everything that I regard as sacred."

"I believe it would, if you didn't love that man. But if you loved the man— Oh, when you come to know what it means to love you will understand all. A woman before she loves is—what is she, an egg before it is hatched? That sounds ridiculous. Better say a green chrysalis before it breaks into a butterfly; for the transition comes at once. Theology! Oh, my Phyllis, haven't you read in history, true history—novels written by men who know us and how we were created,

and why—haven't you read what women do when they truly love a man? How they fling every consideration to the winds: heaven—home—husband—God—Mrs. Grundy? Theology! Ah, you are a healthy girl. You never cared a scrap for George Holland. You were glad when the excuse presented itself in order to throw him over."

"Yes; I believe that is quite true."

Ella's cry of surprise, and her laugh that followed, shocked her companion, and feeling that this was the case, the one who laughed hastened to make her apologies.

"Don't be annoyed with me, dear," she cried. "But I really couldn't help that laugh when I thought of your earnestness the week before last. Then, you will remember, you were in great pain because of the heterodoxy of George Holland. Didn't I tell you at that time that you had never loved him? You were ready to assure me that you had, and that you were making a great sacrifice to your principles?"

"I remember very well," said Phyllis, with a sound that was not far removed from a sob.

"Ah, you are a puzzle to yourself, you poor little chrysalis," said Ella, putting the meteoric feathers playfully down upon the serious face of Phyllis—its seriousness was apparent beneath the light of the carriage lamp. "No, don't make the attempt to explain anything to me. Don't try to reconcile your frankness now with your pretense then, because you'll certainly make a muddle of it, and because no such attempt is necessary to be made to me. I know something of the girl and her moods—not a great deal, perhaps, but enough to prevent my doing you an injustice. You are perfectly consistent, my Phyllis."

"Oh, consistent?"

"Perfectly consistent with your nature as a girl. It is the nature of a girl to change with every wind that blows. It is only the female prig who acts consistently under all circumstances. In a world the leading of which is its men, inconsistency is the best nature of a healthy girl made to be loved by men. One doesn't sneer at the weathercock because one hour it points to the north and the next to the east. 'Tis its nature to. 'Tis our nature to change with every breeze of man that bears down on us. That's why they love us and detest the prigs. Here we are at your house. I hope you don't keep your maid up for you. I would scorn to keep a girl out of her bed for the sake of brushing my hair. Good-night, dear, and dream of the paradise that awaits you—a paradise in which there are birds to be shot, birds of paradise to make feather fans for women who hold them to their bosoms one minute, and the next dispose of them to Mr. and Mme. Abednego with last season's opera wrap. There's a parable for you to sleep upon."

"And you—you?" cried Phyllis.

"Oh, as for me, I'll, I'll—well, I think I'll put my meteor fan on the pillow beside my own to-night. I'm still newfangled with my toy and—well, I'm a woman."

At this instant the carriage pulled up to Mr. Ayrton's hall door and the footman jumped down from the box to run up the steps and ring the bell.

"Good-night," said Phyllis. "I enjoyed my evening greatly, and the drive home best of all."

Ella Linton's laugh was smothered among the delicate floss of the feathers which she held up to her face.

CHAPTER X.

IT IS THE PRICE OF BLOOD.

Phyllis had a good deal to think of after she had sat for half an hour with her father in the room where they worked together for the discomfiture of the opposite party, and had given him some account of the representation of the play at the Parthenon. Her father was delighted to find her in high spirits. So many people come back from the theater looking glum and worn out, yawning and mumbling when asked what they have seen and what it had all been about. Phyllis was not glum, nor did she mumble. She was able to describe scene after scene, and more than once she sprang from her seat, carried away by her own powers of description, and began to act the bits that had impressed her—bits the force of which could only be understood when described with gestures and pretty posturing.

Her father thought he had never seen anything so pretty in his life. (What a girl she was, to be sure, to have so easily recovered from the effects of that terrible ordeal through which she had passed—having to dismiss at a moment's notice the man whom she had promised to marry!) He had certainly never seen anything so fascinating as her pretty posturing, with the electric lights gleaming over her white neck with its gracious curves, and her firm white arms from which her gloves had been stripped.

It had been his intention to describe to her a scene which had taken place in the House of Commons that night—a scene of Celt and Saxon mingling in wild turmoil over a question of neglected duty on the part

of a Government official: not the one who was subsequently decorated by the sovereign a few days after his neglect of duty had placed the country in jeopardy, and had precipitated the downfall of the ministry and the annihilation of his party as a political factor; not this man, but another, who had referred to Trafalgar Square as the private thoroughfare of the crown. The scene had been an animated one, and Mr. Ayrton had hoped to derive a good deal of pleasure from describing it to his daughter; but when he had listened to her, and watched her for a few minutes, he came to the conclusion that it would be absurd for him to make an effort to compete with her. What was his wretched little story of Parliamentary squalor compared with these psychological subtleties which had interested his daughter all the evening?

He listened to and watched that lovely thing, overflowing with the animation that comes from a quick intelligence—a keen appreciation of the intelligence of the great artists who had interpreted a story which thrilled the imagination of generation after generation, and he felt that Parliament was a paltry thing. Parliament—what was Parliament? The wrangle of political parties over a paltry issue. It had no real life in it; it had nothing of the fullness and breadth of the matters that interested such people as had minds—imagination.

“You are tired,” she cried at last. “It is thoughtless of me to keep you out of your bed. You have had a weary night, I am sure. Was it the Irish again, or the horrid teetotalers?”

“It was both, my dear,” said he. “Phyllis,” he added solemnly, “an Irish teetotaler is a fearful thing.”

“You shall forget all the intemperate teetotalers in a beautiful sleep,” said she, putting her arms around his neck. “Good-night, papa! It was so thoughtless of me to keep you up. It is one o’clock.”

“It appears to me that you are the one who should be ready to succumb,” said her father. “I had nothing to stimulate my imagination. Practical politics has not yet discovered a good working reply to the man who calls his fellow-man a liar, so the political outlook is not very cheering.”

“That is what is greatly needed: a satisfactory retort—verbal, of course—to that every-day assertion.”

“It has become the most potent influence in the House of Commons, during the past year or two; and the worst of the matter is that the statement is nearly always correct.”

“Then there is all the greater need for a /modus vivendi/”—she had an ample acquaintance with the jargon of diplomacy. “I don’t despair of Parliament being able to suggest an efficient retort.”

"Parliament: two ragamuffins quarreling up an entry over a rotten orange. Good-night, my child!"

She was at last in her own room: an apartment of gracious-tinted fabrics and pink satin panels; of tapestried sofas made by French artists before the lovely daughter of Maria Teresa went to her death. She switched on the lights in the candle sconces, and threw herself down upon one of the sofas. Her theater wrap and fan she had laid over a chair.

It was not to the drama which she had seen superbly acted at the

Parthenon that her thoughts went out; but to the words which her

dearest friend had spoken when driving back from the theater.

What words were they?

She could not recollect them now; but she was still conscious of the impression which they had produced upon her while they were being spoken. That impression was that up to that instant all the issues of her life had been unworthy of a moment's consideration. She had taken what she believed to be a deep interest in many matters during the five years that she had been the head of her father's house. She had, she knew, been of the greatest help to her father in his political life, not merely turning her memory to good account in discovering the incautious phrases in the speeches of the men who were foolish enough to be his opponents, but actually advising him, when he asked her, on many matters about which the newspapers had been full. Then she had taken an active part in more than one of those "movements" which became the topic of a London season until compelled by an invisible but all-powerful authority to move on and make way for the next new thing. She had moved with every movement, and had proved her capacity to control herself when the movement became uncontrollable. And then she had thought how worthy a position in life would be that of the wife of the rector of a church like St. Chad's.

That idea had remained with her, as had already been said, for some months, until, to be exact in regard to the date, the other young women, whom she had been watching with interest, had bought their brilliant blouses with the newest and, consequently, most abnormal sleeves, casting aside the sober-hued bodices which they had worn in hope.

How paltry were all these aspirations, these undertakings!

That was what was dinning in her ears all the time Ella had been talking in the carriage.

But why, why, why should all her previous interests, including the consideration of the questions of orthodoxy and the other thing, seem so ridiculously small while Ella was speaking?

That was the question which puzzled her. Had Ella shown her a way to something better, something higher, something better worthy of the aspiration of a woman? She could not say that that had been the drift of her large discourse. What she had said had actually been puzzling in its vagueness, its daring images—all images are vague; its allegories—all allegories are indefinite.

And yet—and yet—and yet—

With a motion of impatience Phyllis sprang to her feet. After a pause she went to a little satin-wood cabinet which she had turned into a bookshelf, and took out her Bible. She had never slept a night for years without reading a chapter; and in order to avert the possibility of her own feelings or fancies of the moment making any invidious distinction between the various component parts of a book which is profitable in every line, she had accustomed herself to read the chapters in consecutive order from The Genesis to The Revelation. Sometimes, when she found herself face to face of a night with a purely genealogical chapter, Phyllis of Philistia had difficulty in crushing down her unworthy desire to turn to some chapter that seemed to her frail judgment to contain words of wider comfort to the children of men than a genealogical tree of the Children of Israel; but she had never yielded to so unworthy an impulse. Who was she that she should suggest that one part of the Sacred Book was calculated to be more profitable than another? Was it not all the Bible?

She had plowed her way through the slough of Hebrew names upon these occasions, and the blessing of the words had been borne to her in the form of a sweet sleep.

Her chapter for this night was that which describes the campaign of David, during which he and his hosts were besieged in their earthworks, and how the three mighty men had made a sortie through the camp of the enemy in order to obtain for their leader a cup of water.

She continued the chapter to the end, but all through it those words were ringing in her ears:

”It is the price of blood; it is the price of blood.”

And as she knelt down beside her bed, her bare white feet peeping out

from beneath the drapery of her white night-dress, in a posture that would have made the most human atheist believe in the beauty of devotion, those words were still in her ears: "The price of blood; the price of blood."

Good Heavens! How could she carry that feather fan? How could Ella Linton hold it up to her face—hold her face down to it, flutter its fairy fluff upon her cheeks? It was the price of blood. Herbert Courtland had run a greater risk to obtain those feathers than David's mighty men had run to draw the water from the well. She had heard all about the insatiable savagery of the natives of New Guinea. Paradise? Who had named those birds the birds of paradise? She recollected how the feathers which Ella had whirled about had held in the very center of every wonderful disc of rich purple, edged with unequal radiating lines of gold, a single spot of brilliant crimson, with a tiny star of silver in the center. The effect of the sunlight glinting over this combination on the thousand feathers that swept after the bird had caused Herbert Courtland, the first white man who had seen this glory of glories, to call it the meteor-bird. But those crimson drops: were they not the blood of the men who had perished miserably while endeavoring to wrest its marvels from the tropical forests of that great island?

Paradise?

And Ella could treat those feathers as though they had been plucked from a tame pheasant? And now she was lying in her bed with the fan on the pillow beside her!

How could she do it? That was what the girl asked herself while she lay awake on her own bed. Would Ella not see, on the white pillow beside her head, the crimson stains of the feathers that had been snatched out of the dripping red hand of death, but the man who had not feared to grapple with death itself in that hell which people called a paradise?

But the man, the man who had gripped death by the throat and had torn the feathers from his grisly, fleshless fingers,—her imagination was very vivid at night, especially after reading a thrilling chapter of Hebrew massacre,—that man had talked with her upon such trifles as books and plays, strange pageants enacted among paper and canvas unrealities of life. She had actually been leaning against some of these painted scenes while the man who had fought his way into the depths of that forest which no white man but himself had yet penetrated,—the man whose life had, day by day and night by night, been dependent upon the accuracy of his rifle aim,—had talked with her.

That was really the sum of all her thoughts. She did not try to recall the words that he had spoken; it was simply the figure of the man who

had been before her that now remained on her mind. She did not stop to think whether or not he had spoken as a man with intellect would speak; whether he had spoken as a man whose orthodoxy was beyond suspicion would speak. The question of his orthodoxy, of his intellect (which may be just the opposite), did not occur to her. All she felt was that she had been talking face to face with a man.

So that the result of her evening's entertainment, after she had read her inspiring chapter in the Bible and said her bedside prayer, she might have defined in precisely the same words as she had spoken to her friend Ella when Ella had asked her, immediately on entering the carriage, what she thought of Herbert Courtland.

"He is the bravest man in the world at present."

She did not fall asleep for a considerable time.

CHAPTER XI.

I'M AFRAID THAT I MUST HAVE PRINCIPLE ON MY SIDE.

"It is quite ridiculous, besides being untrue," said Phyllis, when she had read the article in the newspaper to which her father called her attention one morning, a week after the criticism on "Cagliostro" had appeared. The article was headed:

"DYNAMITE VERSUS EVANGELIZATION,"

and it came out in a weekly paper devoted to the interests of Nonconformists.

"It is with the deepest regret that we have to call the attention of our readers and the public [the article ran] to the series of charges brought by the Revs. Joseph Capper and Evans Jones, the eminent pioneers of the Nonconformist Eastern Mission, against a gentleman to whom a considerable amount of honor is just now being given by the Royal Geographical Society, the Ethnological Institute, the Ornithological Association, and other secular organizations, on account of his exploration in the Island of New Guinea. It is scarcely necessary to say that we allude to Mr. Herbert Courtland. The position which has been occupied for several years by the two distinguished ministers whose self sacrifice in endeavoring to spread the Light through the dark places of the tropical forests of a savage land is well known to the subscribers to the N. E. M., precludes the possibility of a mistake being made in this matter, and yet they declare in a

letter which we publish this morning that the manner in which Mr. Courtland pursued his so-called explorations in the forests which line the banks of the Fly River has practically made impossible all attempts at mission work in that region. In several directions it is not denied that Mr. Courtland entered into friendly relations with some native tribes; but instead of endeavoring to make the poor benighted creatures acquainted with the Truth, he actually purchased as slaves over a hundred of them to aid him in penetrating the Kallolu forest, where, it will be remembered, he succeeded in shooting the much illustrated meteor-bird, as well as several other specimens which will delight the members of the Ornithological Association rather than professing Christians. Our distinguished correspondents state, and we have no room to doubt their word, that Mr. Courtland purchased his slaves by a promise to assist the head man of their tribe against his enemies belonging to another tribe—a promise which he only too amply fulfilled, the result being an indiscriminate slaughter of savages who, though avowed cannibals, might eventually have embraced the truths of Nonconformity. The elephant rifles of the explorer did their deadly work only too efficiently; but we trust that, for his own sake, Mr. Courtland will be able to bring forward trustworthy evidence to rebut the suspicion of his having upon at least one occasion induced even the friendly natives to believe that he possessed the power of the Deity to perform miracles, and upon another occasion of having used dynamite against them by which hundreds were destroyed in cold blood. It is the evil influences of such irresponsible men as Mr. Courtland, whose ill-directed enterprise we cannot in justice to him refrain from acknowledging, that retard the efforts of those noble pioneers of Nonconformity who have already made such sacrifices for the cause, and who rejoice at the difficulties with which they find themselves beset. We understand that a question will be put to the Minister for the Annexation Department in the House of Commons toward the latter end of the week, on the subject of the alleged excesses of the most recent explorer (so-called) of New Guinea—excesses which if committed in Bulgaria or Armenia, or even Ireland, would have called for an expression of the horror of Christian Europe; and we may mention that subscriptions on behalf of the Revs. Joseph Capper and Evans Jones will be received at the office of this paper to enable them to substantiate the truth of their statements.”

”It is quite ridiculous, besides being untrue, papa,” cried Phyllis; ”and I hope that you will not fail to take his part and show the falsehood of such accusations. Could anything be more absurd than that about the slaves? Slaves! Dynamite!”

”Leading up to subscriptions—don’t forget that,” said her father. ”If subscriptions are to be forthcoming, they must be got up. Traffic in human flesh, insults to aborigines, Siberia, the conversion of the

Jews—all these appeal directly to the pockets of the Great English People. Any one of them will constitute an excellent peg on which to hang an appeal to the pocket. Those two distinguished pioneers of—well, shall we say civilization or Nonconformity?—understand their business, my dear.”

”It is no part of their business to try and hold a brave man up to the execration of everyone.”

”I’m not so sure of that. The technicalities of the mission field are not so apparent all at once. The Vineyard—well, the system of vine-culture of some of the organizations is a trifle obscure.”

Phyllis became impatient.

”The House of Commons—a question is to be asked in the House. Then you must ask another, papa, showing the nonsense of the first.”

”Heavens above! Why should I be dragged into the quarrel, if it is a quarrel, of Herbert Courtland on the one hand and the Reverends Joseph Capper and what’s the other, Smith—no, Jones—Evans Jones? I shouldn’t wonder if he is of Welsh extraction.”

”You will surely not stand passively by and hear a brave man slandered. That would be unlike you, papa. No; you are bound to protest against the falsehood.”

”Am I indeed? Why? Because the slandered man, if he is slandered, is the friend of my daughter’s friend?”

”Exactly—that’s quite sufficient for you to go upon—that and the falsehood.”

”If it is a falsehood.”

”If—oh, papa—if?”

”If I have your personal guarantee that the statements are unsubstantiated—”

”Now, you are beginning to jest. I cannot jest on so serious an issue. Think of it—slaves—dynamite!”

”Both excellent words for missionaries to send home to England—almost equal to opium and idols from the standpoint of the mission-box.”

Phyllis was solemn for a moment; then she burst into a merry laugh that only wanted a note of merriment to be delightful. Her father did not miss that note. He was thinking of another phrase.

"Now, why shouldn't you say that or something like that, my father?" cried the girl. "Something to set the House laughing before the Minister of the Annexation Department has had time to reply? You can do it, you know."

"I believe I could," said Mr. Ayrton thoughtfully. "But why, my child; why?"

"Why! Why! Oh, if one only said good things when there was a reason for saying them, how dull we should all be! Any stick for a dog—any jest is good enough for the House of Commons."

"Yes; but suppose it is inferred that I am not on the side of the missionaries? What about Hazelborough?"

Hazelborough was the constituency which Mr. Ayrton represented in the House of Commons.

"My dear father, where would you be if you couldn't steer through the Hazelborough prejudices now and again? You can always say something so good as to make people not care which way it cuts."

"What? Oh, Phyllis! I am ashamed of you. Besides, the people of Hazelborough have got to be extremely sensitive. They have caught the Nonconformist Conscience. The bacillus of the Nonconformist Conscience was rampant a short time ago, and it has not yet been stamped out. I'm afraid that I must have principle on my side—some show of principle, at any rate—not so wide as a church door or so deep as a well, but still—"

"And you will, too, papa. I'll see Ella and get her to find out from Mr. Courtland what is the truth."

"Well, perhaps it mightn't be wise to rush into extremes all at once! I wouldn't insist on the truth, if I were you. What's the House of Commons that it should be cockered up with the truth? All that is needed is enough to go on with. An electro-plating of veracity is in keeping with the economic tendencies of the age."

"I am not afraid of the truth," cried Phyllis, without giving the cynicism of her father the tribute of a smile. "Mr. Courtland would, I know, be incapable of doing anything unworthy of—of—"

"Let us say an explorer," suggested her father. He knew that the word which was in her mind was /Englishman/. She only checked herself when her imagination caused her to perceive the average silk-hatted man with his tongue in his cheek at the utterance of the phrase. "Let us say 'unworthy of an explorer,'" repeated her father; "that is an elastic phrase."

Phyllis was irritated.

"I have talked with him," she said a trifle coldly.

"Yes," said her father, "once."

"I should have said that I know Ella."

"And yet Ella is a woman!"

"Oh, the charges are too ridiculous! Slaves! What nonsense! We all know what slavery is. Well, where are his slaves now? If he only hired the natives for a month or two they were only servants, not slaves. The thing is manifestly ridiculous."

"Then why should we trouble ourselves with the attempt to rebut it?"

"Because so many people are idiots nowadays," cried Phyllis warmly. "Because, no matter how ridiculous a charge which is brought against a distinguished person may be, some people will be found ready to believe in its truth. Never mind; I'll find out the truth; I'll go to Ella."

"The fountain-head indeed," said Mr. Ayrton. "When in search of the truth, go to a woman."

"I will, at any rate," said Phyllis.

And she went thither.

CHAPTER XII.

DYNAMITE-SLAVE-DEALING-MASSACRES-ARMENIA!

Phyllis, of course, knew when to go to Ella with the certainty of finding her at home. At the luncheon hour Mrs. Linton was always visible to the three friends whom she had within the confines of Mayfair. She considered herself blessed among women in the numerical strength of her friendships; and so perhaps she was; she had three.

She was in one of her drawing rooms—the one that was decorated with water colors set in fluted panels of yellow silk—not the one with the pink blinds so beloved by those of her visitors who had reached an age to regard a pink light as a woman's best friend. She was wearing a new gown which Phyllis, in spite of her enthusiasm on behalf of a brave man maligned, found admirable both as regards fabric, fit, and

fashion.

Then followed a word or two of commendation of the artists who had been concerned in its production. They had not been absurd about the sleeves, and they had not vetoed the sweep of lace—it was about half a yard wide—which the person who occupied so insignificant a position as is usually allocated to the mere wearer of the gown had suggested for the bodice. The gown was an unequivocal success, and had Ella seen the disgraceful article which had appeared in the /Spiritual Aneroid/ on the subject of Mr. Courtland's explorations?

Ella smiled a slow smile, as the question joined the congratulation without the lapse of a breath.

"The /Spiritual Aneroid/? Who is the /Spiritual Aneroid/? What is the /Spiritual Aneroid/?" she asked. "Oh, a newspaper. What could a newspaper with such a funny name have to say about Mr. Courtland?"

"I have brought it with me," said Phyllis. "It is quite disgraceful. I'm sure you'll agree with me."

"I'm certain of it."

Ella accepted the proffered paper and glanced down the article pointed out to her by Phyllis. Phyllis' eyes were gleaming as she placed her finger on the words, "Dynamite /versus/ Evangelization," but Ella's eyes did not gleam while she was reading all the words printed beneath the heading. She folded the paper and glanced carelessly at the name at the top of the outside page and said, "Well?"

"Was there ever anything so disgraceful?" cried the girl. "Was there every anything so false?"

"Is it false?" asked Ella.

"How can you doubt it? Do you fancy that Mr. Courtland would be a slave-dealer?"

"I wonder how he'd look in the broad flat hat which appears in all the pictures of the slave-dealers? Rather well, I fancy," said Mrs. Linton.

"Oh, how can you talk of his looking well or ill when you read such an attack upon him?" said Phyllis, jumping up with a charmingly rosy face. "Surely it is something to you when so distinguished a man—your friend as well—is attacked!"

"If we were traveling with him across the desert in a caravan, should we mind much if the whole caravan were attacked by Bedouins or missionaries or people of that stamp, my dear? Of course we shouldn't.

We should feel that he would be equal to the defense of all of us, and himself as well."

"Oh, of course; but this is quite another thing, isn't it?"

"Where is the difference? If anybody minds the nonsense printed in that thing, Herbert Courtland will certainly be able to defend himself when called on to do so."

Phyllis seated herself once again.

"But a question is to be asked in Parliament about him?" she suggested.

"And can you, the daughter of a member of that Parliament, honestly tell me that you fancy that any human being minds how many questions are asked about him in the Questionable House?"

"But the least breath of suspicion—dynamite—slave-dealing—massacres—Armenia. Oh, the article is certain to be copied into dozens of other papers—the public do so like to get hold of some scandal against a man who has done something great."

"They do indeed. Would you suggest organizing a committee of ladies for the protection of Mr. Courtland?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Ella. I thought that you were his friend, and that you would be as indignant as I was at that disgraceful attack upon his reputation."

"I don't think that it will place his reputation in jeopardy, unless with the readers of that paper, and they are not worth taking into account, are they?"

"Papa says the thing has a large circulation among a certain class. I want him to ridicule the question which is threatened in that article; he knows how to do that kind of thing very well."

"Is it come to that, my Phyllis? Were you really so greatly interested in the one conversation you had with him as to constitute yourself his champion?"

Above all things Phyllis was truthful. She had never had an experience of love—that passion which can change the most truthful of womankind into the least scrupulous. There was no pause between Ella's question and Phyllis' answer.

"Certainly the one conversation that I had with him interested me—I told you so returning in the carriage. Has he never succeeded in interesting you, Ella? He told me that you were his friend—I believe

he said his dearest friend."

"And I believe that he told you the truth," said Ella. "But, being his best friend and a woman, I refrain from constituting myself his champion. You see we live in Philistia, my Phyllis, and the champions that Philistia sends forth usually come to grief; there was the case of one Goliath of Gath, for example. I have no desire to have stones slung at me by the chosen people."

"I'm not quite sure that I understand you," said Phyllis, with a very pretty pucker on her forehead. "You don't mean to say that a woman should not do her best for a man whom she knows to be maligned? You don't suggest that she should stand silently to one side while people are saying what's false about him?"

"I say that it's unwise in Philistia; though I admit that it is of the greatest advantage to the man, for people at once cease maligning him and take to maligning her."

"If she is any sort of a woman she will not mind that, however unjust it may be. In this case, however, I don't think there is much risk: even the most unscrupulous person could hardly say that—that—"

"That we were becoming Herbert Courtland's champions, because we were in love with him?"

"Well, I don't know. Wasn't that what you meant to suggest people would say of a woman who became a man's champion?"

"Something in that way. How straightforwardly you speak out what's on your mind!"

"Oh, I'm a girl of to-day. I have got over all those absurd affectations of childishness which used to be thought feminine long ago. The gambols of the kitten were once thought the most attractive thing on earth, and they are very interesting: but for the full-grown cat to pretend that it is perfectly happy with a ball of worsted, when all the time it has its heart set on a real mouse, is nonsense."

"That is an allegory, a subtle parable, Phyllis. But I fancy I can interpret it. You are quite right. Men know that we, the full-grown cats, take no interest in the ravelings of wool as mediums of diversion—that we have our hearts set on mice. Oh, yes! it is much better to be straightforward in our speech—it is even sometimes better to be quite straight in our ways as well. It usually prevents misunderstanding. There is scarcely a subject that women may not talk about to men in the most direct way, nowadays. But about the question of championship—"

Here the door of the room was thrown open and Mr. Herbert Courtland

was announced.

"I quite forgot to mention that Mr. Courtland was lunching with us to-day, Phyllis," said Ella, while shaking hands with her visitor. "Now you will have a chance of getting the slave-dealer's account of the whole business. Are you a slave-dealer, Bertie? If so, why don't you wear the usual broad-leaved hat of your order?"

"It is I who am the enslaved one," said Mr. Courtland, laying his hand to the left of the buttons of his white waistcoat and bowing the bow of the early years of the century, with a glance at each lady.

"What a pretty reminiscence of the age of artificiality!" said Ella; "and what an apt commentary upon the subject we were talking about, Phyllis! We were discussing the merits of directness in speech and straightness in every way. We were ridiculing the timid maid—all sandals and simper—of forty years ago. Why should men and women have ever taken the trouble to be affected? Let us go in to lunch and eat with the appetites of men and women of the nineties, not with the nibblings of society of the fifties. Come along, Phyllis. Mr. Courtland will tell us all about his dreadful goings on, his slave-dealings, his dynamitings. Have you seen that article in the—what's the name of the paper, Phyllis?"

"The /Spiritual Aneroid/," said Phyllis.

"I haven't been so fortunate," said he.

"Then we shall take the paper into the dining room with us, and place it before you. If you were guilty of the doings that the article details, you would do well to—to—well, to adopt the picturesque costume incidental to ruffianism—the linen jacket of the slave-trader, the mangy fur collar of the dynamity man of war. Have you ever trafficked in human beings, Mr. Courtland?"

"Well, yes," said he. "I have done a little in that way, I admit."

"And dynamite—have you ever massacred people with dynamite?" Ella continued.

"Well, when my dynamite exploded, the people who were in the immediate neighborhood were never just the same afterward," said he.

"Finally, did you allow yourself to be worshiped as God?" she asked.

"Yes, I got them to do that," he replied. "I have experienced all human sensations, including those of a god in working order."

"Then I hope you will make a good lunch. We begin with white-bait."

"I am quite satisfied to begin with white-bait," said he.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVEN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS DOESN'T MATTER MUCH.

"I did not intend to stay for lunch," said Phyllis, "but your overpowering will swept me along with it, Ella. But I hope you will let me say that I don't think you should jest about what is—what some people at any rate think very serious."

"Phyllis is of Philistia," said Ella, "and Philistia was always given to ordeal by champions. She thinks the attack made upon you by two missionaries in their newspaper organ quite disgraceful. It doesn't seem so disgraceful after all."

"I haven't seen the attack," said he. "But I feel it to be very good of Miss Ayrton to think it disgraceful."

"Of course I thought it disgraceful," said Phyllis, "and I came to Ella to talk it all over. The article accuses you of atrocities, and said that a question would shortly be put to the Minister of the Annexation Department in the House of Commons. Now, I know that there is nothing my father enjoys more than snubbing those detestable men who endeavor to get up a reputation for philanthropy, and temperance, and bimetallism, and other virtues, by putting questions on the paper; and he could, I think, ask some counter question in this particular case that would ridicule the original busybody."

"It was very good of you to think so, Miss Ayrton," said he. "I can't say that, personally, I mind all the attacks that all the missionaries who earn precarious salaries in South Seas may make upon me; but I must confess that I have a weakness for seeing busybodies put to shame."

"You may depend upon Mr. Ayrton's satire," said Ella. "It never misses the point in the harness. The barb of the dart is, I believe, Mr. Ayrton's, the feather at the other end is Phyllis'."

"Only once that happened," said Phyllis. "Oh, no! papa manufactures his own darts, from feather to tip."

"But supposing that the charges brought against me are true?" suggested Mr. Courtland.

"Why, then, can't you see there is all the greater need for ingenuity

in your defense?" said Ella.

"It is impossible to think of the charges as true," said Phyllis stoutly.

"For example?" said he.

"Well, the article said that you had made slaves of some of the natives of New Guinea, purchasing them by a promise to help a native chief against his enemies."

"There wasn't much harm in that: I did it," said he.

"And then it went on to say that you kept your promise," said Phyllis.

"What! They accused me of keeping my promise?" said he. "Well, I'm afraid I can't deny that charge either."

"Did you really slaughter the natives?" cried Phyllis.

The interest which she felt appeared in her eyes.

"I did my best for the savages who had purchased my services," he replied. "The campaign was not a protracted one. Two days after the outbreak of hostilities brought things to a climax. We fought our decisive battle—the Sedan of King Mubamayo. You see, I had a trustworthy Winchester. I believe that about seventy of the enemy bit the dust."

"Only seventy? That was unworthy of you, Mr. Courtland," cried Ella. "Nothing short of thousands counts as a civilized battle. Seventy! Oh, I'm afraid you don't do yourself justice."

"Of course a battle is a battle," said Phyllis stoutly. "If you hadn't killed them they would have killed you. You were in the right, I'm sure."

"I'm not so sure of that," said he, shaking his head. "To tell you the truth, the elements of the crisis of Headman Glowabyola were somewhat involved. The original dispute was difficult for a foreigner to understand—it was, in fact, the Schleswig-Holstein question of Kafalonga."

"You settled it, anyway," suggested Ella. "You were the Bismarck of what's-its-name?"

"I doubled the parts of Bismarck and Von Moltke," said he.

"And that's why they worshiped you as their god? I don't wonder at the heathen in his blindness doing that. Any man who was the same as

Bismarck and Von Moltke would certainly shoulder a deity out of his way," laughed Ella.

"It so happened, however, that my deification was due neither to my recognition as a diplomatist nor as a military strategist," said the explorer. "No, they wanted something beyond the mere fighting man to worship, and my knowledge of that fact combined with their paeans of victory—to the /obbligato/ of a solid iron-wood drum beaten with the thigh bones of the conquered—to keep me awake at night. But one morning the headman came upon me when I was about to boil my kettle to make myself a cup of tea. I had a small lamp that burned spirits, and he stood by while I filled it up from the bottle that I carried with me. He took it for granted that the spirit was water, and he was greatly impressed when he saw it flare up as I applied a lighted match to it. He asked me if I possessed the power to set water in a blaze, and I assured him that that was something for which I had long been celebrated; adding that when I had had my breakfast I meant to while away an hour or two by setting fire to the ocean itself. He implored of me to reconsider my decision, and when I had poured a little spirit into the hollow of my hand and lighted it in the presence of his most eminent scientists, they said that they also desired to associate themselves with the headman's petition. I was, however, inexorable; I walked down to the beach and had just struck a match on the brink of the ocean when the whole tribe prostrated themselves around me, promising to continue worshipping me if I would only stay my hand. Well, what could I do? I weakly yielded and spared the multitudinous sea from being the medium of what would in all likelihood have been the greatest conflagration on record. From that moment, I'm happy to say, they worshiped me as their supreme deity, and I'm bound to say that I behaved as such; I was certainly the most superior class of god they had ever had, and they gave me a testimonial to this effect in case I might ever be looking out for a new situation."

"That was how you managed to get such a collection of birds, including my meteor-bird," said Ella. "But Phyllis of Philistia is shocked at the bare recital of such a tale of idolatry. Are you not, Phyllis?"

"I think I am a little shocked," said Phyllis. She did not say that her first thought just then was that the feather fan was not, after all, the price of blood: it was something much worse. "It was an encouragement of idolatry, was it not, Mr. Courtland?"

"Scarcely," said he. "On the contrary, it was an honest attempt to lead them from their idols to something higher and better."

"You are something higher and better," suggested Ella.

"Quite so; I am a little lower than the angels, but a good deal higher than the awful image which they worshiped before I turned up," said he. "The whole tribe admitted in the most honorable manner that I was

by far the best god they had ever had; they had not an unlucky day so long as they worshiped me, and I retained my Winchester and a full supply of cartridges."

"The testimony was flattering," said Ella. "But still Phyllis is shocked."

"I am," said Phyllis. "I believe in God. Mr. Courtland believes in a Principle."

"Anyhow, I led some thousands of savages from idolatry and cannibalism to something higher, and that's a better record than most gods of my acquaintance can show. Everything must be done gradually to be done permanently. Nothing could be more absurd than the /modus operandi/ of your missionary. Most of them have got rid of their Christianity to make way for their theology. They endeavor to inculcate upon the natives the most subtle points of their theological system, immediately after they have preached against the wickedness of economy in the matter of clothing."

"A large missionary work might be done among husbands at home," said Ella. "But what about the dynamite, that is the charge which still hands over you—a charge of dynamite?"

"That was my worst hour," said Courtland. "I had gone up the Fly River in my steam launch to a point never previously reached by a European. I was fortunate enough to get some specimens that had never been seen before, and I was returning to the coast. My engineer and I were captured when ashore one night getting fuel for our furnace. They took us into the forest a long way, binding our hands with the fiber of one of the creepers, and I had no trouble whatever gathering that it was their intention to make a feast of us—a sort of high tea, it was to be, for they began brewing the herbs which I knew they used only when they were cannibalizing. We were courteously permitted to watch these preparations, for it was rightly assumed that they would be in some degree interesting to us. We were, indeed, greatly interested in all we saw, but much more so when, toward evening, a number of the natives arrived on the scene carrying with them some of the stores which they had found aboard the steam launch. They broke open with a stone hatchet some tins of preserved meat, and seemed to enjoy the contents greatly. The biscuits they didn't care for much, and the cakes of soap which they began to eat could not honestly be said to be an entire success as comestibles. But while we watched them at these /hors d'oeuvres/ to the banquet at which we were expected to take a prominent part, a straggler came up with some reserve supplies; I saw them; tins of dynamite—we carried dynamite for blowing up the snags that obstructed the narrower reaches of the river. We watched the thieves crowd around the bearer of the tins, and we saw that the general impression that prevailed in regard to them was that they had come upon some of the most highly concentrated beef they had ever had

in their hands. When they laid the tins among the hot ashes of their fires and began to break them open with their stone hatchets, my engineer thought with me that all the interest there would be in the subsequent proceedings could not possibly compensate us for the waste of precious time which would be entailed by our remaining. We bolted in spite of our fettered hands, but before we had got more than a couple of hundred yards from the camp, there took place the severest earthquake, coincidental with a thunderstorm and the salute of a battery of a thousand heavy guns. We were whirled into the air like feathers in a breeze, but managed to cling—our bonds being broken—to some of the boughs among which we found ourselves. Shortly afterward, a quarter of an hour or so, there came on the heaviest shower I had ever experienced. Such a downpour of branches of trees, gnarled roots, broken fruits, birds' feathers, mutilated apes of many species, and—well, anatomical specimens! It went on and on until the boughs around us were made into splinters and we were beaten to the ground with the force of those missiles, all the dense forest around us echoing to the shrieks of the lorries and parrots, the monkeys and the wildcats."

"And now the missionaries," said Ella, after a pause.

"And what happened after that?" whispered Phyllis.

He shook his head.

"After that we came away," he said. "We couldn't see that there was any need for us to stay loafing about the forest when we had our business to mind in another direction. It took us two days, however, finding our launch."

"And that is what the missionaries call your dynamite outrage against the natives?" said Ella.

"So it would seem," said he. "I suppose they managed to get some account of the business; one can't hush up a dynamite outrage even in the interior of New Guinea."

"But what a gross misrepresentation of facts it was to say that you had massacred the natives," cried Phyllis indignantly.

He laughed with a shrug.

"Oh, we must all live," he said.

"Unless those who treat tins of dynamite as though they were tins of brawn," said Ella. Then turning to Phyllis she smiled.

Phyllis had no difficulty interpreting the smile.

"Yes," she said, "your opinion was quite correct: Mr. Courtland doesn't care what people say, and it doesn't matter in the least what they do say, or what falsehoods are spread abroad."

"Not in the smallest degree," said Ella. "Herbert Courtland is still Herbert Courtland."

"But so far as I can gather," said Mr. Courtland, "all that the missionaries said of me was substantially correct."

"Read the paper and you will see how detestably false all the charges are," cried Phyllis, rising,—the servants had now left the room,—and picking up the /Spiritual Aneroid/ from where Ella had laid it on a chair.

Herbert Courtland had not yet opened it. He took it from her, saying:

"Thank you, Miss Ayrton. But I really don't see that it concerns me very much whether or not the charges brought against me are true or false. The matter is certainly one for the—~~the~~—ah—/Spiritual Aneroid/ and its special /clientele/."

"But a question is to be asked about it in the House of Commons. I said so just now," cried Phyllis.

"And even the House of Commons doesn't matter much," said Ella.

"That is what papa thought," said Phyllis meekly. "Only I know that if Mr. Courtland thought it worth noticing, papa would be quite pleased to put a counter question. That is why I came here to-day."

"It was so good of you," said the man.

"My Phyllis is all that is good. Let us return to the drawing room," said Ella, rising.

They returned to the drawing room; but when they had been in the apartment for perhaps four minutes, certainly not five, Phyllis said it was necessary for her to hurry home in order that the afternoon letters should be sent to her father at the House.

With another word of appreciation of her kindness, Mr. Courtland held her hand a second longer than was absolutely necessary to maintain a character for civility.

"She is the most charming girl in the world," remarked Ella to the visitor, who remained when Phyllis had left.

"Is she?" said he.

"I know it. Don't you?" asked she.

"How do I know?" he said. "I have thought nothing about it. If you say she is charming, I am pleased to hear it. It matters no more to me that the world is full of charming girls than that the kraken is still at the bottom of the sea. One woman fills all my thoughts. My heart is full of her."

"And you want her to risk the salvation of her soul for you?"

"Yes; that is just what I want."

He remained with her for another hour.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HONORABLE MEMBER IS CLEARLY OUT OF ORDER.

Mr. Ayrton met his daughter the next morning with the good news that he had found among his specimen cases of phrases, one that would effectually silence the member from Wales who had been nominated by the Nonconformist Eastern Missionary Society to put that question to the minister of the Annexation Department on the subject of Mr. Courtland, the explorer. Mr. Ayrton was the better pleased at his discovery, because of the inoffensive nature of the phrase which he had taken out of its case, so to speak. As a rule, he did not mind being offensive if only his phrase was apt. Only people who had no artistic appreciation found fault with the tone of some of his most notable phrases. He did not mind whether they were just or unjust, they said. As if a man can be both honest and witty at the same time!

It so happened, however, that the party to which Mr. Ayrton belonged had become greatly concerned in respect of an element that had just come to the surface to still further complicate the course of politics. This was the Nonconformist Conscience—hitherto a /quantite negligeeable/ in the calculations of the leaders, but now one that it appeared absolutely necessary to take into account as a factor. To be sure, there were a good many people who put their tongues in their cheeks when any mention was made of the Nonconformist Conscience: they said it was no more to be taken seriously than the Spector on the Brocken or the Athanasian Creed. It was only the trick of an electioneering agent desirous of escaping from an untenable position.

There were other persons, however (mostly Nonconformists), who were found ready to declare that the Nonconformist Conscience was a Great and Living Truth. The only point upon which statesmen of all parties

were agreed was that it was worth purchasing. The Nonconformists themselves, upon whom the Great and Living Truth was sprung, had no notion at first that it could be turned into a negotiable security occupying as high a place in the market as, say, Argentine bonds. But it did not take them very long to find out that even an abstraction such as this could be turned to good account by discreet maneuvering. Truth sometimes is heard on an election platform, and yet truth is but an abstract quality. Why, then should not a Great and Living Truth become a regular gold mine to its inventor? It was as great an invention as the art of electroplating, which it closely resembled, and a quite as nice thing could be made out of it by a little dexterous manipulation. If the conscience is silver, the Nonconformist Conscience is at least electroplate of a first-class quality, it was argued; and a political manifesto, which was practically a financial prospectus, was issued with a view of floating the Nonconformist Conscience Company, Limited.

English politics cannot by any possibility be regarded as an exact science; and thus it was that all political parties were at this time making bids for shares in the enterprise. The leaders of one party, in fact, expressed themselves ready to buy up the whole concern, and they actually tendered bills payable at twelve months for all the vendors' interest, and it was only when these bills became due and were returned dishonored that the shadowy character of the transaction was made plain, and the country was convulsed at the disclosure of the fact that the vendors had disposed of a perfectly worthless invention, and that the purchasers had paid for it by promises that were equally worthless.

All this happened later, however; when the fuss was made about the atrocities by an explorer in New Guinea, and Mr. Ayrton was contemplating a counter question that should cast ridicule upon the missionaries and their champion, he was given to understand by the leaders of his party, who, it was believed, had a small parcel of baronetcies done up in official twine, with blank spaces for the name and address in each, awaiting distribution at the first change of Government, that he must take no step that might jeopardize the relations of the party with the vendors of the Nonconformists Conscience. The */Spiritual Aneroid/* was the leading Nonconformist organ, and it would not do to sneer at the missionaries whom it supported. It would be better that all the explorers who had ever risked their lives on behalf of civilization should go by the board than that a single vote should be lost to the party, he was assured by the Senior Whip.

This was rather irritating to the artist in phrases; because it stood to reason that the majority of his phrases were calculated to be hurtful to his opponents. He was thus quite elated when he came upon something which would, he felt sure, call comment in the press at the expense of the member from Wales without casting any slight upon

Nonconformist Missionary enterprise.

He read out the thing to his daughter, and he was surprised to find that she was not appreciative of its unique charm. This was rather too bad, he felt, considering that it was she who had enlisted his services in this particular matter.

"I don't think Mr. Courtland wants anybody to take his part in Parliament or out of it," said she. "And that's why I think it would be better to let that Mr. Aphomas ask his question without interruption. What can the Minister of Annexation say except that he has no information on the subject, and that if he had he could not interfere, as he had no jurisdiction on the Fly River?"

"That is what he will reply as a matter of course," said her father. "But that will not prevent the newspapers that are on the side of Wales and the missionaries from saying what they please in the way of comment on the atrocities in New Guinea."

"Mr. Courtland will not mind whatever they may say," cried Phyllis.

"That was the view I took of the matter in regard to Mr. Courtland's attitude when you mentioned it to me at first," said he. "I didn't suppose that he was the man to be broken down because some foolish paper attacks him; but you were emphatic in your denunciation of the injustice that would be liable to be done if—"

"Oh, I had only spoken for about half an hour to Mr. Courtland then," said Phyllis. "I think I know him better now."

"Yes, you have spoken with him for another half hour; you therefore know him twice as well as you did," remarked her father. "I wonder if he admitted to you having done all that he was accused of doing."

He saw in a moment from the little uneasy movement of her eyes that he had made an excellent guess at the general result of the conversation at Mrs. Linton's little lunch. He had not yet succeeded in obtaining any details from his daughter regarding her visit to Ella. She had merely told him that Ella had kept her to lunch, and that Mr. Courtland had been there also.

"Yes. I do believe that he admitted everything," he continued, with a laugh as he thought how clever he was. (He had frequent reasons for laughing that laugh.)

"No," said Phyllis doubtfully; "he did not admit everything."

"There was some reservation? Perhaps it was melinite that he employed for the massacre of the innocents of New Guinea, not dynamite."

"No; it was dynamite. But the natives had stolen it from his steam launch and they exploded it themselves."

Mr. Ayrton lay back in his chair convulsed with laughter.

"And that is the true story of the dynamite massacre?" he cried. "That is how it comes that, in the words of the /Aneroid/, the works of evangelization on Nonconformist principles is likely to be retarded for some time? The missionaries are quite right too. And what about his miracles—they suggested a miracle, didn't they?"

"Oh, that was some foolishness about setting spirits of wine on fire," said Phyllis. "The natives thought that it was water, you know."

Mr. Ayrton laughed more heartily than before.

"That is the crowning infamy," he cried. "My dear Phyllis, it would be quite impossible to allow so delicious a series of missionary muddles to pass unnoticed. I think I see my way clearly in the matter."

She knew that he did. She knew that he regarded most incidents in the political world merely as feeders to his phrase-making capacity. She knew that it would be impossible to repress him now in the matter of Courtland and the missionaries; she fully realized the feelings of Frankenstein.

Only the weakest protest did she make against her father's intended action; and thus when the day came for Mr. Aphomas' question, that gentleman from Wales inquired, "If Her Majesty's Minister for Annexations could give the House any information regarding the so-called explorations of Mr. Herbert Courtland in the island of New Guinea, particularly in respect of a massacre of natives by dynamite in the region of the Fly River; and if it was true that the gentleman just named had permitted himself to be worshiped as a god by the aborigines of another region; and if Her Majesty's Minister for Domestic Affairs was prepared to say that it was legal for one of Her Majesty's subjects to assume the privileges and functions of a god, and if the First Lord of the Treasury was prepared to communicate to the House what course, if any, Her Majesty's government meant to adopt with a view to the prevention of similar outrages in the same region in the future?"

Mr. Ayrton rose before the Minister of the Annexation Department had quite concluded his yawn, and said he trusted that he was in order (cries of "Yes, yes," from those members who knew that the honorable member had an enlivening phrase which he wanted to get rid of) in inquiring, in connection with the same subject, if the right honorable gentleman could inform the House if there was any truth in the report current in financial and other circles that the object of the explorations of Mr. Herbert Courtland was the discovery of a small

mammal of the porcine tribe, and if one of the Law Officers of the Crown was prepared to assure the House that it would be contrary to the provisions of the Companies Act, and the Companies Act Amendment

Act, to permit this New Guinea pig to assume the functions of the

director of Limited Liability Companies, whose directorate was largely composed of members of both Houses of Parliament (great laughter from honorable gentlemen who were aware that the Mr. Apthomas had no income beyond the remuneration he received as a director of companies); and if Her Majesty's Minister for Agriculture was prepared to state that it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to prohibit the introduction of, at any rate the males of the mammals just referred to, considering the rapid increase in representative assemblies of the English or Welsh bore— (Great laughter, which prevented the concluding words of the sentence being audible in the gallery.)

THE SPEAKER: Order! order! The honorable member for Hazelborough must confine himself strictly to the issue raised by the honorable gentleman from Wales. The honorable member for Hazelborough is only permitted to follow the honorable gentleman from Wales by the indulgence of the House.

MR. AYRTON: Sir, I bow to the ruling of the chair, and will continue by inquiring if Her Majesty's Minister for the Public Worship Department can state to the House if it is true that a newspaper published within the Principality of Wales recently made the announcement that the honorable member who had just made inquiries regarding the exploration of Mr. Herbert Courtland, was the idol of his constituents [Laughter, and cries of "Order!"], and if the right honorable gentleman is prepared to state that the provisions of the Idolatry Act are—

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member is clearly out of order. The question of idolatry in Wales is not at present before the House.

MR. AYRTON: Sir, I give notice that next session I shall move a resolution regarding idolatry in the Principality of Wales [Laughter and cheers.]

The minister for Annexation was about to rise when

MR. MUDLARKY (Ballynamuck) asked if the introduction of the guinea pigs would be prejudicial to the interests of the higher and nobler

Irish animal who, he would remind the Minister for Public Worship, was not to be confounded with the herd whose example was clearly emulated by the present government in seeking self-destruction by running down a steep place into the sea. (Cries of "Order, order!") If there was any doubt before, the honorable member continued, as to the influence which was at work in that Gadarene herd, which assumed the functions of Her Majesty's government, the sounds that now came from the Treasury Benches would convince even the most skeptical that sacred history is sometimes repeated by profane, but he could not compliment the devils, who had the bad taste to—(Several honorable members here rose amid the cheers of the Irish Members, and a scene of confusion took place.)

THE SPEAKER [sternly]: Order, Order! The honorable member from Ballynamuck must resume his seat. He is out of order. The question before the House is not the good taste of demoniac visitants. I call upon the right honorable gentleman, the Minister for the Department of Annexation.

MR. McCULLUM (Blairpukey Burghs): Mr. Speaker, one moment. To save time, will the right honorable gentleman say if the Highland Crofters, whose land was stolen from them in order that the members of the Upper House—

THE SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for the Department of Annexation.

MR. BLISTER (Battersea, Mid): Mr. Speaker, though I don't do any work myself, I'm the representative of labor, only those contemptible skunks, the workingmen, don't see that they have a man for a leader—a man, that's me—that's Joe Blister. And as the Upper House has been introduced, I'll run, eat, or swear with the best of that lot of tap-room loafers; I'll do anything but fight them—except, of course, on a labor platform, and if—

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member is out of order. The Minister for the Department of Annexations.

THE MINISTER FOR ANNEXATIONS: No, sir; I have no information [Cheers and laughter.]

The House then went into Committee of Supply.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT MR. COURTLAND— AH, NEVER MIND!

Mr. Ayrton entertained his daughter with a description of the scene in the House incidental to the annihilation of Mr. Aphthomas. He rather thought himself that his counter-question had been neat. He had been congratulated on it by quite a number of his friends in the tea room, and six messages had been delivered to him by representatives of the press to the effect that if he could provide them with the exact text of his counter-question they would be greatly obliged.

"They mean to report it in full?" said Phyllis. She had an ample experience of the decimation of his questions as well as speeches by the members of the press gallery. They had reduced it to a science.

"I am much mistaken if they don't comment on it as well," said her father. "Poor Aphthomas! he alone sat glum and mute while everyone around him was convulsed."

"I hope that Mr. Courtland will not feel hurt at what has occurred," said Phyllis doubtfully.

"Mr. Courtland? Who is Mr. Courtland? What has Mr. Courtland to say to the matter? What business is it of his, I should like to know."

"Well, considering that he was the original subject of the questions, though I must confess that he didn't remain long so, I don't think it altogether unreasonable to wonder what he will think about the whole episode," remarked Phyllis.

"Ah, you always do take an original view of such incidents," said her father indulgently. "It is so like a woman to try and drag poor Courtland into the business. You ought to know better than to fancy that any interest attaches to the original subject of a question in the House. You'll be suggesting next that some credit should be given to the youths who pass brilliant examinations in things, and that all should not be absorbed by their grinders."

"I'm not so silly as that, papa," said she. "No; but Mr. Courtland— Ah, never mind."

He did not mind.

It so happened, however, that several of the newspapers which commented on the questions and counter-questions the next day introduced the name of Mr. Herbert Courtland and his explorations;

though, of course, most attention was directed to what Mr. Ayrton's party called the brilliant, and the other party the flippant, methods of Mr. Ayrton. His reference to the New Guinea pig some thought a trifle too personal to be in good taste, but if politicians refrained from personalities and were punctilious in matters of taste, what chance would they have of "scoring," and where would the caricaturists be? The reputation of a politician is steadily built up nowadays, not by consistency, certainly; not by brilliant rhetoric; not even by the unscrupulous exercise of a faculty for organizing impromptu "scenes," but by the wearing of a necktie, or a boot, or a waistcoat that is susceptible of caricature. A very ordinary young man has before now been lifted into fame by the twists of his mustache, and another of less than mediocre ability has been prevented from sinking in the flood of forgetfulness by the kindly efforts of a caricaturist who supported him by a simple lock on his scalp. Thus it was that Mr. Apthomas found himself famous before a week had passed, through the circumstance of being represented in the leading journal of caricature as a guinea pig, flying, with the spoil of bubble boards of directors under his arm, from the attack of a number of quaint-looking mammals wearing collars inscribed "ACCURACY," "CORRECT BALANCE SHEETS," "LEGITIMATE SPECULATIONS," and other phrases that suggested the need for the old guinea pig to give way to a new breed. Underneath the picture was printed a portion of the counter-question of Mr. Ayrton, and opposite to it were some verses with a jingling refrain that everyone could remember, and which everyone quoted during the next few days.

The firm of publishers who had been fortunate enough to secure the issue of Mr. Courtland's new book were delighted. If Mr. Ayrton could only have seen his way to introduce their names and their address in his counter-question, their cup of happiness would have been complete, they said. They managed, however, to induce the proprietors of a young lady who was reputed to be the vulgarest and most fascinating of all music-hall artistes, to introduce Mr. Courtland's name into one of the movable stanzas of her most popular lyric: those stanzas which are changed from week to week, so as to touch upon the topics which are uppermost in the minds—well, not exactly the minds—of the public. It is scarcely necessary to say that this form of advertisement is worth columns of the daily papers; and if Mr. Courtland had only shown himself appreciative of his best interests and had changed the title of his book to "The Land of the New Guinea Pig," instead of "The Quest of the Meteor-Bird," they would have gone to press with an extra thousand copies.

But even as it was they knew that between the member of Parliament and the music-hall young lady the sale of the book was a certainty. Their calculations were not at fault. The publishers sent a liberal subscription to the Nonconformist Eastern Mission, whose agents had stimulated public curiosity in Mr. Courtland's new book by suggesting that he had carried out, single-handed, one of the most atrocious

massacres of recent years; and a diamond brooch to the music-hall young lady who had so kindly worked in the reference to the book after dancing one of her most daring hornpipes in the uniform of a midshipman; they doubled the lines of their announcements in the advertising columns of the paper that had issued the cartoon of the New Guinea Pig, and, finally, they sent a presentation copy of "The Quest of the Meteor-Bird," to Mr. Ayrton.

Then, as everyone was humming the lines of the music-hall young lady:

"From the land of far New Guinea
Came a little pig-a-ninny,"

the daily papers were bound to give two-column reviews to the book on the day of its publication; and as the rod which Moses cast down before Pharaoh swallowed up the wriggling rods of the magicians, the interest attaching to Mr. Courtland's book absorbed that which attached to all the other books of the season, including "Revised Versions," though the publishers of the latter moved heaven and earth (that is to say, the bishop and the people's churchwarden) to get the Rev. George Holland prosecuted. If either had been susceptible to reason, and had got up a case against their author, the publishers declared that Mr. Courtland's book would not have had a chance with "Revised Versions." To be sure they admitted that the report that Mr. Holland had been thrown over by the lady who had promised to marry him had given a jerk forward to the sales; but when Mr. George Holland had been so idiotically blind to his best interests and (incidentally) the best interests of his publishers, as to contradict this suggestion of incipient martyrdom, and thus an excellent advertisement had been lost, and everyone was, in a week or two, talking about "The Quest of the Meteor-Bird," while only a few continued shaking their heads over "Revised Versions."

Meantime, however, Mr. Courtland thought it well to call upon Mr. Ayrton in order to thank him for his kindness in replying in the House of Commons so effectively to the questions put to the various ministers by Mr. Apthomas; and Mr. Ayrton had asked Mr. Courtland to dinner, and Mr. Courtland had accepted the invitation, Miss Ayrton begging Mrs. Linton to be of the party, and Mrs. Linton yielding to her petition without demur.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOULD IT BE WELL WITH MY HUSBAND?

It was on their way back from this little dinner-party that Mr.

Courtland confessed to Ella Linton that he had come to think of her dearest friend as a most charming and original girl; she had never once referred to his achievements in New Guinea, nor had she asked him to write his name in her birthday book. Yes, she was not as other girls.

"I'm so delighted to hear you say so much," said Ella. "Oh, Bertie! why not make yourself happy with a sweet girl such as she, and give no more thought to such absurdities as you have been indulging in? Believe me, you don't know so well as I do in what direction your happiness lies."

"I don't know anything about happiness," said he. "I don't seem to care much, either. When I made up my mind to find the meteor-bird, don't you suppose that there were many people who told me that, even if it was found, it was quite unlikely that it would be more succulent eating than a Dorking chicken? I'm sure they were right. You see, I didn't go to New Guinea in search of a barndoor fowl. I don't want domestic happiness, I don't want anything but you—you are my meteor-bird. I found, after my first visit to New Guinea, that it was impossible for me to rest until I had found the meteor-bird. I have found that it is impossible for me to live without you, my beloved."

"You will have to learn to live without me," said she, laying her hand upon his. They had now reached her house, so that no immediate reply was possible. He did not attempt to make a reply until they had gone into a small drawing room, and she had flung off her wrap. They were alone.

Then he knelt on the rug before her and took both her hands in his own—a hand in each of his hands—as they lay on her dress. His face was close to hers: she was in a low chair. Each could hear the sound of the other's breathing—the sound of the other's heart-beats. That duet went on for some minutes—the most perfect music in life—the music which is life itself—the music by which man becomes immortal.

"Do not hold me any longer, Bertie," said she. "Kiss me and go away—away. Oh, why should you ever come back? I believe that, if you loved me, you would go away and never come back. Oh, what is this farce that is being played between us? It is unworthy of either of us!"

"A farce? A tragedy!" said he. "I want you, Ella. I told you that I could not live without you."

"You want me? You want me, Bertie?" said she. Tears were in her eyes and in her voice, for there was to her a passion of pathos in those words of his. "You want me, and you know that it is only my soul that shall be lost if I give myself to you. God has decreed that only the soul of the woman pays the penalty of the man's longing for her."

"Your soul shall be saved, not lost," said he. "At present it is your soul that is in peril, when you give your sweetness to the man whom you have ceased to love—ah! whom you never loved. You will save your soul with me."

"I shall lose it for all eternity," said she. "Do you think that I complain? Do you fancy for a moment that I grumble at the decree of God, or that I rail against it as unjust?"

"You are a woman."

"I am a woman, and therefore you know I will one day be ready to lose my soul for you, Bertie, my love. Oh, my dear, dear love, you say you want me?"

"Oh, my God!"

He had sprung to his feet and was pacing the room before her.

"You say that you want me. Oh, my love, my love, do you fancy for a moment that your longing for me is anything to be compared to my longing for you?"

"My beloved, my beloved!"

His arms were about her. His lips were upon hers. She kissed him as he kissed her.

Then she turned her head away so that his kisses fell upon her cheek instead of her mouth. She turned it still farther and they fell upon her neck—it was exquisite in its shape—and lay there like red rose-leaves clinging to a carved marble pillar.

"Wait," she said. "Wait; let me talk to you."

She untwined his arms from about her—the tears were still in her eyes as she tried to face him.

"Why should you still have tears?" said he. "If anything stood between us and love, there might be room for tears, but nothing stands between us now. I am yours, you are mine."

"That is the boast of a man who sees only the beginning of a love; mine are the tears of a woman who sees its end, and knows that it is not far off."

"How can you say that? The end? the end of love such as ours? Oh, Ella!"

"Oh, listen to me, my love! I am ashamed of the part I have played during the past six months—since we were together on the Arno, and you are ashamed, too."

"I am not ashamed. I have no reason to be ashamed."

"No; you are not ashamed of the part you have played; but you are ashamed of me, Bertie."

"Oh you? I—ashamed of you? Oh, my darling, if you talk longer in that strain I will be ashamed of you."

"You are ashamed of me—I have sometimes felt it. A man with a heart such as I know yours to be, cannot but be ashamed of a woman, who, though the wife of another man, allows him to kiss her—yes, and who gives him kiss for kiss. Oh, go away—go away! I have had enough of your love—enough of your kisses, enough shame! Go away! I never wish to see you again—to kiss you again."

She had walked to the other end of the room, and stood under a Venetian mirror—it shone like a monstrous jewel above her head—looking at him, her hands clenched, her eyes flashing through the tears that had not yet fallen.

He had had no experience of women and their moods, and he was consequently amazed at her attitude. He took a step toward her.

"No—no," she cried angrily. "I will not have any more of you. I tell you that I have had enough. I find now that what I mistook for love was just the opposite. I believe that I hate you. No—no, Bertie, not that, it cannot be that, only— Oh, I know now that it is not hate for you that I feel—it is hate for myself, hate for the creature who is hateful enough to stand between you and the happiness which you have earned by patience, by constancy, by self-control. Yes, I hate the creature who is idiotic enough to put honor between us, to put religion between us, to put her soul's salvation between us."

"Ella, Ella, why will you not trust me?" he said, when she had flung herself into a chair. He was standing over her with his hands clasped behind him. He was beginning to understand something of her nature; of the nature of the woman to whom love has come as a thief in the night. He was beginning to perceive that she had, in her ignorance, been ready to entertain love without knowing what was entailed by entertaining him. "If you would only trust me, all would be well."

She almost leaped from her chair.

"Would it?" she cried. "Would all be well? Would it be well with my soul? Would it be well with both of us in the future? Would it be well with my husband?"

He laughed.

"I know your husband," he said.

"And I know him, too," said she. "He cares for me no more than I care for him, but he has never been otherwise than kind to me. I think of him—I think of him. I know the name that men give to the man who tries to make his friend's wife love him. It is not my husband who has earned that name, Mr. Courtland."

He looked into her face, but he spoke no word. Even he—the lover—was beginning to see, as in a glass, darkly, something of the conflict that was going on in the heart of the woman before him. She had uttered words against him, and they had stung him, and yet he had a feeling that, if he had put his arms about her again, she would have held him close to her as she had done before; she would have given him kiss for kiss as she had done before. It is the decree of nature that the lover shall think of himself only; but had he not told Phyllis that his belief was that Nature and Satan were the same? He was sometimes able to say, "/Retro me, Sathana/"—not always. He said it now, but not boldly, not loudly—in a whisper. The best way of putting Satan behind one is to run away from him. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Yes, but, on the whole, it is safer to show him a clean pair of heels than to enter on an argument with him, hoping that he will be amenable to logic. Herbert Courtland said his, "/Retro me/," in a whisper, half hoping, as the gentlewoman with the muffins for sale hoped, that he would escape notice. For a few moments he ceased to think of himself. He thought of that beautiful thing before him—she was tall, and her rosy white flesh was as a peach that has reached its one hour of ripeness—he thought of her and pitied her.

He had not the heart to put his arms about her, though he knew that to do so would be to give him all the happiness for which he longed. What was he that he should stand by and see that struggle tearing her heart asunder?

"My poor child!" said he, and then he repeated his words, "My poor child! It would have been better if we had never come together. We are going to part now."

She looked at him and laughed in his face.

He did not know what this meant. Had she been simply acting a part all along? Had she been playing a comedy part all the while he was thinking that a great tragedy was being enacted? Or was it possible that she was mocking him? that her laugh was the laugh of the jailer who hears a prisoner announce his intention of walking out of his cell?

"Good-by," said he.

She fixed her eyes upon his face, then she laughed again.

He now knew what she meant by her laugh.

"Perhaps you may think that you have too firm a hold upon me to give me a chance of parting from you," said he. "You may be right; but if you tell me to go I shall try and obey you. But think what it means before you tell me to leave you forever."

She did think what it meant. She looked at him, and she thought of his passing away from her forever more. She wondered what her life would be when he should have passed out of it. A blank? Oh, worse than a blank, for she would have ever present with her the recollection of how he had once stood before her as he was standing now—tall, with his brown hands clenched, and a paleness underlying the tan of his face. "The bravest man alive"—that was what Phyllis had called him, and Phyllis had been right. He was a man who had fought his way single-handed through such perils as made those who merely read about them throb with anxiety.

This was the man of whom she knew that she would ever retain a memory—this was the man whom she was ready to send back to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And this was to be the reward of his devotion to her! What was she that she could do this thing? What was she that she should refrain from sacrificing herself for him? She had known women who had sacrificed themselves to men—such men! Wretched things! Not like that man of men who stood before her with such a look on his face as it had worn, she knew, in the most desperate moments of his life, when the next moment might bring death to him—death from an arrow—from a wild beast—from a hurricane.

What could she do?

She did nothing.

She made no effort to save herself.

If he had put his arms about her and had carried her away from her husband's house to the uttermost ends of the earth, she would not have resisted. It was not in her power to resist.

And it was because he saw this he went away, leaving her standing with that lovely Venetian mirror glittering in silver and ruby and emerald just above her head.

"You have been right; I have been wrong," said he. "Don't try to speak, Ella. Don't try to keep me. I know how you love me, and I know that if I ask you to keep me you will keep me until you die. Forgive me for my selfishness, my beloved. Good-by."

She felt him approach her and she felt the hands that he laid upon her bare shoulders—one on each side of her neck. She closed her eyes as he put his face down to hers and kissed her on the mouth—not with rapturous, passionate lips, but still with warm and trembling lips. She did not know where the kiss ended, she did not know when his hands were taken off her shoulders. She kept her eyes closed and her mouth sealed. She did not even give him a farewell kiss.

When she opened her eyes she found herself alone in the room.

And then there came to her ears the sound of the double whistle for a hansom. She stood silently there listening to the driving up of the vehicle—she even heard the sound of the closing of the apron and then the tinkling of the horse's bells dwindling into the distance.

A sense of loneliness came to her that was overwhelming in its force.

"Fool! fool! fool!" she cried, through her set teeth. "What have I done? Sent him away? Sent him away? My beloved!—my best beloved—my man of men. Gone—gone! Oh, fool! fool!"

She threw herself on a sofa and stared at the Watteau group of masquerading shepherds and shepherdesses on the great Sevres vase that stood on a pedestal near her. The masks at the joining of the handles were of grinning satyrs. They were leering at her, she thought. They alone were aware of the good reason there was for satyrs to grin. A woman had just sent away from her, forever, the bravest man in all the world—those were Phyllis' words—a king of men—the one man who loved her and whom she loved. She had pretended to him that she was subject to the influences of religion, of honor, of duty! What hypocrisy! They knew it, those leering creatures—they knew that she cared nothing for religion, that she regarded honor and duty as words of no meaning when such words as love and devotion were in the air.

She looked at the satyr masks, and had anyone been present in the room, that one would have seen that her lovely face became gradually distorted until the expression it wore was precisely the same as that upon the masks—an expression that had its audible equivalent in the laugh which broke from her.

She lay back on her broad cushions. One of the strands of her splendid hair had become loose, and after coiling over half a yard of the brocaded silk of a cushion, twisted its way down to the floor. She lay back, pointing one finger at the face on the vase and laughing that satyr-laugh.

"We know—we know—we know!" she cried, and her voice was like that of a drunken woman. "We know all—you and I—we know the hypocrisy—the pretense of religion—of honor—duty—a husband! Ah, a husband! that is the funniest of all—that husband! We know how little we care for them all."

She continued laughing until her cushion slipped from under her head. She half rose to straighten it, and at that instant she caught a glimpse of her face in the center silvered panel of the Venetian mirror. The cry of horror that broke from her at that instant seemed part of her laugh. It would not have occurred to anyone who might have heard it that it was otherwise than consistent with the incongruity, so to speak, of the existing elements of the scene. The hideous leer of the thing with horns, looking down at the exquisite picture of the /fete champetre/—the distorted features of the woman's face in the center of the ruby and emerald and sapphire of the Venetian mirror—the cry of horror mixed with the laugh of the woman who mocked at religion and honor and purity—all were consistently incongruous.

In another instant she was lying on the sofa with her face down to the cushion, trying to forget all that she had seen in the mirror. She wept her tears on the brocaded silk for half an hour, and then she slipped from where she was lying till her knees were on the floor. With a hand clutching each side of the cushion she got rid of her passion in prayer.

"Oh, God! God! keep him away from me! keep him away from me!" was her prayer; and it was possibly the best that she could have uttered. "Keep him away from me! keep him away from me! Don't let my soul be lost! Keep him away from me!"

When she struggled to her feet, at last, she stood in front of the mirror once again.

She now saw a face purified of all passion by tears and prayer, where she had seen the soulless face of a Pagan's orgy.

She went upstairs to her bed and went asleep, thanking God that she had had the strength to send him away; that she had had strength sufficient to stand where she had stood in the room, silent, while he had put his arms on her bare shoulders and kissed her on the mouth, saying "Good-by."

She felt that she had every reason to thank God for that strength, for she knew that it had been given to her at that moment; it had not sprung from within her own heart; her heart had been crying out to him, "Stay, stay, stay!" her heart took no account of honor or purity or a husband.

Yes, she felt that the strength which had come to her at that moment had been the especial gift of God, and she was thankful to God for it.

That consciousness of gratitude to God was her last sensation before falling asleep; and, when morning came, her first sensation was that of having a letter to write. Before she had breakfasted she had written her letter and sent it to be posted.

This was the letter:

"MY ONE LOVE: I was a fool—oh, such a fool! How could I have done it? How could I have sent you away in such coldness last night? Believe me, it was not I who did it. How could I have done it? You know that my love for you is limitless. You know that it is my life. I tell you that my love for you laughs at such limits as are laid down by religion and honor. Why should I protest? My love is love, and there can be no love where there are any limits.

"Come to me on Thursday. I shall be at home after dinner, at nine, and see if I am not now in my right mind. Come to me; come to me, Bertie, my love."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT AM I THAT I SHOULD DO THIS THING?

"At last!"

He sat with the letter before him after he had breakfasted, and perhaps for a time, say a minute or so, he caught a glimpse of the nature of the woman who had written those lines to him. If he had not had some appreciation of her nature he would have spent an hour or two—perhaps a day or two—trying to reconcile her attitude of the previous night with the tone of her letter. He did not, however, waste his time over such an endeavor. He knew that she loved him, and that she did not love her husband. He knew that she had allowed him to kiss her, and it had been a puzzle to him for some months why she had not come to his arms forever—he meant her to be his own property forever. He had been amazed to hear her allude, as she had done on the previous night, to such abstractions as honor, religion, her husband. He could not see what they had to do with the matter in hand. He could not see why such considerations should be potent to exercise a restraining influence on the intentions of a man and a woman who love each other.

Well, now it would appear that she had cast to the winds all such

considerations as she had enumerated, and was prepared to live under the rule of love alone, and it was at his suggestion she was doing so.

For a moment or two he saw her as she was: a woman in the midst of a seething ocean, throwing up her hands and finding an absolute relief in going down—down—down into very hell. For a moment or two his heart was full of pity for her. Who could be a spectator of a woman's struggles for life in the midst of that turbulent sea of passion which was overwhelming her, and refrain from feeling pity? That letter which lay before him represented the agonizing cry of a drowning creature; one whom the long struggle has made delirious; one who looks forward to going down with the delight born of delirium.

He recollected a picture which he had once seen—the picture of a drowning woman. He saw it now before him with hideous vividness, and the face of the woman was the face of Ella Linton. The agony of that last fight with an element that was overpowering, overwhelming in its ruthless strength, was shown upon every feature, and his soul was filled with pity.

He sprang to his feet and crushed the letter into his pocket. He felt none of the exultation of the huntsman—only sadness at the fate of the hunted thing that lay at his feet. Once before the same feeling had come over him. It was when, after the long struggle up the river, through the forests, swamps, jungle grass that cut the body of a man as though it were sharp wire, he fired his shot and the meteor-bird fell at his feet. After the first few panting breaths that came to him he had stood leaning on his gun, looking down at that beautiful thing which he had deprived of life.

"What am I that I should have done this thing?" he had asked himself on that evening, while the blacks had yelled around him like devils.

"What am I that I should do this thing?" was his cry now, as the voice of many demons sounded in his ears.

What was he that he should rejoice at receiving that letter from the woman over whose head the waters were closing?

He ordered his horse and, mounting it, rode to where he could put it to the gallop. So men try to leave behind them the sneering demons of conscience and self-reproach. Some of them succeed in doing so, but find the pair waiting for them on their own doorstep. Herbert Courtland galloped his horse intermittently for an hour or two, and then rode leisurely back to his rooms. He felt that he had got the better of those two enemies of his who had been irritating him. He heard their voices no longer. He had lost them (he fancied), because there had come to him another voice that said:

"I love her—I love her."

And whensoever that voice comes to a man as it came to Herbert Courtland it drowns all other voices. He would love her to the end of his life. Their life together would be the real life for which men and women have come into the world. He would go to her, and so far from allowing her to sink beneath the waters down to hell, his arms would be around her to bear her up until—well, is it not generally conceded that love is heaven and heaven is love?

He seated himself at a desk and wrote to her an impassioned line. He would go to her, he said. If death should come to him the next day he would still thank God for having given him an hour of life.

That was what he said—all. It expressed pretty well what he felt he should feel. That reference to God she would, of course, understand. God was to him a Figure of Speech. He had said as much to Phyllis Ayrton. But then he had said that he had regarded God to mean the Power by which men were able (sometimes) successfully to combat the influences of nature. But had he not just then made up his mind to yield to that passion which God, as a Principle, has the greatest difficulty in opposing? Why, then, should he expect that Ella would understand precisely what he meant in saying that he would thank God for his hour of life, his hour of love?

He would have had considerable difficulty in explaining this apparent discrepancy between his scheme of philosophy and his life as a man, had Phyllis asked him to do so; and Phyllis would certainly have asked him to do so had she become acquainted with the contents of his letter to her friend Ella; though Phyllis' father, having acquired some knowledge of men as well as of phrases, would not have asked for any explanation, knowing that a man's philosophy is, in its relation to a man's life, a good deal less important than the fuse is to a bomb. He would have known that a scheme of philosophy no more brings wisdom into a man's life than a telescope brings the moon nearer to the earth. He would have known that for a man to build up a doctrine of philosophy around himself, hoping that the devil will keep on the other side of the paling, is as ridiculous as it is to raise a stockade of roses against a tiger.

Herbert Courtland, however, thought neither of philosophical consistency nor of the advantages of having on one's side a sound Principle. He thought of the stockade of roses, not to keep out the beast but to keep love in. They would live together in the midst of roses forever, and though each might possibly lose something by the transaction, yet what they might lose was nothing compared to what they should certainly win. Of that he was certain, and therefore he posted his impassioned line with a light heart.

That was on Tuesday. He had still two days that he might employ thinking over the enterprise to which he was committed; and he

certainly made the most of his time in this direction. Now and again, as he thought of what was in store for him—for her—he felt as if he were lifted off the earth, and at other times he felt that he was crushed into the earth—crushed into it until he had become incapable of any thought that was not of the earth, earthy. At such moments he felt inclined to walk down to the docks and step aboard the first vessel that was sailing eastward or westward or northward or southward. Then it was that he found but the scantiest comfort in the consideration of the loveliness of love. Glorifying life! No, corrupting life until life is more putrid than death.

That was what love was—something to fly from. But still he did not fly from the vision that came to him when he found himself alone after spending the evenings in brilliant company—a vision of the lovely woman who was waiting for him! What had she said? Her soul—her soul would be lost forevermore?

Well, that showed that she was a woman, at any rate, and he loved her all the better for her womanliness. He knew very well that if God is a Figure of Speech with men, the losing of a soul is a figure of speech with women. The expression means only that they have lost the chance of drinking a number of cups of tea in drawing rooms whose doors are now shut to them. That was what Ella meant, no doubt. If she were openly to set at defiance certain of those laws by the aid of which society was kept together with a moderate degree of consistency, she would be treated as an outlaw.

After all, such a fate was not without its bright side. Some happiness may remain to human beings in that world which is on the hither side of London drawing rooms; and it would be his aim in life to see that she had all the happiness that the world could give her.

Pah! He felt his sentiment becoming a trifle brackish. He loved her, and she loved him. That was more than all the laws and the profits of society to them. That was the beginning and the end of the whole matter—the origin of the sin (people called it a sin) and the exculpation of the sinners. There was nothing more to be said or thought about the matter. Those who loved would understand. Those who did not understand would condemn, and the existence of either class was of no earthly importance to himself or to Ella.

When he awoke on the Thursday morning the feeling of exultation of which he was conscious was not without a note of depression. So it had been when the object of his explorations in New Guinea had been attained, and he looked down at that exquisite thing—that dead splendor at his feet.

He wondered if the attainment of every great object which a man may have in life brings about a feeling of sadness that almost neutralizes the exultation. As he picked up his letters he had a fear that among

them there might be one from Ella, telling him that she had come to the conclusion that she had written too hastily those lines which he had received on Tuesday—that, on consideration, she was unwilling to lose her soul for love of him.

No such letter, however, was among his correspondence. (Could it be possible that he was disappointed on account of this?) He received an intimation from Berlin of the conferring of an order upon him in recognition of his exploration of a territory in which Germany was so greatly interested. He received an intimation from Vienna that a gold medal had been voted to him by one of the learned societies in recognition of his contributions to biological science. He received an intimation from his publishers that they had just gone to press with another thousand (the twelfth) of his book, and he received thirteen cards of invitation to various functions to take place in from three to six weeks' time, but no line did he receive from Ella.

She was his forever and ever, whether her soul would be lost or saved in consequence.

He rather thought that it would be lost; but that did not matter. She was his forever and ever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HERBERT COURTLAND IS A MAN WHO HAS LIVED WITH HONOR.

It was a long day.

Toward evening he recollected that he had to leave cards upon his host and hostess of the Monday previous, but it was past six o'clock when he found himself at the top of the steps of Mr. Ayrton's house. Before his ring had been responded to a victoria drove up with Phyllis, and in a moment she was on the step beside him.

She looked radiant in the costume which she was wearing. He thought he had never seen a lovelier girl—he was certain that he had never seen a better-dressed girl. (Mr. Courtland was not clever enough to know that it is only the beautiful girls who seem well dressed in the eyes of men.) There was a certain frankness in her face that made it very interesting—the frankness of a child who looks into the face of the world and wonders at its reticence. He felt her soft gray eyes resting upon his face, as she shook hands with him and begged him to go in and have tea with her. He felt strangely uneasy under her eyes this evening, and his self-possession failed him so far as to make it impossible for him to excuse himself. It did not occur to him to say

that he could not drink tea with her on account of having an appointment which he could not break through without the most deplorable results. He felt himself led by her into one of her drawing rooms, and sitting with his back to the window while her frank eyes remained on his face, asking (so he thought) for the nearest approach to their frankness in response, that a man who has lived in the world of men dare offer to a maiden whose world is within herself.

"Oh, yes! I got the usual notification of the Order of the Bald Eagle," said he, in reply to her inquiry. "I shall wear it next my heart until I die. The newspapers announced the honor that had been done to me the same morning."

"You cannot keep anything out of the papers," said Phyllis.

"Even if you want to—a condition which doesn't apply to my case," said he. "My publishers admitted to me last week that they wouldn't rest easy if any newspaper appeared during the next month without my name being in its columns in some place."

"I'm sure they were delighted at the development of the /Spiritual Aneroid's/ attack upon you," said Phyllis.

"They told me I was a made man," said he.

She threw back her head—it was her way—and laughed. Her laughter—all the grace of girlhood was in its ring; it was girlhood made audible—was lightening her fair face as she looked at him.

"How funny!" she cried. "You fight your way through the New Guinea forests; you are in daily peril of your life; you open up a new country, and yet you are not a made man until you are attacked by a wretched newspaper."

"That is the standpoint of the people who sell books, so you may depend upon its being the standpoint of the people who buy books," said he.

"I can quite believe it," said she. "Mr. Geraint, the novelist, took me down to dinner at Mrs. Lemuel's last night, and he told me that the only thing that will make people buy books is seeing the author's portrait in some of the illustrated papers, or hearing from some of the interviews which are published regarding him that he never could take sugar in his coffee. The reviews of his books are read only by his brother authors, and they never buy a book, Mr. Geraint says; but the interviews are read by the genuine buyers."

"Mr. Geraint knows his public, I'm sure."

"I fancy he does. He would be very amusing if he didn't aim so

persistently at going one better than someone else in his anecdotes. People were talking at dinner about your having massacred the natives with dynamite—you did, you know, Mr. Courtland.”

”Oh, yes; I have admitted so much long ago. There was no help for it.”

”Well, of course everyone was laughing when papa told how the massacre came about, and this annoyed Mr. Geraint and induced him to tell a story about a poor woman who fancied that melinite was a sort of food for children that caused their portraits to appear in the advertisements; so she bought a tin of it and gave it all to her little boy at one meal. It so happened, however, that he became restless during the night and fell out of his cradle. That happened a year ago, Mr. Geraint said, and yet the street isn’t quite ready for traffic yet.”

”That little anecdote of Mr. Geraint makes me feel very meek. If at any time I am tempted to think with pride upon my dynamite massacre, I shall remember Mr. Geraint’s story, and hang my head.”

”We were all amused at Mr. Geraint’s lively imagination, but much more so when Mr. Topham, the under-secretary, shook his head gravely, and said in his most dignified manner, that he thought the reported occurrence—the melinite incident—quite improbable. He was going on to explain that the composition of the explosive differed so materially from that of the food that it would be almost impossible for any mother to take the one for the other, when our hostess rose.”

”Mr. Topham must have been disappointed. As a demonstrator of the obvious he has probably no equal even among the under-secretaries. You discussed him pretty freely in the drawing room afterward, I may venture to suggest.”

”No; we discussed you, Mr. Courtland.”

”A most unprofitable topic. From what standpoint—dynamite massacres?”

”From the standpoint of heredity, of course. Can you imagine any topic being discussed in a drawing room, nowadays, from any other standpoint? There was a dear old lady present, Mrs. Haddon, and she said she had been a friend of your mother’s.”

”So she was; I recollect her very well. I should like to go see her.”

”She told us a great deal about your mother, and your sister—a sister to whom you were greatly attached.”

Phyllis’ voice had become low and serious; every tone suggested sympathy.

"I had such a sister," said he slowly. His eyes were not turned toward her. They were fixed upon a little model of St. Catherine of Siena,—a virgin among the clouds,—which was set in the panel of an old cabinet beside him. "I had such a sister—Rosamund; she is dead."

"Mrs. Haddon told us so," said Phyllis. "She talked about your mother, and your sister, and of the influence which they had had upon your life—your career."

"They are both dead," said he.

"They did not live to see your triumph; that is what your tone suggests," said she. "That is what Mrs. Haddon said—the tears were in her eyes—last night, Mr. Courtland. I wish you could have heard her. I wish you could have heard what she said when someone made a commonplace remark as to how sad it was they were dead."

"What did she say, Miss Ayrton?"

"She said, 'No, no; please do not talk about death overtaking such as they. The mother, who transmits her nature to the son, renews her life in him; it is not he, but his mother, who lives.' And then she asked, 'Do you suppose that Herbert Courtland ever sets out on any of his great enterprises without thinking of his mother and sister, without feeling that he must do something worthy of them, something for their sake? And you talk of them as if they were dead—as if they had passed away forever from the concerns of earth!' That is what she said, Mr. Courtland."

He had bent forward on his low seat, and was leaning his head on one of his hands. He had his eyes fixed on the parquet of the floor. He was motionless. He did not speak a word.

"Mrs. Haddon said something more," Phyllis continued, after a pause. Her voice had fallen still another tone. " 'Yes,' she said, as if musing, 'dead—dead! A man is as his mother has made him. He is with her from the moment she loves his father. She is evermore thinking of him; he is precious to her before the mystery of his birth is revealed to her. He grows up by her side, and loves her because he knows that she understands him. She does understand him, and she understands his father better by understanding her son.' She said that, Mr. Courtland, and I felt that she had spoken one of the greatest truths of this mysterious life of ours. Then she said, 'Herbert Courtland is a man who has lived with honor to himself, with honor to the memory of his mother, and of his sister, whom he loved. He is a man, and he has not merely attained distinction in the world; if he is without fear, he is also without reproach; and ask him if he has not been strengthened in his fight with whatever of base may have risen up within him, being a man, from day to day, by the thought that his sister is one with him; that his purity of heart and of act is the purity of his mother and

his sister, upon which no stain must ever come.' That was all she said, Mr. Courtland."

There was a long pause after she had spoken. He sat there with his head bent, his fingers interlaced. He had his eyes fixed upon the floor. His cup of tea stood untasted beside him on a little Algerian table.

And she—as she looked at him her soft eyes became dim with tears. She knew that the words which she had spoken, the words which she had repeated as they were spoken by the lady whom she had met the previous night, had awakened many memories within him. She too had her memories. She knew that there was a certain gratefulness in the midst of the bitterness of such memories.

That was all she knew.

And the tears continued to well up to her eyes until she was aware that he had risen from his seat and was standing in front of her. She drew her hand across her eyes. She saw a movement in his lips. They were trembling, but no sound came from them. The hand that he stretched out to her was trembling also. She put her own into it. He held her hand tightly for a moment, then dropped it suddenly and almost fled from the room, without uttering a word.

For a few moments she stood where he had left her, and then she went to a sofa and seated herself upon it. The tears that had come to her eyes before, now began to fall; she thought, girl that she was, that she could understand what were the feelings of the man who had just parted from her. She thought that he was overcome at the reflection that the distinction which he had won in the world could not be shared by those whom he loved, those who would have valued far more than he did the honor that was being done to him.

The pity of it! Oh, the pity of it!

Ella had told her one day when they had talked together about Herbert Courtland, that he had no relation alive, that he stood alone in the world. The information had not meant much to her then; but when she had heard Mrs. Haddon speak on the previous evening about his attachment to his mother and his sister, she remembered what Ella has said, and her heart was full of pity for him. She had made up her mind to tell him all that Mrs. Haddon had said, for surely more sympathetic words had never been spoken; and her opportunity had come sooner than she expected. Their chat together had led naturally up to Mrs. Haddon, and she had been able to repeat to him almost word for word all that his mother's friend had said.

Her heart felt for him. Surely the sweetest reward that can come to a man who has toiled and fought and conquered was denied to the man who

had just parted from her. He had toiled and conquered; but not for him was the joy of seeing pride on the face of those who claimed him as their kin. His father had been killed when he had charged with a brigade through the lines of a stubborn enemy—everyone knew the story. His mother and sister had died when he was beginning to make a name for himself. He had gone forth from the loneliness of his home to the loneliness of the tropical forest; and he had returned to the loneliness of London.

She felt that she had done well to repeat to him the words of his mother's friend. Those words had affected him deeply. They could not but be a source of comfort to him when he was overwhelmed with the thought of his loneliness. They would make him feel that his position was understood by some people who were able to think of him apart from the great work which he had accomplished.

Thus the maiden sat musing in the silent room after she had dried her tears of pity for the man who an hour before had sauntered up to her door thinking, not of the melancholy isolation of his position in the world, but simply that two hours of the longest day of his life must pass before he could kiss the lips of the woman who had given herself up to him.

Her maid found her still seated on the sofa, and ventured to remind her that time was fugitive, and that if mademoiselle still retained her intention of going to Lady Earls court's dinner party,—Lady Earls court was giving a dinner party apparently for the purpose of celebrating her husband's departure for a cruise in Norwegian fjords in his yacht,—it would be absolutely necessary for mademoiselle to permit herself to be dressed without delay.

Phyllis sprang up with a little laugh that sounded like a large sigh, and said if Fidele would have the kindness to switch on the lights in the dressing room, she would not be kept waiting a moment.

The maid hurried upstairs, and mademoiselle repaired to an apartment where she could remove, so far as was possible, the footmarks left by those tears which she had shed when she had reflected upon the loneliness to which Mr. Herbert Courtland was doomed for (probably) the remainder of his life.

Mademoiselle had a dread of the acuteness of vision with which her maid was endowed. She was not altogether sure that Fidele would be capable of understanding the emotion that had forced those tears to her eyes.

But that was just where she was wrong. Fidele was capable of understanding that particular emotion a good deal better than mademoiselle understood it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY HAVE SOULS TO BE SAVED.

When Lord Earls court was at home the only two topics that were debarred from the dinner table were religion and politics; but when Lord Earls court was absent these were the only two topics admitted at the dinner table. Lady Earls court had views, well-defined, clearly outlined, on both religion and politics, and she greatly regretted that there still remained some people in the world who held other views on both subjects; it was very sad—for them; and she felt that it was clearly her duty to endeavor by all the legitimate means in her power—say, dinner parties for eight—to reduce the number of these persons. It was rumored that in the country she had shown herself ready to effect her excellent object by illegitimate means—say, jelly and flannel petticoats—as well.

She wore distinctly evangelical boots, though, in the absence of her husband, she had expressed her willingness to discuss the advantages of the confessional. She had, however, declined, in the presence of her husband, to entertain the dogma of infallibility: though she admitted that the cardinals were showy; she would have liked one about her house, say, as a footman. She thought there was a great deal in Buddhism (she had read "The Light of Asia" nearly through), and she believed that the Rev. George Holland had been badly treated by Phyllis Ayrton. She admitted having been young once—only once; but no one seemed to remember it against her, so she was obliged to talk about it herself, which she did with the lightness of a serious woman of thirty-two. When a man had assured her that she was still handsome, she had shaken her head deprecatingly, and had ignored his existence ever after. She had her doubts regarding the justice of eternal punishment for temporary lapses in the West End, but she sympathized with the missionary who said: "Thank God we have still got our hell in the East End." She knew that all men are alike in the sight of Heaven, but she thought that the licensing justices should be more particular.

She believed that there were some good men.

She had more than once talked seriously to Phyllis on the subject of George Holland. Of course, George Holland had been indiscreet; the views expressed in his book had shocked his best friends, but think how famous that book had made him, in spite of the publication of Mr. Courtland's "Quest of the Meteor-Bird." Was Phyllis not acting unkindly, not to say indiscreetly, in throwing over a man who, it was rumored, was about to start a new religion? She herself, Lady Earls court admitted, had been very angry with George Holland for writing something that the newspapers found it to their advantage to abuse so heartily; and Lord Earls court, being a singularly sensitive

man, had been greatly worried by the comments which had been passed upon his discrimination in intrusting to a clergyman who could bring himself to write "Revised Versions" a cure of such important souls as were to be found at St. Chad's. He had, in fact, been so harassed—he was a singularly sensitive man—that he had found it absolutely necessary to run across to Paris from time to time for a change of scene. (This was perfectly true. Lord Earls court had gone more than once to Paris for a change of scene, and had found it; Lady Earls court was thirty-two, and wore evangelical boots.) But, of course, since George Holland's enterprise had turned out so well socially, people who entertained could not be hard on him. There was the new religion to be counted upon. It was just as likely as not that he would actually start a new religion, and you can't be hard upon a man who starts a new religion. There was Buddha, for instance,—that was a long time ago, to be sure; but still there he was, the most important factor to be considered in attempting to solve the great question of the reconciliation of the religions of the East,—Buddha, and Wesley, and Edward Irving, and Confucius, and General Booth; if you took them all seriously where would you be?

"Oh, no, my dear Phyllis!" continued Lady Earls court; "you must not persist in your ill-treatment of Mr. Holland. If you do he may marry someone else."

Phyllis shook her head.

"I hope he will, indeed," said she. "He certainly will never marry me."

"Do not be obdurate," said Lady Earls court. "He may not really believe in all that he put into that book."

"Then there is no excuse for his publishing it," said Phyllis promptly.

"But if he doesn't actually hold the views which he has formulated in that book, you cannot consistently reject him on the plea that he is not quite—well, not quite what you and I call orthodox."

This contention was too plain to be combated by the girl. She did not for a moment see her way out of the amazing logic of the lady. Quite a minute had passed before she said:

"If he propounds such views without having a firm conviction that they are true, he has acted a contemptible part, Lady Earls court. I think far too highly of him to entertain for a single moment the idea that he is not sincere."

"But if you believe that he is sincere, why should you say that you will not marry him?"

"I would not marry an atheist, however sincere he might be."

"An atheist! But Mr. Holland is not an atheist; on the contrary, he actually believes that there are two Gods; one worshiped of the Jews long ago, the other by us nowadays. An atheist! Oh, no!"

"I'm afraid that I can't explain to you, dear Lady Earlscourt."

Once more Phyllis shook her head with some degree of sadness. She felt that it would indeed be impossible for her to explain to this lady of logic that she believed the truth to be a horizon line, and that any opinion which was a little above this line was as abhorrent as any that was a little below it.

"If you are stubborn, God may marry you to a Dissenter yet," said Lady Earlscourt solemnly.

Phyllis smiled and shook her head again.

"Oh, you needn't shake your head, my dear," resumed Lady Earlscourt. "I've known of such judgments falling on girls before now—yes, when the Dissenters were well off. But no Dissenter rides straight to hounds."

Phyllis laughed.

"More logic," she said, and shook hands with her friend.

"That girl has another man in her eye," said her friend sagaciously, when Phyllis had left her opposite her own tea-table. "But I don't despair; if we can only persuade our bishop to prosecute George Holland, she may return to him all right."

She invariably referred to the bishop as if he were a member of the Earlscourt household; but it was understood that the bishop had never actually accepted the responsibilities incidental to such a position; though he had his views on the subject of Lady Earlscourt's cook.

This interview had taken place a week before the dinner party for which Phyllis was carefully dressed by her maid Fidele while Herbert Courtland was walking away from the house. In spite of her logic, Lady Earlscourt now and again stumbled across the truth. When it occurred to her that Phyllis had another man in her eye,—the phrase was Lady Earlscourt's and it served very well to express her meaning,—she had made some careful inquiries on the subject of the girl's male visitors, and she had, of course, found out that no other man occupied that enviable position; no social oculist would be required to remove the element which, in Lady Earlscourt's estimation, caused Phyllis'

vision to be distorted.

George Holland was at the dinner. Phyllis had been asked very quietly by the hostess if she would mind being taken in by George Holland; if she had the least feeling on the matter, Sir Lionel Greatorex would not mind taking her instead of Mrs. Vernon-Brooke. But Phyllis had said that of course she would be delighted to sit beside Mr. Holland. Mr. Holland was one of her best friends.

"Is his case so hopeless as that?" said Lady Earls court, in a low voice, and Phyllis smiled in response—the smile of the guest when the hostess had made a point.

When Lady Earls court had indiscreetly, but confidentially, explained to some of her guests the previous week that she meant her little dinner party to be the means of reuniting Mr. Holland and Miss Ayrton, one of them—he was a man—smiled and said, when she had gone away, that she was a singularly unobservant woman, or she would have known that the best way of bringing two people together is to keep them as much apart as possible. There was wisdom in the paradox, he declared; for everyone should know that it was only when a man and a woman were far apart that they came to appreciate each other.

It seemed, indeed, that there was some truth in what that man said, for Phyllis, before the ice pudding appeared, had come to the conclusion that George Holland was a very uninteresting sort of man. To be sure, he had not talked about himself,—he was not such a fool as to do that: he had talked about her to the exclusion of almost every other topic—he had been wise enough to do that,—but in spite of all, he had not succeeded in arousing her interest. He had not succeeded in making her think of the present when her thoughts had been dwelling on the past—not the distant past, not the past of two months ago, when they had been lovers, but the past of two hours ago, when she had watched the effect of her words upon Herbert Courtland.

She chatted away to George Holland very pleasantly—as pleasantly as usual—so pleasantly as to cause some of her fellow-guests to smile and whisper significantly to one another, suggesting the impossibility of two persons who got on so well together as Mr. Holland and Miss Ayrton being separated by a barrier so paltry as an engagement broken off by the young woman for conscience' sake.

But when the significant smiles of these persons were forced upon the notice of their hostess, she did not smile; she was a lady with a really remarkable lack of knowledge; but she knew better than to accept the pleasant chat of George Holland and Phyllis Ayrton as an indication that the /status quo ante bellum/—to make use of the expressive phrase of diplomacy—had been re-established between them.

Only when George Holland ventured to express his admiration of Mr.

Ayrton's adroitness in dealing with the foolish question of the gentleman from Wales did he succeed in interesting Miss Ayrton.

"What a very foolish letter those missionaries sent home regarding the explorations of Mr. Courtland!" said he. "Did they hope to jeopardize the popularity of Mr. Courtland by suggesting that he had massacred a number of cannibals?"

"I suppose that was their object," said Phyllis.

"They must be singularly foolish persons, even for missionaries," said the Rev. George Holland.

"Even for missionaries?" Phyllis repeated. "Oh, I forgot that you are no believer in the advantages of missions to the people whom we call heathen. But I have not been able to bring myself to agree with you there. They have souls to be saved."

"That is quite likely," said he. "But the methods of the missionaries, generally speaking, have not tended in that direction. Hence the missionary as a comestible is more highly esteemed by the natives than the missionary as a reformer. They rarely understand the natives themselves, and they nearly always fail to make themselves intelligible to the natives. It would appear that the two foolish persons who wrote that letter about Mr. Courtland made but a poor attempt at understanding even their own countrymen, if they fancied that any rumor of a massacre of cannibals—nay, any proof of such a massacre—would have an appreciable effect upon the popularity of the man who brought home the meteor-bird."

"You don't think that the public generally would believe the story?" said Phyllis.

"I think it extremely unlikely that they would believe it," he replied. "But even if they believed every word of it they would not cease to believe in Mr. Courtland's bravery. What is a hecatomb of cannibals compared to the discovery of the meteor-bird,—that is, in the eyes of the general public, or for that matter, the Nonconformist public who turn up their eyes at the suggestion of a massacre of natives of an island that is almost as unknown to them as Ireland itself? The people of this country of ours respect bravery more than any other virtue, and I'm not altogether sure that they are generally astray in this matter. The Christian faith is founded upon bravery, and the same faith has inspired countless acts of brave men and women. Oh, no! Mr. Courtland will not suffer from the attacks of these foolish persons."

"I saw him this—a short time ago," said Phyllis, "and he told me that his publishers were delighted at the result of the agitation which that newspaper tried to get up against him: they said it was selling

his book.”

”I saw you talking with Mr. Courtland after the first production of ‘Cagliostro.’ I envied you—and him,” said Mr. Holland. ”I wonder if he was really placed in the unfortunate position of having to massacre a horde of cannibals.”

Phyllis laughed, and forthwith told him the truth as it had been communicated to her regarding the dynamite outrage upon the unsuspecting natives, and George Holland was greatly amused at the story—much more highly amused, it would have occurred to some persons, than a clergyman should be at such a recital. But then George Holland was not as other clergymen. He was quite devoid of the affectations of his cloth. He did not consider it necessary to put the tips of his fingers together and show more of the white portion of the pupil of his eye than a straight-forward gaze entailed, when people talked of the overflowing of a river in China and the consequent drowning of a quarter of a million of men—that is to say, Chinamen. He was no more affected by such tidings than the Emperor of China. He was infinitely more affected when he read of the cold-blooded massacre by David, sometime King of Israel, in order to purchase for himself a woman for whom he had conceived a liking. He knew that the majority of clergymen considered it to be their duty to preach funeral service over the drowned Chinamen, and to impress upon their hearers that David was a man after God’s own heart. He also knew that the majority of clergymen preached annual sermons in aid of the missionaries who did some yachting in the South Seas, and had brought into existence the sin of nakedness among the natives, in order that they might be the more easily swindled by those Christians who sold them shoddy for calico, to purge them of their sin. George Holland could not see his way to follow the example of his brethren in this respect. He did not think that the Day of Judgment would witness the inauguration of any great scheme of eternal punishment for the heathen in his blindness who had been naked all his life without knowing it. He knew that the heathen in his blindness had curiosity enough at his command to inquire of the missionaries if the white beachcomber and his bottle of square-face represented the product of centuries of Christianity, and if they did not, why the missionaries did not evangelize the beachcomber and his bottle off the face of the earth.

Phyllis, being well aware of George Holland’s views, was not shocked at the sound of his laughter at the true story of Mr. Courtland’s dynamite outrage at New Guinea; but all the same, she was glad that she was not going to marry him.

He had not, however, been altogether uninteresting in her eyes while sitting beside her, and that was something to record in his favor.

She drove home early, and running upstairs found herself face to face with Ella Linton.

CHAPTER XX.

I HAVE HEARD THE PASSIONATE GALLOP OF THOSE FIERY-FOOTED STEEDS.

Ella was standing waiting for her outside the open door of a drawing room. She was wearing a lovely evening dress with a corsage of white lace covered with diamonds and sapphires. Her hair—it was of the darkest brown and was very plentiful—was also glittering with gems under the light that flowed through the open door. The same light showed Phyllis how deathly white Ella's face and neck were—how tumultuously her bosom was heaving. She had one hand pressed to her side, and the other on the handle of the door when Phyllis met her; and in that attitude, even though the expanse of white flesh, with its gracious curves that forced out her bodice, had no roseate tint upon it, she looked lovely—intoxicating to the eyes of men.

Phyllis was certainly surprised. The hour was scarcely eleven, but Ella had given no notice of her intention to pay a visit to her friend that night. When the girl raised her hands with a laugh of admiration, of pleasure, Ella grasped her hands with both of her own and drew her into the drawing room without a word. Then with a cry,—a laugh and a cry mingled,—she literally flung herself into the girl's arms and kissed her convulsively a dozen times, on the throat, on the neck, on the shoulder whereon her head lay.

"My darling, my darling!" she cried,—and now and again her voice was broken with a sob,—"my darling Phyllis! I have come to you—I want to be with you—to be near you—to keep my arms about you, so tightly that no one can pluck us asunder. Oh, you don't know what men are—they would pluck us asunder if they could; but they can't now. With you I am safe—that is why I have come to you, my Phyllis. I want to be safe—indeed I do!"

She had now raised her head from Phyllis' shoulder, but was still holding her tightly—a hand on each of her arms, and her face within an inch of the girl's face.

Phyllis kissed her softly on each cheek.

"My poor dear!" she said, "what can have happened to you?"

"Nothing—nothing! I tell you that nothing has happened to me," cried Ella, with a vehemence that almost amounted to fierceness in her voice. "Would I be here with you now if anything had happened to me?"

tell me that. I came to you—ah! women have no guardian angels, but they have sisters who are equally good and pure, and you are my sister—my sister—better than all the angels that ever sang a dirge over a lost soul that they put forth no hand to save. You will not let me go, darling Phyllis, you will not let me go even if I tell you that I want to go. Don't believe me, Phyllis; I don't want to go—I don't want to be lost, and if I leave you I am lost. You will keep me, dear, will you not?"

"Until the end of the world," said Phyllis. "Come, dearest Ella, tell me what is the matter—why you have come to me in that lovely costume. You look as if you were dressed for a bridal."

"A bridal—a bridal? What do you mean by that?" said Ella, with curious eagerness—a suggestion of suspicion was in her tone. She had loosed her hold upon the girl's arms.

Phyllis laughed. She put a hand round Ella's waist and led her to a sofa, saying:

"Let us sit down and talk it all over. That is the lace you told me you picked up at Munich. What a design—lilies!"

"The Virgin's flower—the Virgin's flower! I never thought of that," laughed Ella. "It is for you—not me, this lace. I shall tear it off and—"

"You shall do nothing of the kind," cried Phyllis. "I have heaps of lace—more than I shall ever wear. What a lovely idea that is of yours,—I'm sure it is yours,—sewing the diamonds around the cup of the lilies, like dewdrops. I always did like diamonds on lace. Some people would have us believe that diamonds should only be worn with blue velvet. How commonplace! Where have you been to-night?"

"Where have I been? I have been at home. Where should a good woman be in the absence of her husband, but at home—his home and her home?"

Ella laughed loud and long with her head thrown back on the cushion of the sofa, and the diamonds in her hair giving back flash for flash to the electric candles above her head. "Yes; I was at home—I dined at home, and, God knows why, I conceived a sudden desire to go to the opera,—Melba is the /Juliet/,—and forgetting that you were engaged to the Earls Courts—you told me last week that you were going, but I stupidly forgot, I drove across here to ask you to be my companion. Oh, yes, I have been here since—since nine, mind that! nine—nine—ask the servants. When I heard that you were dining out I thought that I was lost—one cannot drive about the streets all night, can one? Ah! I thought that God was against me now, as he ever has been; and as for my guardian angel—ah! our guardian angels are worse than the servants of nowadays who have no sense of responsibility. Thompson, your

butler, is worth a whole heavenful of angels, for it was he who asked me if I would come in and wait for your return—ask him, if you doubt my word.”

”Good Heavens, Ella, what do you say? Doubt your word—I doubt your word? You wound me deeply.”

”Forgive me, my Phyllis. I don’t quite know what I said. Ah, let me nestle here—here.” She had put her head down to Phyllis’ bare neck and was looking up to her face as a child might have done. ”There is no danger here. Now pet me, and say that you forgive me for having said whatever I did say.”

Phyllis laughed and put her lips down among the myriad diamonds that glowed amid the other’s hair, like stars seen among the thick foliage of a copper beech.

”I forgive you for whatever you said,” she cried. ”I, too, have forgotten what it was; but you must never say so again. But had you really no engagement for to-night that you took that fancy for going to ’Romeo’?”

”No engagement? Had I no engagement, do you ask me?” cried Ella. ”Oh, yes, yes! I had an engagement, but I broke it—I broke it—I broke it, and that is why I am here. Whatever may come of it, I am here, and here I mean to stay. I am safe here. At home I am in danger.”

Phyllis wondered greatly what had come to her friend to make her talk in this wild strain.

”Where were you engaged?” she inquired casually. She had come to the conclusion that there was safety in the commonplace: she would not travel out of the region of commonplaces with Ella in her present state.

”Where was I engaged? Surely I told you. Didn’t I say something about the opera—’Romeo and Juliet’?—that was to be the place, but I came to you instead. Ah, what have we missed! Was there ever such a poem written as ’Romeo and Juliet’? Was there ever such music as Gounod’s? I thought the first time that I went to the opera that it would spoil Shakspeare—how could it do otherwise? I asked. Could supreme perfection be improved upon? Before the balcony scene had come to an end I found that I had never before understood the glory of the poem. Ah, if you could understand what love means, my Phyllis, you would appreciate the poem and the music; the note of doom runs through it; that—that is wherein its greatness lies—passion and doom—passion and doom—that is my own life—the life of us women. We live in a whirlwind of passion, and fancy that we can step out of the whirlwind into a calm at any moment. We marry our husbands and we fancy that all the tragedy of human passion is over so far as we are concerned. ”The

haven entered and the tempest passed.' Philip Marston's terrible poem, -you have read it,-'A Christmas Vigil'? 'The haven entered,'-the whirlwind of passion has been left far away, we fancy. Oh, we are fools! It sweeps down upon us and then-doom-doom!"

"My poor dear, you are talking wildly."

"If you only understood-perhaps you will some day understand, and then you will know what seems wild in my speech is but the incoherence of a poor creature who has been beaten to the ground by the whirlwind, and only saved from destruction by a miracle."

She had sprung from her place on the sofa and was pacing the room, her diamonds quivering, luminous as a shower of meteors-that was the fancy that flashed from her to Phyllis. Meteors-meteors-what a splendid picture she made flashing from place to place! Meteors-ah, surely there was the meteor-bird flashing across the drawing room!

"Come and sit down, my dear Ella," said Phyllis. "You are, as you know, quite unintelligible to me."

"Unintelligible to you? I am unintelligible to myself," cried Ella. "Why should I be tramping up and down your room when I might be at this very moment--" She clutched Phyllis' arm. "I want to stay with you all night," she whispered. "I want to sleep in your bed with you, Phyllis. I want to feel your arms around me as I used to feel my mother's long ago. Whatever I may say, you will not let me go, Phyllis?"

"I will load you with chains," said Phyllis, patting her lovely hair-it was no longer smooth. "Why should you want to go away from me? Cannot we be happy together once again as we used to be long ago?"

"How long ago that was! And we read 'Romeo and Juliet' together, and fancied that we had gone down to the very depths of its meaning. We fancied that we had sounded the very depths of its passion and pathos. We were only girls. Ah, Phyllis, I tell you-I, who know-I, who have found it out,-I tell you that the tragedy is the tragedy of all lovers who have ever lived in the world. I tell you that it is the tragedy of love itself. 'Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!' That is the poem that the heart of the lover sings all day-all day! I have heard it-my heart has sung it. I have heard the passionate gallop of those fiery-footed steeds. I have listened to them while my heart beat in unison with their frantic career-all day counting the moments with fiery face, and then-then-something that was not passion forced me to fly from it for the salvation of my soul. I was a fool! Why am I here, when I should be where he-- What is the hour? Why, it is scarcely twelve o'clock! Did I say nine in my letter? What does it matter? I wonder if on that wonderful night-Gounod translated its glory into music-Juliet kept her lover waiting for three hours."

"What are you doing?" cried Phyllis, rising.

Ella had picked up her theatre wrap—it was a summer cloud brocaded with golden threads of quivering sunlight, and had flung it around her.

She held out a hand to Phyllis. Phyllis grasped her round the waist.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"To hell!"

She had whispered the words, and at their utterance Phyllis gave a cry of horror and covered her face with her hands.

Had she seen a suggestion of the satyr in the expression of that lovely face before her?

In the pause that followed the sound of footsteps upon the stairs outside was heard; the sound of footsteps and of men's friendly laughter. Some persons were in the act of ascending.

"My God!" whispered Ella. "He has followed me here!"

"Hush!" said Phyllis. "Papa is bringing someone to us."

"Whom—whom?"

They were both standing together in the middle of the room, both having their eyes fixed on the door, when the door opened and Mr. Ayrton appeared, having by his side a man with iron-gray hair and a curiously pallid face.

At the sight of that man Ella's hands, that had been holding her wrap close to her throat, feeling for its silver clasp, fell limp, and the splendid mass of white brocade slipped to the floor and lay in folds about her feet, revealing her lovely figure sparkling from the hem of her dress to the top of her shapely head.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT TOILET SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN WASTED.

For several seconds the tableau remained unchanged: the two women standing side by side, the two men motionless at the half-open door.

Ella was staring at the man who had entered with Mr. Ayrton. There was some apprehension in her eyes.

The man had his eyes fixed upon her. But his face was wholly devoid of expression.

Phyllis was the first to break the silence that made a frame, so to speak, for the picture.

"How do you do, Mr. Linton?" she said, taking a step toward the door.

"I am very well, thank you, Miss Ayrton," the man replied, shaking hands with her. "Rather a singular hour for a visit, is it not?"

"Oh, no! only Ella didn't tell me that you—"

She turned to Ella, and noticed that the expression of apprehension on her face had increased. She was still gazing at her husband as one shut up in a room with a snake might gaze at it, waiting for it to strike.

"Ella didn't tell you that I was coming?" said he. "She had the best of reasons for her reticence."

"Ah!"

The sound came from Ella. There was a little scornful smile on her face.

"The best of reasons?" said Phyllis interrogatively.

"The very best; she had no idea that I was coming. I wonder if she is glad to see me. She has not spoken a word to me yet."

"You have startled her by your sudden appearance," said Phyllis. "She is not certain whether you are flesh and blood or a ghost."

Then Ella gave a laugh.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "He is my husband. Go on with what you have to say, Stephen. I will not run away."

"Run away? What nonsense is this, my dear? Run away? Who said anything about your running away?"

Her husband had advanced to her as he spoke. He put a hand caressingly on one of her bare arms and the other at the back of her head. She suffered him to press her head forward until he put his lips upon her

forehead.

When he had released her, and had taken a step back from her,—he seemed about to address Phyllis,—a little cry forced itself from her. She called his name twice,—the second time louder,—and threw herself into his arms, burying her face on his shoulder, as she had buried it on Phyllis' shoulder.

In a few moments, however, she looked up. Her husband was patting her on the arm. She had acquired two new gems since she had bent her head. They were shining in her eyes.

"Don't go away, Phyllis dear," she said. Phyllis and her father were standing at the /portiere/ between the drawing rooms. Mr. Ayrton had a hand at the embroidered edge in the act of raising it. "Don't go away. I am all right now. I was quite dazed at Stephen's sudden appearance. I thought that perhaps he had—had— Ah, I scarcely know what I thought. How did you come here—why did you come here?"

She had turned to her husband. In spite of her manifestation of affection,—the result of a certain relief which she experienced at that moment,—there was a note of something akin to indignation in her voice.

"It is very simple, my dear," replied her husband. His curiously sallow face had resumed its usual expressionless appearance. "Nothing could be more simple. I got a telegram at Paris regarding the mine, and I had to start at a moment's notice. I wrote out a telegram to send to you, and that idiotic courier put it into the pocket of my overcoat instead of sending it. I found it in my pocket when we had come as far as Canterbury. I am not one of those foolish husbands who keep these pleasant surprises for their wives—it is usually the husband who receives the surprise in such cases."

"And the coachman told you that he had driven me here?" said Ella.

"Quite so," replied the husband. "But, you see, I had some little hesitation in coming here at half-past ten o'clock to make inquiries about my wife—you might have gone to some place else, you know, in which case I should have looked a trifle foolish; so I thought that, on the whole, my best plan would be to drop in upon Mr. Ayrton at the House of Commons and drive here with him when he was coming home for the night. I took it for granted that even so earnest a legislator as Mr. Ayrton allows himself his nights—after twelve, of course—at home. I'm very sorry I startled you, Ella. It shall not occur again."

"What time did you reach home?" inquired Ella casually—so casually that her husband, who had a very discriminating ear, gave a little glance in her direction. She was disengaging a corner of her lace trimming that had become entangled with a large sapphire in a pendant.

"I reached home at nine," he replied.

"At nine?" She spoke the words after him in a little gasp. Then she said, walking across the room to a sofa, "I could not have left many minutes before you arrived. I intended going to the opera."

"That toilet should not have been wasted," said he. "It is exquisite—/ravissante/!"

"It was an inspiration, your putting it on," said Phyllis. "I wonder if she really had no subtle suggestion from her own heart that you were on your way to her, Mr. Linton," she added, turning to the husband.

"I dare say it was some inward prompting of that mysterious nature, Miss Ayrton," he replied. "A woman's heart is barometric in its nature, it is not? Its sensitiveness is so great that it moves responsive to a suggestion of what is to come. Is a woman's heart prophetic, I wonder?"

"It would be a rank heresy to doubt it, after the example we have had to-night," said Mr. Ayrton. "Yes, a woman's heart is a barometer suggesting what is coming to her, and her toilet is a thermometer indicating the degree of expectancy."

"A charming phrase," said Mr. Linton; "a charming principle, only one that demands some years of close study to be rendered practical. For instance, look at my wife's toilet: it is bridal, and yet we have been married three years."

"Quite so; and that toilet means that you are the luckiest fellow in the world," said Mr. Ayrton.

"I admit the interpretation," said her husband. "I told the hansom to wait for me. He is at the door now. You have had no opera to-night, my dear?"

"You would not expect me to go alone? Phyllis was dining at the Earls Courts'," said the wife.

"You are the soul of discretion, my beloved," said the husband. "Is your stock of phrases equal to a suggestion as to what instrument is the soul of a woman, Ayrton?" he added. "Her heart is a barometer, her toilet a thermometer, and her soul—"

"The soul of a woman is not an instrument, but a flower—a lily," said Mr. Ayrton.

"And my wife wears her soul upon her sleeve," said Mr. Linton, touching the design on the lace that fell from her shoulders.

"But not for daws to peck at—that is the heart," laughed Mr. Ayrton. "Talking of woman's soul, how is Lady Earlscourt?" he added, to his daughter.

"I was so sorry that I was at that stupid dinner," said Phyllis. "I might have enjoyed the music of 'Romeo and Juliet.' But I had engaged myself to Lady Earlscourt a fortnight ago."

"You did not see Lord Earlscourt, at any rate," said her father.

"No; he left us in the evening for Southampton," said Phyllis.

"And, curiously enough, I dined with him at the club," said her father. "Yes, he came in with Herbert Courtland at half-past seven; he had met Courtland and persuaded him to join him in his cruise to Norway. They dined at my table, and by the time we had finished Courtland's man had arrived with his bag. He had sent the man a message from the club to pack. They left by the eight-forty train, and I expect they are well under way by this time."

"That's quite too bad of Courtland," said Mr. Linton. "I wanted to have a talk with him—a rather serious talk."

Ella had listened to Mr. Ayrton's account of that little dinner party at the club with white cheeks—a moment before they had been red—and with her lips tightly closed. Her hands were clenched until the tips of the nails were biting into each of her palms, before he had come to the end of his story—a story of one incident. But when her husband had spoken her hands relaxed. The blaze that had come to her eyes for a second went out without a flicker.

"A serious talk?" she murmured.

"A serious talk—about the mine," replied her husband.

"About the mine," she repeated, and a moment after burst into a laugh that was almost startling in its insincerity. "It is so amusing, this chapter of cross-purposes," she cried. "What a sight it has been! a night of thrilling surprises to all of us! I miss Phyllis by half an hour and my husband misses me by less than half an hour. He comes at express speed from Paris to have a talk, a serious talk, with Mr. Courtland about the mine, and while he is driving from Victoria, Mr. Courtland is driving to the same station with Lord Earlscourt!"

"What a series of fatalities!" said Mr. Ayrton. "But what seemed to me most amusing was the persuasiveness of Earlscourt. He has only to speak half a dozen words to Courtland, and off he goes to Norway at a

moment's notice with probably the most uncongenial boat's load that Courtland ever sailed with, and he must have done a good deal in that way in New Guinea waters. Now, why should Courtland take such a turn?"

"Ah, why, indeed!" cried Mrs. Linton. "Yes, that is, as you say, the most amusing part of the whole evening of cross-purposes. Why should he run away just at this time—to-night—to-night?"

"What is there particular about to-night that Courtland's running away should seem doubly erratic?" asked Mr. Linton, after a little pause. He had his eyes fixed coldly upon his wife's face.

She turned to him and laughed quite merrily.

"What is there particular about to-night?" she repeated. "Why, have you not arrived from Paris to-night to have that serious talk with him about the mine? Doesn't it seem to you doubly provoking that he didn't stay until to-morrow or that you didn't arrive yesterday? Why, why, why did he run away to-night before nine?"

"Why before nine?" said her husband.

"Heavens! Was not that the hour when you arrived home? You said so just now," she cried. Then she picked up her wrap. Phyllis had thrown it over a chair when it had lain in a heap on the floor as Cleopatra's wrap may have lain when she was carried into the presence of her lover. "My dear Stephen, don't you think that as it is past nine, and Mr. Courtland is probably some miles out at sea with his head reposing on something hard,—there is nothing soft about a yacht,—we should make a move in the direction of home? It seems pretty clear that you will have no serious talk with him to-night. Alas! my Phyllis, our dream of happiness is over. We are to be separated by the cruelty of man, as usual. Good-night, my dear! Good-night, Mr. Ayrton! Pray forgive us for keeping you out of bed so long; and receive my thanks for restoring my long-lost husband to my arms. Didn't you say that the hansom was waiting, Stephen?"

"I expect the man has been asleep for the last half-hour," said her husband.

"I hope nothing has gone astray with the gold mine," said she. "Hasn't someone made a calculation regarding the accumulation of a shilling hansom fare at compound interest when the driver is kept waiting? It is like the sum about the nails in the horse's shoe. We shall be ruined if we remain here much longer."

"Ah, my dear," said Mr. Ayrton, when he had kissed her hand, and straightened the sable collar of her wrap; "ah, my dear, a husband is a husband."

"Even when he stays away from his wife for three months at a time?" said Ella.

"Not in spite of that, but on account of it," said Mr. Ayrton. "Have you been married all these years without finding that out?"

"Good-night!" said she.

CHAPTER XXII.

HE HAD EXPLAINED TO PHYLLIS ONCE THAT HE THOUGHT OF GOD ONLY AS A PRINCIPLE.

The sound of the hansom wheels died away before the father and daughter exchanged a word. Mr. Ayrton was the first to speak.

"It seems to have been a night of mischance," said he.

"I am very glad that Mr. Linton has returned," said she.

"What? Now, why should you be glad of that very ordinary incident?"

"Why? Oh, papa, I am so fond of her!"

"She may be fond of him, after all."

Mr. Ayrton spoke musingly.

"Of course she is," said Phyllis, with a positiveness that was designed to convince herself that she believed her own statement.

"And he may be fond of her—yes, at times," resumed Mr. Ayrton. "That toilet of hers seems to have been the only happy element in the game of cross-purposes which was played to-night."

"Ah," whispered the girl.

"Yes; it was in inspiration. She could not have expected her husband to-night. What a dress! Even a husband would be compelled to admit its fascination. And she said she meant to wear it at the opera to-night. It was scarcely an opera toilet, was it?"

"Ella's taste is never at fault, papa."

"I suppose not. I wonder if he is capable of appreciating the—the—let us say, the inspiration of that toilet. Is that, I wonder, the

sort of dress that a man likes his wife to wear when she welcomes him home after an absence of some months? No matter it was exquisite in every detail. Curious, her coming here and waiting after she had learned that you were out, was it not; from nine o'clock—that fateful hour!—to-night.”

”I think she must have felt—lonely,” said Phyllis. ”She seemed so glad to see me—so relieved. She meant to stay with me all night, poor thing! Oh, why should her husband stay away from her for months at a time? It is quite disgraceful!”

”I think that we had better go to bed,” said her father. ”If we begin to discuss abstract questions of temperament we may abandon all hope of sleep tonight. We might as well try to fathom Herbert Courtland’s reasons for going to yacht with so uncongenial a party as Lord Earls court’s. Good-night, my dear!”

He kissed her and went upstairs. She did not follow him immediately. She stood in the center of the room, and over her sweet face a puzzled expression crept, as a single breath of wind passes over the smooth surface of a lake on a day when no wind stirs a leaf.

She thought first of Herbert Courtland, which of itself was a curious incident. How did it come that he had yielded so easily to the invitation of Lord Earls court to accompany him on his cruise in the yacht /Water Nymph/? (Lord Earls court’s imagination in the direction of the nomenclature of his boats as well as his horses was not unlimited.)

But this was just the question which her father had suggested as an example of a subject of profitless discussion. She remembered this, and asked herself if it was likely that she, having at her command fewer data than her father bearing upon this case, should make a better attempt than he made at its solution. Her father had seen Herbert Courtland since he had agreed to go on the cruise, and was therefore in the better position to arrive at a reasonable conclusion in regard to the source of the impulse upon which Mr. Courtland had acted; so much she thought certain. And yet her father had suggested the profitless nature of such an investigation, and her father was certainly right.

Only for a single moment did it occur to her that something she had said to Herbert Courtland when he was sitting there, there in that chair beside her, might have had its influence upon him—only for a single moment, however; then she shook her head.

No, no! that supposition was too, too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. He had, to be sure, shown that he felt deeply the words which she had quoted as they came from Mrs. Haddon; but what could those words have to do with his sudden acceptance of Lord Earls court’s

invitation to go to Norway?

She made up her mind that it was nothing to her what course Herbert Courtland had pursued, consequently the endeavors to fathom his reason for adopting such a course would be wholly profitless. But the question of the singular moods suggested by the conduct and the words of her friend Ella Linton stood on a very different basis. Ella was her dearest friend, and nothing that she had said or done should be dismissed as profitless.

What on earth had Ella meant by appearing in that wonderful costume that night? It was not a toilet for the opera, even on a Melba night; even on a "Romeo and Juliet" night, unless, indeed, the wearer meant to appear on the stage as /Juliet/, was the thought which occurred to the girl. Her fantastic thought—she thought it was a fantastic thought—made her smile. Unless—

And then another thought came to her which, not being fantastic, banished her smile.

/Unless/—

She got to her feet—very slowly—and walked very slowly—across the room. She seated herself on the sofa where Ella had sat, and she remained motionless for some minutes. Then she made a motion with one of her hands as if sweeping from before her eyes some flimsy repulsiveness—the web of an unclean thing flashing in the air. In another instant she had buried her face in the pillow that still bore the impress of Ella's face.

"Oh, God—my God, forgive me—forgive me—forgive me!" was her silent, passionate prayer as she lay there sobbing. "How could I ever have such a thought, so terrible a thought. She is my friend—my sister—and she put herself into her husband's arms and kissed him! Oh, God, forgive me!"

That was her prayer for the greater part of the night as she lay in her white bed.

She felt that she had sinned grievously in thought against her friend, when she recalled the way in which her friend had thrown herself into the arms of her husband. That was the one action which the girl felt should entitle Ella Linton to be the subject of no such horrid thought as had been for a shocking instant forced upon her mind, when she reflected upon the strange passion which had tingled through Ella's repetition of the fiery words of /Juliet/.

She recalled every strange element in the incident of Ella's appearance in the drawing room: the way in which Ella had kissed her and clung to her as a child might have done on finding someone to

protect it; she recalled the wild words which Ella had uttered, and, finally, the terrible expression which had appeared on her face as she whispered that reckless answer to Phyllis' question, when she had picked up her wrap and flung it around her just before the sound of footsteps had come to their ears. All that she recalled in connection with that extraordinary visit of Ella's was quite intelligible to her; but the mystery of all was more than neutralized by her recollection of the way Ella had thrown herself into her husband's arms. That action should, she felt, be regarded as the one important factor, as it were, in the solution of the problem of Ella's mood—Ella's series of moods. Nothing else that she had done, nothing that she had said, was worthy of being taken account of, alongside that dominant act of the true wife.

The little whisper which suggested to her that there was a good deal that was mysterious in the incident of her friend's visit she refused to regard as rendering it less obligatory on her—Phyllis—to pray that she might be forgiven that horrid suspicion which, for an instant, had come to her; and so she fell asleep praying to God to forgive her for her sin (in thought) against her friend.

And while Phyllis was praying her prayer, her friend, the True Wife, was praying with her face down upon her pillow, and her bare arms stretched out over the white lace of the bed:

"Forgive me, O God; forgive me! and keep him away from me—forever and ever and ever. Amen."

And while both these prayers were being prayed, Herbert Courtland was sitting on one of the deck stools of the yacht /Water Nymph/, looking back at the many lights that gleamed in clusters along the southern coast of England, now far astern; for a light breeze was sending the boat along with a creaming, quivering wake. In the bows a youth was making the night hideous through the agency of a banjo and a sham negro melody. Amidships, Lord Earls court and two other men were playing, by the light of a lantern slung from the backstay, a game called poker; Lord Earls court, at every fresh deal, trying to make the rest understand how greatly the worry of being held responsible, as the patron of the living of St. Chad's, for the eccentricities of his rector, had affected his nerves—a matter upon which his friends assured him, with varied degrees of emphasis, they were in no way interested.

Within a few feet of these congenial shipmates Herbert Courtland sat looking across the shining ripples to the shining lights of the coast; wondering how he came to be on the sea instead of on the shore. Was this indeed the night over which his imagination had gloated for months? Was it indeed possible that this was the very night following the day—Thursday—for which he had engaged himself in accordance with the letter that he still carried in his pocket?

How on earth did it come that he was sitting with his arm over the bulwarks of a yacht instead of— Oh, the thing was a miracle—a miracle! He could think of it in no other light than that of a miracle.

Well, if it were a miracle, it had been the work of God, and God had to be thanked for it. He had explained to Phyllis once that he thought of God only as a Principle—as the Principle which worked in opposition to the principle of nature. That was certainly the God which had been evolved out of modern civilization. The pagan gods had been just the opposite. They had been founded on natural principles. The Hebrew tradition that God had made man in his own image was the reverse of the scheme of the pagan man who had made God after his own image; in the image of man created he God.

But holding the theory that he held—that God was the sometimes successful opponent to the principles of nature (which he called the Devil)—Herbert Courtland felt that this was the very God to whom his thanks were due for the miracle that had been performed on his behalf.

"Thank God—thank God—thank God!" he murmured, looking out over the rippling waters, steel gray in the soft shadow of the summer's night.

But then he held that "thank God" was but a figure of speech.

"Tinky-tink, tinky-tink, tinky-tinky-tinky-tinky-tinky-tinky-tink," went the youth with the banjo in the bows.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ITS MOUTHINGS OF THE PAST HAD BECOME ITS MUMBLINGS OF THE PRESENT.

It was very distressing—very disappointing! The bishop would neither institute proceedings against the rector of St. Chad's nor state plainly if it was his intention to proceed against that clergyman. When some people suggested very delicately—the way ordinary people would suggest anything to a bishop—that it was surely not in sympathy with the organization of the Church for any clergyman to take advantage of his position and his pulpit to cast sometimes ridicule, sometimes abuse, upon certain "scriptural characters"—that was their phrase—who had hitherto always been regarded as sacred, comparatively sacred, the bishop had brought the tips of the fingers of one hand in immediate, or almost immediate, contact with the tips of the fingers of his other hand, and had shaken his head—mournfully, sadly. These

signs of acquiescence, trifling though they were, had encouraged the deputation that once waited on his lordship—two military men (retired on the age clause), an officer of engineers (on the active list), a solicitor (retired), and a member of the London County Council (by occupation an ironmonger), to express the direct opinion that the scandal which had been created by the dissemination—the unrebuked dissemination—of the doctrines held by the rector of St. Chad’s was affording the friends of Disestablishment an additional argument in favor of their policy of spoliation. At this statement his lordship had nodded his head three times with a gravity that deeply impressed the spokesman of the deputation. He wondered if his lordship had ever before heard that phrase about the furnishing of an additional argument to the friends of Disestablishment. (As a matter of fact his lordship had heard it before.)

After an expression of the deputation’s opinion that immediate steps should be taken to make the rector of St. Chad’s amenable to the laws of the Church,

His lordship replied.

(It was his facility in making conciliatory replies that had brought about his elevation in the Church):

He referred to (1) his deep appreciation of the sincerity of the deputation; (2) his own sense of responsibility in regard to the feelings of the weaker brethren; (3) his appreciation of the value of the counsel of practical men in many affairs of the Church; (4) the existing position of the Church in regard to the laity; (5) the friendly relations that had always existed between himself personally and the clergy of his extensive diocese; (6) his earnest and prayerful desire that these relations might be strengthened; (7) the insecurity of a house divided against itself; (8) the progress of socialism; (9) the impossibility of socialism commending itself to Englishmen; (10) the recent anarchist outrages; (11) the purity of the Court of her Majesty the Queen; (12) the union of all Christian Churches; (13) the impossibility of such union ever becoming permanent; (14) the value of Holy Scripture in daily life; (15) his firm belief in the achievement of England’s greatness by means of the open Bible; (16) the note of pessimism in modern life; (17) the necessity for the Church’s combating modern pessimism; (18) the Church’s position as a purveyor of healthy literature for the young; (19) his reluctance to take up any more of their valuable time, and (20) his assurance that the remarks of their spokesman would have his earnest and prayerful attention.

The deputation then thanked his lordship and withdrew.

But still the bishop made no move in the matter, and the friends of the Rev. George Holland felt grievously disappointed. They had counted

on the bishop's at least writing a letter of remonstrance to the rector of St. Chad's, and upon the publication of the letter, with the rector's reply in the newspapers; but now quite two months had passed since the appearance of "Revised Versions," the bishop had returned from the Engadine, and still there were no indications of his intention to make the Rev. George Holland responsible to the right tribunal—whatever that was—for his doctrines. They counted on his martyrdom within six months; and, consequently, upon his election to a position of distinction in the eyes of his fellow-country-men—or, at least, of his country-women. But the bishop they found to be a poor thing after all. They felt sure that what the people said about his being quite humble in the presence of his wife was not without some foundation; and they thought that, after all, there was a great deal to be said in favor of the celibacy of priests compulsory in the Church of Rome. If the bishops of the Church of England were not very careful, they might be the means of such a going over to Rome as had never previously been witnessed in England.

George Holland may have been disappointed, or he may have been pleased at the inactivity of the bishop. He made no sign one way or the other. Of course he was no more than human: he would have regarded a letter of remonstrance from the bishop as a personal compliment; he had certainly expected such a letter, for he had already put together the heads of the reply he would make—and publish—to any official remonstrance that might be offered to him. Still he made no sign. He preached at least one sermon every Sunday morning, and whenever it was known that he would preach, St. Chad's was crowded and the offertory was all that could be desired. The bishop's chaplain no longer held a watching brief in regard to those sermons. He did not think it worth while to do so much, George Holland's friends said, shaking their heads and pursing out their lips. Oh, yes! there could be no doubt that the bishop was a very weak sort of man.

But then suddenly there appeared in the new number of the */Zeit Geist Review/* an article above the signature of George Holland, entitled "The Enemy to Christianity," and in a moment it became pretty plain that George Holland had not in his "Revised Versions," said the last word that he had to say regarding the attitude of the Church of England in respect of the non-church-goers of the day. When people read the article they asked "Who is the Enemy to Christianity referred to by the writer?" and they were forced to conclude that the answer which was made to such an inquiry by the article itself was, "The Church."

He pointed out the infatuation which possessed the heads of the Church of England in expecting to appeal with success to the educated people of the present day, while still declining to move with the course of thought of the people. Already the braying of a trombone out of tune, and the barbarous jingle of a tambourine, had absorbed some hundred thousand of possible church-goers; and though, of course, it was

impossible for sensible men and women—the people whom the Church should endeavor to grapple to its soul with hooks of steel—to look, except with amused sadness, at the ludicrous methods and vulgar ineptitude of the Salvation Army, still the Church was making no effort to provide the sensible, thinking, educated people of England with an equivalent as suitable to their requirements as the Salvation Army was to the requirements of the foolish, the hysterical, the unthinking people who played the tambourines and brayed on the tuneless trombones. Thus it is that one man says to another nowadays, when he has got nothing better to talk about, "Are you a man of intelligence, or do you go to church?"

Men of intelligence do not go to church nowadays, Mr. Holland announced in that article of his in the */Zeit Geist/*; many women of intelligence refrain from going, he added, though many beautifully dressed women were still frequent attenders. There was no blinking the fact that the crass stupidity of the Church had made church-going unpopular—almost impossible—with intelligent men and women. The Church insulted the intelligence by trying to reconcile the teachings of Judaism with the teachings of Christianity, when the two were absolutely irreconcilable. It was the crass stupidity of the Church that had caused it—for its self-protection, it fancied—to bitterly oppose every truth that was revealed to man. The Church had tortured and burned at the stake the great men to whom God had revealed the great facts of nature's workings—the motion of the earth and the other planets. But these facts, being Divine Truth, became accepted by the world in spite of the thumb-screws and the fagots—the arguments of the Church against Divine Truth. The list of the Divine Truths which the Church had bitterly opposed was a sickening document. Geography, Geology, Biology—the progress of all had, even within recent years, been bitterly opposed by the Church, and yet the self-constituted arbiters between Truth and falsehood had been compelled to eat their own words—to devour their own denunciations when they found that the Truth was accepted by the intelligence of the people in spite of the anathemas of the Church.

The intelligence of the Church was equal only to the duty of burning witches. It burned them by the thousand, simply because ancient Judaism had a profound belief in the witch and because a blood-thirsty Jewish murderer-monarch had organized a witch hunt.

And yet with such a record against it—a record of the murder of innocent men and women who endeavored to promulgate the Divine Truths of nature—the Church still arrogated to itself the right to lay down a rule of life for intelligent people—a rule of life founded upon that impossible amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity. The science of the Church was not equal to the task of amalgamating two such deadly opponents.

Was it any wonder, then, that church-going had become practically

obsolete among intelligent men and women? the writer asked.

He then went on to refer to the nature of the existing services of the Church of England. He dealt only casually with the mockery of the response of the congregation to the reading out of the Fourth Commandment by the priest, when no one in the Church paid the least respect to the Seventh Day. This was additional proof of the absurdity of the attempted amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity. But what he dealt most fully with was the indiscriminate selection of what were very properly termed the "Lessons" from the Hebrew Bible. It was, he said, far from edifying to hear some chapters read out from the lectern without comment; though fortunately the readers were as a rule so imperfectly trained that the most objectionable passages had their potentiality of mischief minimized. He concluded his indictment by a reference to a sermon preached by the average clergyman of the Church of England. This was, usually, he said, either a theological essay founded upon an obsolete system of theology, or a series of platitudes of morality delivered by an unpractical man. The first was an insult to the intelligence of an average man; the second was an insult to the intelligence of an average schoolgirl.

His summing up of the whole case against the Church was as logical as it was trenchant. The Church had surely become, he said, like unto the Giant Pagan in "The Pilgrim's Progress," who, when incapable of doing mischief, sat mumbling at the mouth of his cave on the roadside. The Church had become toothless, decrepit either for evil or for good. Its mouthings of the past had become its mumblings of the present. The cave at the mouth of which this toothless giant sat was very dark; and intelligent people went by with a good-natured and tolerant laugh.

This article was published in the /Review/ on Tuesday. Phyllis read it on the evening of that day. On Wednesday the newspapers were full of this further development of the theories of the writer, and on Thursday afternoon the writer paid a visit to Phyllis.

As he entered the drawing room he found himself face to face with Herbert Courtland, who was in the act of leaving.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHE WAS A WIFE, AND SHE HAD A LOVER WHO DISAPPOINTED HER.

The prayer of Ella Linton had not been answered. She had prayed, not that her heart wherewith she loved Herbert Courtland might be changed—that she knew would be difficult; not that her love for Herbert Courtland might cease—that she believed to be impossible; but simply

that Herbert Courtland might be kept away from her—that she knew to be the most sensible course her scheme of imploration could take.

She was well aware of the fact that God had given her strength to run away from Herbert Courtland, and for that she was sincerely thankful; she did not pause to analyze her feelings, to ask herself if her thanks were due to her reflection upon the circumstance of her husband's return, at the very hour when she had appointed to meet Herbert Courtland; she only felt that God had been good to her in giving her sufficient strength to run away from that appointment. Then it was that she had prayed that he might be kept away from her. Surely God would find it easy to do that, she thought. Surely she might assume that God was on her side, and that he would not leave his work half done.

But when she began to think of the thorough manner in which God does his work she began to wish that she had not prayed quite so earnestly. Supposing that God should think it fit to keep him away from her by sending a blast from heaven to capsize that yacht in the deep sea, what would she think of the fervency of her prayer then?

The terror of her reflection upon the possibility of this occurrence flung her from her bed and sent her pacing, with bare feet and flying lace, the floor of her bedroom in the first pearly light of dawn, just as she had paced the floor of Phyllis' drawing room beneath the glow of the electric lights.

She wished that she had not prayed quite so earnestly that he might be kept apart from her. But one cannot pray hot and cold; she felt that she had no right now to lay down any conditions to Heaven in the matter of keeping Herbert Courtland away from her. She had prayed her prayer; only, if he were drowned before she saw him again, she would never say another prayer.

This feeling that she would be even with Heaven, so to speak, had the effect of soothing her. She threw herself upon her bed once more and was able to fall asleep; she had a considerable amount of confidence in the discrimination of Heaven.

But before she had come down to the breakfast room where her husband was reading a newspaper in the morning, she had thought a good deal upon another matter that disquieted her in some degree. She had been exuberant (she thought) at having had sufficient strength given to her to run away from her lover; but then she had not dwelt upon the rather important circumstance that all the running away had not been on her side. What were the facts as revealed by the narrative of Mr. Ayrton? Why, simply, that while she was putting on that supreme toilet which she had prepared for the delight of the eyes of her lover (feeling herself to be a modern Cleopatra), that lover of hers was sitting on the cushions of a first-class carriage, flying along to Southampton;

and while she had been lying among the cushions of her drawing room, waiting tremulously, nervously, ecstatically, for the dreary minutes to crawl on until the clock should chime the hour of nine, he was probably lighting his first pipe aboard the yacht /Water Nymph/. What did it matter that she had lifted her hot face from her cushions and had fled in wild haste to the arms of Phyllis Ayrton? The fact remained the same; it was he who had run away from her.

That was a terrible reflection. Hitherto she had never felt humiliated. She had not felt that he had insulted her by his kisses; she had given him kiss for kiss. She had but to hold up her finger and he was ready to obey her. But now—what was she to think of him? Had ever man so humiliated woman? She had offered him, not her heart but her soul—had he not told her a few days before that he meant her to give him her soul? and when she had laid heart and soul at his feet—that was how she put it to herself—he had not considered it worth his while to take the priceless gift that she offered to him.

“He will answer to me for that,” she said, as she thought over her humiliation, in front of her dressing-glass that morning, while her maid was absent from the room.

Her wish was now not that her prayer had been less earnest, but that it had not been uttered at all. It was necessary for her to meet him again in order that he might explain to her how it came that he had preferred the attractions incidental to a cruise with Lord Earls court and his friends to all that she had written to offer him.

And yet when her husband, after having quite finished with his paper, said:

“It’s very awkward that Herbert Courtland is not in town,”

She merely raised her shoulders an inch, saying:

“I suppose that he has a right to take a holiday now and then. If you didn’t telegraph to him from Paris, you cannot complain.”

“I felt certain that I should find him here,” said the husband.

“Here?” said the wife, raising her eyebrows and casting an offended glance at her husband. “Here?”

He smiled in the face of her offended glance.

“Here—in London, I mean, of course. Heavens, Ella! did you fancy for a moment that I meant— Ah, by the way, you have seen him recently?”

“Oh, yes; quite recently—on Tuesday, I think it was, we met at the Ayrton’s dinner party—yes, it was Tuesday. There was some fuss, or

attempted fuss, about his adventures in New Guinea, and a question was being asked about the matter in the House of Commons. Mr. Ayrton got rid of some of his superfluous cleverness in putting a counter question—you know the way.”

”Oh, perfectly well! And that is how you met on Tuesday—if it was Tuesday?”

”Yes; he went to thank Mr. Ayrton, and Mr. Ayrton asked him to dinner. It was a small party, and not very brilliant. Herbert came here with me afterward—for five minutes.”

”Ah! To get the taste of the party off his mouth, I suppose? He didn’t say anything to you then about being tired of his London season?”

”Not a word. He seemed tired of the dinner party. He yawned.”

”And I’m sure that you yawned in sympathy. When a man so far forgets himself as to yawn in the presence of a woman, she never fails to respond with one of more ample circumference. When a woman so far remembers herself as to yawn in the presence of a man, he tries to say something witty.”

”Yes, when the woman is not his wife. If she is his wife, he asks her if she doesn’t think it’s about time she was in bed.”

”I dare say you’re right; you have observed men—and women, for that matter—much more closely than I have had time to do. It’s very awkward that he isn’t here. I must bring him back at once.”

She felt a little movement at her heart; but she only said:

”I wouldn’t do that, if I were you. Why shouldn’t he be allowed to enjoy his holiday in peace?”

”It’s a matter of business; the mine, I told you.”

”What’s wrong with the mine that could be set right by his coming back at once? Are you not making enough out of it?”

”We’re making quite as much as is good for us out of it. But if we can get a hundred and fifty thousand pounds for a few yards of our claim further east, without damaging the prospects of the mine itself, I don’t think we should refuse it—at any rate, I don’t think that we should refuse to consider the offer.”

”What is a hundred and fifty thousand pounds?” said she.

”I wonder why you dressed yourself as you did last night?” said he.

The suddenness of the words did not cause her to quail as the guilty wife quails—yes, under a properly managed lime-light. She did not even color. But then, of course, she was not a guilty wife.

She lay back on her chair and laughed.

He watched her—not eagerly, but pleasantly, admiringly.

”My dear Stephen, if you could understand why I dressed myself that way you would be able to give me a valuable hint as to where the connection lies between your mine and my toilet—I need such a hint, now, I can assure you.”

She was sitting up now looking at him with lovely laughing eyes. (After all, she was no guilty wife.)

”What, you can’t see the connection?” he said slowly. ”You can sew over your dress about fifty thousand pounds’ worth of diamonds, and yet you don’t see the connection between the wearing of that dress and the development of a gold mine by your husband?”

”I think I see it now—something of a connection. But I don’t want any more diamonds; I don’t care if you take all that are sewed about the dress and throw them into the river. That’s how I feel this morning.”

”I heard some time ago of a woman who had something of your mood upon her one day. She had some excellent diamonds, and in one of her moods, she flung them into the river. She was a wife and she had a lover who disappointed her. The story reads very smoothly in verse.”

She laughed.

”I have no lover,” she said—was it mournfully? ”I have a husband, it is true; but he is not exactly of the type of King Arthur—nor Sir Galahad, for that matter. I hope you found Paris as enjoyable as ever?”

”Quite. I never saw at Paris a more enrapturing toilet than yours of last night. You are, I know, the handsomest woman of my acquaintance, and you looked handsomer than I had ever before seen you in that costume. I wonder why you put it on.”

”Didn’t someone—was it Phyllis?—suggest that it was an act of inspiration; that I had a secret, mysterious prompting to put it on to achieve the object which—well, which I did achieve.”

”Object? What object?”

”To make my husband fall in love with me again.”

"Ah! In love there is no again. I wonder where a telegram would find Herbert."

"Don't worry yourself about him. Let him enjoy his holiday."

"Do you fancy he is enjoying himself with Earls court and his boon companions? They'll be playing poker from morning till night—certainly from night till morning."

"Why should he go on the cruise if he was not certain to enjoy himself?"

"Ah, that question is too much for me. Think over it yourself and let me know if you come to a solution, my dear."

He rose and left the room before she could make any answer—before she could make an attempt to find out in what direction his thoughts regarding the departure of Herbert Courtland were moving.

She wondered if he had any suspicion in regard to Herbert and herself. He was not a man given to suspicion, or at any rate, given to allowing whatever suspicion he may have felt, to be apparent. He had allowed her to drive and to ride with Herbert Courtland during the four months they had been together, first at Egypt, then at Florence, Vienna, Munich, and Paris, and he could not have but seen that Herbert and she had a good many sympathies in common. Not a word had been breathed, however, of a suspicion that they were more than good friends to each other.

(As a matter of fact, they had not been more than good friends to each other; but then some husbands are given to unworthy suspicions.)

Could it be possible, she asked herself, that some people with nasty minds had suggested to him in Paris that she and Herbert were together a great deal in London, and that he had been led to make this sudden visit, this surprise visit to London, with a view of satisfying himself as to the truth of the nasty reports—the disgraceful calumnies which had reached his ears?

If he had done so, all that could be said was that he had been singularly unfortunate in regard to his visit. "Unfortunate" was the word which was in her mind, though, of course /"fortunate"/ was the word which should have occurred to her. It was certainly a fortunate result of his visit—that tableau in the drawing room of Mr. Ayrton: Ella and her dearest friend standing side by side, hand in hand, as he entered. A surprise visit, it may have been, but assuredly the surprise was a pleasant one for the husband, if he had listened to the voice of calumny.

And then, after pondering upon this with a smiling face, her smile

suddenly vanished. She was overwhelmed with the thought of what might have been the result of that surprise visit—yes, if she had not had the strength to run away to the side of Phyllis; yes, if Herbert had not had the weakness to join that party of poker-players aboard the yacht.

She began to wonder what her husband would have done if he had entered the house by the aid of his latch-key, and had found her sitting in that lovely costume by the side of Herbert Courtland? Would he have thought her a guilty woman? Would he have thought Herbert a false friend? Would he have killed her, or would he have killed Herbert? Herbert would, she thought, take a good deal of killing from a man of the caliber of her husband; but what could she have done?

Well, what she did, as the force of that thought crushed her back upon her chair, was to bring her hands together in a passionate clasp, and to cry in a passionate gasp:

”Thank God—thank God—thank God!”

She dined alone with her husband that night, and thought it well to appear in another evening toilet—one that was quite as lovely, though scarcely so striking, as that which her husband had so admired the previous night. He clearly appreciated her efforts to maintain her loveliness in his eyes, and their little dinner was a very pleasant one.

He told her that he had learned that the yacht /Water Nymph/ would put in to Leith before crossing the North Sea, and that he had written to Herbert Courtland at that port to return without delay.

”You did wrong,” said she; and she felt that she was speaking the truth.

”I don’t think so,” he replied. ”At any rate, you may rest perfectly certain that Herbert will receive my letter with gratitude.”

And Mr. Linton’s judgment on this point was not in error. Herbert Courtland received, on the evening of the third day after leaving Southampton, the letter which called him back to London, and he contrived to conceal whatever emotion he may have felt at the prospect of parting from his shipmates. They accompanied him ashore, however—they had worn out six packs of cards already, and were about to buy another dozen or two, to see them safely through the imposing scenery of the Hardanger Fjord.

The next day he was in London, and it was on the evening of that same day that he came face to face with the Rev. George Holland outside Miss Ayrton’s drawing room.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIES! LIES! LIES!

"You should have come a little sooner," said Phyllis quite pleasantly. "Mr. Courtland was giving me such an amusing account of his latest voyage. Will you have tea or iced coffee?"

"Tea, if you please," said George Holland, also quite pleasantly. "Has Mr. Courtland been on another voyage of discovery? What has he left himself to discover in the world of waters?"

"I think that what he discovered on his latest voyage was the effect of a banjo on the human mind," laughed Phyllis. "He was aboard Lord Earls court's yacht, the /Water Nymph/. Some other men were there also. One of them had an idea that he could play upon the banjo. He was wrong, Mr. Courtland thinks."

"A good many people are subject to curious notions of the same type. They usually take an optimistic view of the susceptibilities of enjoyment of their neighbors—not that there is any connection between enjoyment and a banjo."

"Mr. Courtland said just now that when Dr. Johnson gave it as his opinion that music was, of all noises, the least disagreeable, the banjo had not been invented."

"That assumes that there is some connection between music and the banjo, and that's going just a little too far, don't you think?"

"I should like to hear Dr. Johnson's criticism of Paderewski."

"His criticism of Signor Piozzi is extant: a fine piece of eighteenth century directness."

"I sometimes long for an hour or two of the eighteenth century. You remember Fanny Burney's reference to the gentleman who thought it preposterous that Reynolds should have increased his price for a portrait to thirty guineas, though he admitted that Reynolds was a good enough sort of man for a painter. I think I should like to have an hour with that man."

"I long for more than that. I should like to have seen David Garrick's reproduction, for the benefit of his schoolfellows, of Dr. Johnson's love passages with his very mature wife. I should also like to have heard the complete story of old Grouse in the gun room."

"Told by Squire Hardcastle, of course?"

"Of course. I question if there was anything very much better aboard the /Water Nymph/. By the way, Lady Earls court invited me to join the yachting party. She did not mention it to her husband, however. She thought that there should be a chaplain aboard. Now, considering that Lord Earls court had told me the previous day that he was compelled to take to the sea solely on account of the way people were worrying him about me, I think that I did the right thing when I told her that I should be compelled to stay at home until the appearance of a certain paper of mine in the /Zeit Geist Review/."

"I'm sure that you did the right thing when you stayed at home."

"And in writing the paper in the /Zeit Geist/? You have read it?"

"Oh, yes! I have read it."

"You don't like it?"

"How could I like it? You have known me now for sometime. How could you fancy that I should like it—that is, if you thought of me at all in connection with it? I don't myself see why you should think of me at all."

He rose and stood before her. She had risen to take his empty cup from him.

"Don't you know that I think of you always, Phyllis?" he said, in that low tone of his which flowed around the hearts of his hearers, and made their hearts as one with his heart. "Don't you know that I think of you always—that all my hopes are centered in you?"

"I am so sorry if that is the case, Mr. Holland," said she. "I don't want to give you pain, but I must tell you again what I told you long ago: you have passed completely out of my life. If you had not done so before, the publication of that article in the /Zeit Geist/ would force me to tell you that you had done so now. To me my religion has always been a living thing; my Bible has been my guide. You trampled upon the one some months ago, you have trampled on the other now. You shocked me, Mr. Holland."

"I have always loved you, Phyllis. I think I love you better than I ever did, if that were possible," said he. "I am overwhelmed with grief at the thought of the barrier which your fancy has built up between us."

"Fancy?"

"Your fancy, dear child. I feel that the barrier which you fancy is now between us is unworthy of you."

"What? Do you mean to say that you think that my detestation—my—my horror of your sneers at the Bible, which I believe to be the Word of God—of the contempt you have heaped upon the Church which I believe to be God's agent on earth for the salvation of men's souls—do you think that my detestation of these is a mere girlish fancy?"

"I don't think that, Phyllis. What I think is, that if you had ever loved me you would be ready to stand by my side now—to be guided by me in a matter which I have made the study of my life."

"In such matters as these—the value or the worthlessness of the Bible; the value or the worthlessness of the Church—I require no guide, Mr. Holland. I do not need to go to a priest to ask if it is wrong to steal, to covet another's goods, to honor my father— Oh, I cannot discuss what is so very obvious. The Bible I regard as precious; you think that you are in a position to edit it as if it were an ordinary book. The Church I regard as the Temple of God upon the earth; you think that it exists only to be sneered at? and yet you talk of fanciful barriers between us!"

"I consider it the greatest privilege of a man on earth to be a minister of the Church of Christ."

"Why, then, do you take every opportunity of pointing to it as the greatest enemy to Christianity?"

"The Church of to-day represents some results of the great Reformation. That Reformation was due to the intelligence of those men who perceived that it had become the enemy to freedom; the enemy to the development of thought; the enemy to the aspirations of a great nation. The nation rejoiced in the freedom of thought of which the great charter was the Reformation. But during the hundreds of years that have elapsed since that Reformation, some enormous changes have been brought about in the daily life of the people of this great nation. The people are being educated, and the Church must sooner or later face the fact that as education spreads church-going decreases. Why is that, I ask you?"

"Because men are growing more wicked every day."

"But they are not. Crime is steadily decreasing as education is spreading, and yet people will not go to church. They will go to lectures, to bands of music, to political demonstrations, but they will not go to church. The reason they will not go is because they know that they will hear within the church the arguments of men whose minds are stunted by a narrow theological course against every discovery of science or result of investigation. You know how the best minds in the Church ridiculed the discoveries of geology, of biology, ending, of course, by reluctantly accepting the teachings of the men

whom they reviled.”

”You said all that in your paper, Mr. Holland, and yet I tell you that I abhor your paper—that I shuddered when I read what you wrote about the Bible. The words that are in the Bible have given to millions of poor souls a consolation that science could never bring to them.”

”And those consoling words are what I would read to the people every day of the week, not the words which may have a certain historical signification, but which breathe a very different spirit from the spirit of Christianity. Phyllis, it is to be the aim of my life to help on the great work of making the Church once more the Church of the people—of making it in reality the exponent of Christianity and Judaism. That is my aim, and I want you to be my helper in this work.”

”And I tell you that I shall oppose you by all the means in my power, paltry though my power may be.”

Her eyes were flashing and she made a little automatic motion with her hands, as if sweeping something away from before her. He had become pale and there was a light in his eyes. He felt angry at this girl who had shown herself ready to argue with him,—in her girlish fashion, of course,—and who, after listening to his incontrovertible arguments, fell back resolutely upon a platitude, and considered that she had got the better of him.

She had got the better of him, too; that was the worst of it; his object in going to her, in arguing with her, was to induce her to promise to marry him, and he had failed.

It was on this account he was angry. He might have had a certain consciousness of succeeding as a theologian, but he had undoubtedly failed as a lover. He was angry. He was as little accustomed as other clergymen to be withstood by a girl.

”I am disappointed in you,” said he. ”I fancied that when I—when I—” It was in his mind to say that he had selected her out of a large number of candidates to be his helpmeet, but he pulled himself up in time, and the pause that he made seemed purely emotional. ”When I loved you and got your promise to love me in return, you would share with me all the glory, the persecution, the work incidental to this crusade on behalf of the truth, but now— Ah! you can never have loved me.”

”Perhaps you are right, indeed,” said she meekly. She was ready to cede him this point if he set any store by it.

”Take care,” said he, with some measure of sternness. ”Take care, if you fancy you love another man, that he may be worthy of you.”

"I do not love another man, Mr. Holland," said she gently; scarcely regretfully.

"Do you not?" said he, with equal gentleness. "Then I will hope."

"You will do very wrong."

"You cannot say that without loving someone else. I would not like to hear of your loving such a man as Herbert Courtland."

She started at that piece of impertinence, and then, without the slightest further warning, she felt her body blaze from head to foot. She was speechless with indignation.

"Perhaps I should have said a word of warning to you before." He had now assumed the calm dignity of a clergyman who knows what is due to himself. "I am not one to place credence in vulgar gossip; I thought that your father, perhaps, might have given you a hint. Mrs. Linton is undoubtedly a very silly woman. God forbid that I should ever hear rumor play with your name as I have heard it deal with hers."

His assumption of the clergyman's solemn dignity did not make his remark less impertinent, considering that Ella Linton was her dearest friend. And yet people were in the habit of giving George Holland praise for his tact. Such persons had never seen him angry, wounded, and anxious to wound.

There was a pause after he had spoken his tactless words. It was broken by a thrice-repeated cry from Phyllis.

"Lies! Lies! Lies!" she cried, facing him, the light of scorn in her eyes. "I tell you that you have listened to lies; you, a clergyman, have listened to lying gossip, and have repeated that lying gossip to me. You have listened like a wicked man, and you should be ashamed of your behavior, of your words, your wicked words. If Ella Linton were wicked, you would be responsible for it in the sight of God. You, a clergyman, whose duty it is to help the weak ones, to give counsel to those who stand on the brink of danger; you speak your own condemnation if you speak Ella Linton's. You have spent your time not in that practical work of the Church—that work which is done silently by those of her priests who are desirous of doing their duty; you have spent your time, not in this work, but in theorizing, in inventing vain sophistries to put in a book, and so cause people to talk about you; whether they talk well or ill of you, you care not so long as they talk; you have been doing this to gratify your own vanity, instead of doing your duty as a clergyman on behalf of the souls which have been intrusted to your keeping. Go away—go away! I am ashamed of you; I am ashamed of myself that I was ever foolish enough to allow my name to be associated with yours even for a single day. I shall never, never again enter the church where you preach. Go away! Go away!"

He stood before her with his hands by his sides as a man suddenly paralyzed might stand. He had never recovered from the shock produced by her crying of the word "lies! lies! lies!" He was dazed. He was barely conscious of the injustice which she was doing him, for he felt that he was not actuated by vanity, but sincerity in all that he had hitherto preached and written regarding the Church. Still he had not the power to interrupt her in her accusation; he had not the power to tell her that she was falsely accusing him.

When her impassioned denunciation of him had come to an end, and she stood with flaming face, one outstretched hand pointing to the door, he recovered himself—partially; and curiously enough, his first thought was that he had never seen a more beautiful girl in a more graceful attitude. She had insulted him grossly; she had behaved as none of the daughters of Philistia would behave in regard to him—him, a clergyman of the Church of England; but he forgot her insults, her injustice, and his only thought was that she was surely the most beautiful woman in the world.

"I am amazed!" he found words to say at last. "I am amazed! I felt certain that you at least would do me justice. I thought—"

"I will not listen to you," she cried. "Every word you utter increases my self-contempt at having heard you say so much as you have said. Go away, please. No, I will go—I will go."

And she did go.

He found himself standing in the middle of an empty room.

Never before had he been so treated by man or woman; and the worst of the matter was that he had an uneasy feeling that he had deserved the scorn which she had heaped upon him. He knew perfectly well that he had no right to speak to her as he had spoken regarding her friend, Ella Linton. Rumor—what right had he to suggest to her, as he had certainly done, that the evil rumors regarding her friend were believed by him at least?

Yes, he felt that she had treated him as he deserved; and when he tried to get up a case for himself, so to speak, by dwelling upon the injustice which she had done him in saying that he had been actuated by vanity, whereas he knew that he had been sincere, he completely failed.

But his greatest humiliation was due to a consciousness of his own want of tact. Any man may forget himself so far as to lose his temper upon occasions; but no man need hope to get on in the world who so far forgets himself as to allow other people to perceive that he has lost his temper.

What was he to do?

What was left for him to do but to leave the house with as little delay as possible?

He went down the stairs, and a footman opened the hall door for him. He felt a good deal better in the open air. Even the large drawing room which he had left was beginning to feel stuffy. (He was a singularly sensitive man.)

On reaching the rectory he found two letters waiting for him. One from the bishop requesting an early interview with him. The other was almost identical but it was signed "Stephen Linton."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DID HE SAY SOMETHING MORE ABOUT RUTH?

Herbert Courtland had found his way to her drawing room on the afternoon of his return to London; and it was upon this circumstance rather than upon her own unusual behavior in the presence of George Holland that Phyllis was dwelling so soon as she had recovered from her tearful outburst on her bed. (She had, of course, run into her bedroom and thrown herself upon the bed the moment that she had left the presence of the man whom she had once promised to marry.) She had wept in the sheer excitement of the scene in which she had played the part of leading lady; it had been a very exciting scene, and it had overwhelmed her; she had not accustomed herself to the use of such vehement language as she had found necessary to employ in order to adequately deal with Mr. Holland and that was how it came about that she was overwhelmed.

But so soon as she had partially recovered from her excitement, and had dried her eyes, she began to think of the visit which had been paid to her, not by George Holland, but by Herbert Courtland. She dwelt, moreover, less upon his amusing account of the cruise of the /Water Nymph/ than upon the words which he had said to her in regard to his last visit. She had expressed her surprise at seeing him. Had he not gone on a yachting cruise to Norway? Surely five days was under rather than over the space of time necessary to thoroughly enjoy the fine scenery of the fjords.

He had then laughed and said that he had received a letter at Leith making his immediate return absolutely necessary.

"How disappointed you must have felt!" she suggested, with something like a smile upon her face.

His smile was broader as he said:

"Well, I'm not so sure that my disappointment was such as would tend to make me take a gloomy view of life for an indefinite time. Lord Earlscourt is a very good sort of fellow; but—"

"Yes; I quite agree with you," said she, still smiling. "Knowing what follows that 'but' in everyone's mind, we all thought it rather strange on your part to start on that cruise. And so suddenly you seemed to make up your mind, too. You never hinted to me that afternoon that you were anxious to see Norway under the personal conductorship of Lord Earlscourt."

"It would have been impossible for me to give you such a hint," said he. "I had no idea myself that I wanted greatly to go to Norway, until I met Earlscourt."

"So we gathered from what papa told us when he came in about midnight, bringing Mr. Linton with him," said Phyllis. "Ella had come across to me before nine, to ask me to go with her to 'Romeo and Juliet' at Covent Garden, forgetting that I was dining with Lady Earlscourt."

"But you had not returned from the dinner party at nine," he suggested. She had certainly succeeded in arousing his interest, even in such ordinary details as those she was describing.

"Of course not; but Ella waited for me; I suppose she did not want to return to her lonely house. She seemed so glad when I came in that she made up her mind to stay with me all night."

"Oh! But she didn't stay with you?"

"Of course not, when her husband appeared. It was so funny—so startling."

"So funny—so startling! Yes, it must have been—funny."

"Ella was wearing such a lovely frock—covered with diamonds. I wish that you had seen her."

"Ah!"

"I never saw anything so lovely. I told her that it was a bridal toilet."

"A bridal toilet?"

"We thought it such a pity that it should be wasted. She didn't go to the opera, of course."

"And it was wasted—wasted?"

"Oh, no! When her husband came in with papa, about midnight, we laughed and said that her dressing herself in that way was an inspiration; that something told her that he was returning."

"Probably a telegram from Paris had told her; that was the source of her inspiration."

"Oh, no! what was so funny about the matter was that Mr. Linton's servant bungled sending the telegram, so that Ella knew nothing of his coming."

"Great Heavens!"

"You have not seen Ella since your return?"

"No; I have been with her husband on business all day, however."

"And of course he would not have occasion to refer to so casual an incident as his wife's wearing a new toilet."

"Of course not. The word inspiration has no place in a commercial vocabulary, Miss Ayrton."

"But it is a good word elsewhere, Mr. Courtland."

"Yes, it has its meaning. You think that it may be safely applied to the wearing of an effective toilet. I wonder if you would think of applying it to the words you said to me on the last evening I was here?"

It was in a very low tone, and after a long pause, that she said:

"I hope if what I told you Mrs. Haddon said was an inspiration, it was a good one. I felt that I must tell you, Mr. Courtland, though I fear that I gave you some pain—great pain. I know what it is to be reminded of an irreparable loss."

"Pain—pain?" said he. Then he raised his eyes to hers. "I wonder if you will ever know what effect your words had upon me, Miss Ayrton?" he added. "I don't suppose that you will ever know; but I tell you that it would be impossible for me ever to cease to think of you as my good angel."

She flushed slightly, very slightly, before saying:

"How odd that Ella should call me her good angel, too, on that same night!"

"And she spoke the truth, if ever truth was spoken," he cried.

Her face was very serious as she said:

"Of course I don't understand anything of this, Mr. Courtland."

"No," he said; "it would be impossible for you to understand anything of it. It would be impossible for you to understand how I feel toward you—how I have felt toward you since you spoke those words in this room; those words that came to me as the light from heaven came to Saul of Tarsus; words of salvation. Believe me, I shall never forget them."

"I am so glad," said she. "I am glad, though, as I say, I understand nothing."

Then there had been a long interval of silence before she had asked him something further regarding the yachting party.

And now she was lying on her bed trying to recall every word that he had spoken, and with a dread over her that what he had said would bear out that terrible suspicion which she had prayed to God to forgive her for entertaining on that night when Ella had gone home with her husband.

No rumor had reached her ears regarding the closeness of the intimacy existing between Mr. Courtland and Mrs. Linton; and thus it was that when that suspicion had come upon her, after Ella had left her, she felt that she was guilty of something akin to a crime—a horrible breach of friendship, only to be expiated by tears and prayers.

That terrible thought had been borne upon her as a suggestion to account for much that she could not understand in the words and the behavior of Ella during that remarkable evening; and, in spite of her remorse and her prayers, she could not rid herself of it. It left its impression upon her mind, upon her heart. Hitherto she had only heard about the way an unlawful passion sweeps over two people, causing them to fling to the winds all considerations of home, of husband, of religion, of honor; and she felt it to be very terrible to be brought face to face with such a power; it seemed to her as terrible as to be brought face to face with that personal Satan in whom she believed.

It only required such a hint as that which had come from George Holland to set her smoldering suspicion—suspicion of a suspicion—in a flame. It had flamed up before him in those words which she had spoken to him. If Ella were guilty, he, George Holland, was to be held responsible for her guilt.

But Ella was not guilty; Herbert Courtland was not guilty.

"No, no, no!" she cried, in the solitude of her chamber. "She did not talk as a guilty woman would talk; and he—he went straight out of the room where I had told him what Mrs. Haddon said about his mother, his sister—straight aboard the yacht; and she—"

All at once the truth flashed upon her; the truth—she felt that it was the truth; and both of them were guiltless. It was for Herbert Courtland that Ella had put on that lovely dress; but she was guiltless, he was guiltless. (Curiously enough, she felt quite as happy in the thought that he was guiltless.) Yes, Ella had come to her wearing that dress instead of waiting for him, and he— Ah, she now knew what he had meant when he had called her his good angel. She had saved him.

She flung herself on her knees in a passion of thanksgiving to God for having made her the means of saving a soul from hell—yes, for the time being.

And then she began to think what she should do in order that that soul should be saved forever.

It was time for her to dress for dinner before she had finished working out that great question, possibly the greatest question that ever engrossed the attention of a young woman: how to save the soul of a man, not temporarily, but eternally.

And all the time that she was in her room alone she had not a single thought regarding the scene through which she had passed with the Rev. George Holland. She had utterly forgotten him and his wickedness—his vain sophistries. She had forgotten all that he had said to her—his monstrous calumny leveled against her dearest friend; she even forgot her unjust treatment of George Holland and her rudeness—her unparalleled rudeness toward him. She was thinking over something very much more important. What was a question of mere etiquette compared to the question of saving a man's soul alive?

But when she dined opposite to her father it was to the visit of George Holland she referred rather than to the visit of Herbert Courtland.

"What had George Holland got to say that was calculated to interest you?" her father inquired. The peaches were on the table and the servant had, of course, left the room.

"He had nothing to say of interest to me," she replied.

"Nothing, except, of course, that his respectful aspiration to marry

you—” suggested Mr. Ayrton.

”You need not put the ‘except’ before that, my papa,” said she.

”And yet I have for some years been under the impression that even when a man whom she recoils from marrying talks to a young woman about his aspirations in the direction of marriage, she is more interested than she would be when the man whom she wishes to marry talks on some other topic.”

”At any rate, George Holland didn’t interest me so long as he talked of his aspirations. Then he talked of—well, of something else, and I’m afraid that I was rude to him. I don’t think that he will come here again. I know that I shall never go to St. Chad’s again.”

”Heavens above! This is a pretty story to tell a father. How were you rude to him? I should like to have a story of your rudeness, merely to hold up against you for a future emergency.”

”I pointed to the door in the attitude of the heroine of one of the old plays, and when he didn’t leave at once, I left the room.”

”You mean to say that you left him standing in the middle of the room while you went away?”

”I told you that I was rude.”

”Rude, yes; but it’s one thing to omit to leave cards upon a hostess, and quite another to stare her in the face when she bows to you in the street. It’s one thing to omit sending a man a piece of your bridescake, and quite another to knock off his hat in the street. Rude, oh, my dear Phyllis!”

”If you knew what he said about—about someone whom I love—if you knew how angry I was, you would not say that I acted so atrociously, after all.”

”Oh! Did he say something more about Ruth?”

”He said too much—far too much; I cannot tell you. If any other man said so much I would treat him in the same way. You must not ask me anything further, please.”

”Rude and unrepentant, shocking and not ashamed. This is terrible. But perhaps it’s better that you should be rude when you’re young and beautiful; later on, when you’re no longer young, it will not be permitted in you. I’ll question you no further. Only how about Sunday?”

"I have promised Ella to go with her party to The Mooring for a week."

"That will get over the matter of the church, but only for one Sunday. How about the next Sundays—until the prorogation? Now, don't say the obvious 'sufficient unto the Sunday is the sermon thereof.' "

"I certainly will not. I have done forever with St. Chad's, unless the bishop interferes and we get a new rector."

"Then that's settled. And so we can drink our coffee in the drawing room with easy minds. Rude! Great Heavens!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THAT'S WHY WOMEN DO NOT MAKE GOOD PHILOSOPHERS.

She had prayed to God that he might be kept away from her; but immediately afterward, as has already been stated, when she began to think over the situation of the hour, she came to the conclusion that she had been a little too precipitate in her petition. She felt that she would like to ask him how it had come about that he had played that contemptible part. Such a contemptible part! Was it on record, she wondered, that any man had ever played that contemptible part? To run away! And she had designed and worn that wonderful toilet; such a toilet as Helen might have worn (she thought); such a toilet as Cleopatra might have worn (she fancied); such a toilet as—Sarah Bernhardt (she was certain) would wear when impersonating a woman who had lost her soul for the love of a man. Oh, had ever woman been so humiliated! She thought of the way Sarah Bernhardt would act the part of one of those women if her lover had run away from her outstretched arms,—and such a toilet,—only it was not on record that the lover of any one of them had ever run away. The lovers had been only too faithful; they had remained to be hacked to pieces with a mediaeval knife sparkling with jewels, or to swallow some curious poison out of a Byzantine goblet. She would have a word or two to say to Herbert Courtland when he returned. She would create the part of the woman whose lover has humiliated her.

This was her thought until her husband told her that he had sent that letter to Herbert Courtland, and he would most likely dine with them on the evening of his return.

Then it was it occurred to her that Herbert Courtland might by some curious mischance—mischances occurred in many of Sarah Bernhardt's plays—have come to hear that she had paid that rather singular visit to Phyllis Ayrton, just at the hour that she had named in that letter

which she had written to him. What difference did that make in regard to his unparalleled flight? He was actually aboard the yacht /Water Nymph/ before she had rung for her brougham to take her to Phyllis'. He had been the first to fly.

Then she began to think, as she had thought once before, of her husband's sudden return,—the return of a husband at the exact hour named in the letter to a lover was by no means an unknown incident in a play of Sarah Bernhardt's,—and before she had continued upon this course of thought for many minutes, she had come to the conclusion that she would not be too hard on Herbert Courtland.

She was not too hard on him.

He had an interview with Mr. Linton at the city offices of the great Taragonda Creek Mine. (The mine had, as has already been stated, been discovered by Herbert Courtland during his early explorations in Australia, and he had acquired out of his somewhat slender resources—he had been poor in those days—about a square mile of the wretched country where it was situated, and had then communicated his discovery to Stephen Linton, who understood the science and arts necessary for utilizing such a discovery, the result being that in two years everyone connected with the Taragonda Mine was rich. The sweepings of the crushing rooms were worth twenty thousand pounds a year: and Herbert Courtland had spent about ten thousand pounds—a fourth of his year's income—in the quest of the meteor-bird to make a feather fan for Ella Linton.) And when the business for which he had been summoned to London had been set /en train/, he had paid a visit to his publishers. (They wondered could he give them a novel on New Guinea. If he introduced plenty of dialect and it was sufficiently unintelligible it might thrust the kail yard out of the market; but the novel must be in dialect, they assured him.) After promising to give the matter his attention, he paid his visit to Phyllis, and then went to his rooms to dress; for when Stephen Linton had said:

”Of course you'll dine with us to-night: I told Ella you would come.”

He had said, ”Thanks; I shall be very pleased.”

”Come early; eight sharp,” Mr. Linton had added.

And thus it was that at five minutes to eight o'clock Herbert found himself face to face alone with the woman whom he had so grossly humiliated.

Perhaps she was hard on him after all: she addressed him as Mr. Courtland. She felt that she, at any rate, had returned to the straight path of duty when she had done that. (It was Herbert Courtland who had talked to Phyllis of the modern philosopher—a political philosopher or a philosophical politician—who, writing

against compromise, became the leading exponent of that science, and had hoped to solve the question of a Deity by using a small g in spelling God. On the same principle Ella had called Herbert "Mr. Courtland.")

He felt uneasy. Was he ashamed of himself, she wondered?

"Stephen will be down in a moment, Mr. Courtland," she said.

He was glad to hear it.

"How warm it has been all day!" she added. "I thought of you toiling away over figures in the city, when you might have been breathing the lovely air of the sea. It was too bad of Stephen to bring you back."

"I assure you I was glad to get his letter at Leith," said he. "I was thinking for the two days previous how I could best concoct a telegram to myself at Leith in order that I might have some excuse for running away."

"That is assuming that running away needs some excuse," said she.

There was a considerable pause before he said, in a low tone:

"Ella, Ella, I know everything—that night. We were saved."

At this moment Mr. Linton entered the room. He was, after all, not late, he said: it wanted a minute still of being eight o'clock. He had just been at the telephone to receive a reply regarding a box at Covent Garden. In the earlier part of the day none had been vacant, he had been told; but the people at the box office promised to telephone to him if any became vacant in the course of the afternoon. He had just come from the telephone, and had secured a good enough box on the first tier. He hoped that Ella would not mind "Carmen"; there was to be a new /Carmen/.

Ella assured him that she could not fail to be interested in any /Carmen/, new or old. It was so good of him to take all that trouble for her, knowing how devoted she was to opera. She hoped that Herbert—she called him Herbert in the presence of her husband—was in a /Carmen/ mood.

"I'm always in a mood to study anything that's unreservedly savage," said he.

"There's not much reservation about our little friend /Carmen/," said Mr. Linton. "She tells you her philosophy in her first moment before you."

He hummed the habanera.

"There you are: /Misteroso e l'amore/—that's the philosophy of your pretty savage, Herbert."

"Yes," said Herbert; "it's that philosophy which consists in an absence of philosophy—not the worst kind, either, it seems to me. It's the philosophy of impulse."

"I thought that the aim of all philosophy was to check every impulse," said Ella.

"So it is; that's why women do not make good philosophers," said her husband.

"Or, for that matter, good mothers of philosophers," said Herbert.

"That's rather a hard saying, isn't it?" said the other man.

"No," said his wife; "it's as transparent as air."

"London air in November?" suggested her husband.

"He means that there's no such thing."

"As air in London in November? I'm with him there."

"He means that there's no such thing as a good philosopher."

"Then I hope he has an appetite for dinner. The man without philosophy usually has."

The butler had just announced dinner.

There was not much talk among them of philosophy so long as the footmen were floating round them like mighty tropical birds. They talked of the House of Commons instead. A new measure was to be introduced the next night: something that threatened beer and satisfied no party; not even the teetotalers—only the wives of the teetotalers. Then they had a few words regarding George Holland's article in the */Zeit Geist/*. Mr. Linton seemed to some extent interested in the contentions of the rector of St. Chad's; and Herbert agreed with him when he expressed the opinion that the two greatest problems that the Church had to face were: How to get people with intelligence to go to church, and what to do with them when they were there.

In an hour they were in their box at Covent Garden listening to the sensuous music of "Carmen," and comparing the sauciness of the charming little devil who sang the habanera, with the piquancy of the

last /Carmen/ but three, and with the refinement of the one who had made so great a success at Munich. They agreed that the savagery of the newest was very fascinating,—Stephen Linton called it womanly,—but they thought they should like to hear her in the third act before pronouncing a definite opinion regarding her capacity.

Then the husband left the box to talk to some people who were seated opposite.

"You know everything?" she said.

"Everything," said Herbert. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"For running away? Oh, Bertie, you cannot have heard all."

"For forcing you to write me that letter—can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, the letter? Oh, Bertie, we were both wrong—terribly wrong. But we were saved."

"Yes, we were saved. Thank God—thank God!"

"That was my first cry, Bertie, when I felt that I was safe—that we both had been saved: Thank God! It seemed as if a miracle had been done to save us."

"So it was—a miracle."

"I spent the night praying that you might be kept away from me, Bertie—away for ever and ever. I felt that I was miserably weak; I felt that I could not trust myself; but now that you are here beside me again I feel strong. Oh, Bertie, we know ourselves better now than we did a week ago—is it only a week ago? It seems months—years—a lifetime!"

"Yes, I think that we know each other better now, Ella. That night aboard the yacht all the history of the past six months seemed to come before me. I saw what a wretch I had been, and I was overwhelmed with self-contempt."

"It was all my fault, dear Bertie. I was foolish—vain—a mere woman! Do not say that I did not take pride in what I called, in my secret moments, my conquest. Oh, Bertie! I had sunk into the depths. And then that letter! But we were saved, and I feel that we have been saved forevermore. I feel strong by your side now. And you, I know, feel strong, Bertie?"

"I have awakened from my dream, Ella. You called her your good angel too. Surely it was my good angel that sent me to her that evening!"

Ella was staring at him. He said that he knew everything. It appeared that she was the one who was not in the fortunate position of knowing all.

She stared.

"Phyllis Ayrton—you were with her?"

"For half an hour. She was unconscious of the effect her words had upon me,—the words of another woman,—leading me back to the side of those who have gone forever. I listened to her, and then it was that I awoke. She did not know. How could she tell that the light of heaven was breaking in upon a soul that was on the brink of hell? She saved me."

"She told me nothing of that." There was a curious eagerness in her voice. "She told me nothing. Oh, how could she tell me anything? She knew nothing of it herself. She looked on you as an ordinary visitor. She told you that I fled to her. Oh, Bertie, Bertie! those hours that I passed—the terrible conflict. But when I felt her arms about me I knew that I was safe. Then Stephen entered. I thought that we were lost—you and I; that he had returned to find you waiting. I don't know if he had a suspicion. At any rate we were saved, and by her—dear Phyllis. Oh, will she ever know, I wonder, what it is to be a woman? Bertie, she is my dearest friend—I told you so. I thought of her and you—long ago. Oh, why should you not think of her now that you have awakened and are capable of thought—the thought of a sane man?"

He sat with an elbow resting on the front of the opera box, his head upon his hand. He was not looking at her, but beyond her. He seemed to be lost in thought.

Was he considering that curious doctrine which she had propounded, that if a man really loves a woman he will marry her dearest friend? He made no reply to her. The point required a good deal of thought, apparently.

"You hear me, Bertie—dear Bertie?" she said.

He only nodded.

She remembered that, upon a previous occasion, when she had made the same suggestion to him, he had put it aside as unworthy of comment—unworthy of a moment's thought. How could it be possible for him, loving her as he did, to admit the possibility of another's attractiveness in his eyes? The idea had seemed ludicrous to him.

But now he made no such protest. He seemed to consider her suggestion and to think it—well, worthy of consideration; and this should have

been very pleasing to her; for did it not mean that she had gained her point?

"You will think over it, Bertie?" she said. Her voice was now scarcely so full of eagerness as it had been before. Was that because she did not want to weary him by her persistence? Even the suggestion to a man that he should love a certain woman should, she knew, be made with tact.

"I have been thinking over it," he said at last; but only after a long pause.

"Oh, I am so glad!"

And she actually believed that she was glad.

"I thought about her aboard the yacht."

"Did you? I fancied that you would think of— But I am so glad!"

"I thought of her as my good angel. Those words which she said to me—"

"She has been your good angel, and I—"

"Ella, Ella, she has been our good angel—you said so."

"And don't you think that I meant it? Some women—she is one of them—are born to lead men upward; others— Ah, there, it is on the stage: /Carmen/, the enchantress, /Michaela/, the good angel. But I am so glad! She is coming to stay with us up the river; you must be with us too. You cannot possibly know her yet. But a week by her side—you will, I know, come to perceive what she is—the sweetest—the most perfect!"

Still he made no reply. He was looking earnestly at the conductor, who was pulling his musicians together for the second act.

"You will come to us, Bertie?" she whispered.

He shook his head.

"I dare not promise," said he. "I feel just now like a man who is still dazed, on being suddenly awakened. I have not yet begun to see things as they are. I am not sure of myself. I will let you know later on."

Then the conductor tapped his desk, and those of the audience who had left their places returned. Stephen Linton slipped into his chair; his wife took up her lorgnette as the first jingle of the tambourines was

heard, and the curtain rose upon the picturesque tawdriness of the company assembled at the /Senor Lois Pastia's/ place of entertainment.

Ella gave all her attention to the opera—to that tragedy of the weakness of the flesh, albeit the spirit may be willing to listen to good. Alas! that the flesh should be so full of color and charm and seduction, while the spirit is pale, colorless, and set to music in a minor key!

/Carmen/ flashed about the stage under the brilliant lights, looking like a lovely purple butterfly—a lovely purple oriole endowed with the double glory of plumage and song, and men whose hearts beat in unison with the heart-beats of that sensuous music through which she expressed herself, loved her; watched her with ravished eyes; heard her with ravished ears—yes, as men love such women; until the senses recover from the intoxication of her eyes and her limbs and her voice. And in the third act the sweet /Michaela/ came on with her song of the delight of purity, and peace, and home. She sang it charmingly, everyone allowed, and hoped that /Carmen/ would sing as well in the last act as she had sung in the others.

Ella Linton kept her eyes fixed upon the stage to the very end of all.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CHURCH IS NOT NEUROTIC.

When George Holland received his two letters and read them he laid them side by side and asked himself what each of them meant.

Well, he could make a pretty good guess as to what the bishop's meant. The bishop meant business. But what did Mr. Linton want with him? Mr. Linton was a business man, perhaps he meant business too. Business men occasionally mean business; they more frequently only pretend to do so, in order to put off their guard the men they are trying to get the better of.

He would have an interview with the bishop; so much was certain; and that interview was bound to be a difficult one—for the bishop. It was with some degree of pride that he anticipated the conflict. He would withdraw nothing that he had written. Let all the forces of the earth be leagued against him, he would abate not a jot—not a jot. (By the forces of the earth he meant the Bench of Bishops, which was scarcely doing justice to the bishops—or to the forces of the earth.)

Yes, they might deprive him of his living, but that would make no

difference to him. Not a jot—not a jot! They might persecute him to the death. He would be faithful unto death to the truths he had endeavored to spread abroad. He felt that they were truths.

But that other letter, which also asked for an interview at his earliest convenience the next day, was rather more puzzling to George Holland. He had never had any but the most casual acquaintance with Mr. Linton—such an acquaintance as one has with one's host at a house where one has occasionally dined. He had dined at Mr. Linton's house more than once; but then he had been seated in such proximity to Mrs. Linton as necessitated his remoteness from Mr. Linton. Therefore he had never had a chance of becoming intimate with that gentleman. Why, then, should that gentleman desire an early interview with him?

It was certainly curious that within a few minutes of his having referred to Mrs. Linton, in the presence of Phyllis Ayrton, in a way that had had a very unhappy result so far as he was concerned, he should receive a letter from Mrs. Linton's husband asking for an early interview.

He seated himself in his study chair and began to think what the writer of that letter might have to say to him.

He had not to ask himself if it was possible that Mr. Linton might have a word or two to say to him, respecting the word or two which he, George Holland, had just said about Mrs. Linton; for George knew very well that, though during the previous week or two he had heard some persons speaking lightly of Mrs. Linton, coupling her name with the name of Herbert Courtland, yet he had never had occasion to couple their names together except during the previous half hour, so that it could not be Mr. Linton's intention to take him to task, so to speak, for his indiscretion—his slander, Phyllis might be disposed to term it.

Upon that point he was entirely satisfied. But he was not certain that Mr. Linton did not want to consult him on some matter having more or less direct bearing upon the coupling together of the names of Mrs. Linton and Mr. Courtland. People even in town are fond of consulting clergymen upon curious personal matters—matters upon which a lawyer or a doctor should rather be consulted. He himself had never encouraged such confidences. What did he keep curates for? His curates had saved him many a long hour of talk with inconsequent men and illogical women who had come to him with their stories. What were to him the stories of men whose wives were giving them trouble? What were to him the stories of wives who had difficulties with their housemaids or who could not keep their boys from reading pirate literature? His curates managed the domestic department of his church for him. They could give any earnest inquirer at a moment's notice the addresses of several civil-spoken women (elderly) who went out as mother's helps by the day. They were very useful young men and professed to like this

work. He would not do them the injustice to believe that they spoke the truth in that particular way.

He could not fancy for what purpose Mr. Linton wished to see him. But he made up his mind that, if Mr. Linton was anxious that his wife should be remonstrated with, he, George Holland, would decline to accept the duty of remonstrating with her. He was wise enough to know that he did not know very much about womankind; but he knew too much to suppose that there is any more thankless employment than remonstrating with an extremely pretty woman on any subject, but particularly on the subject of a very distinguished man to whom she considers herself bound by ties of the truest friendship.

But then there came upon him with the force of a great shock the recollection of what Phyllis had said to him on this very point:

”/If Ella Linton were wicked, you should be held responsible for it in the sight of God/.”

Those were her words, and those words cut asunder the last strand of whatever tie there had been between him and Phyllis.

His duty as a clergyman intrusted with the care of the souls of the people, he had neglected that, she declared with startling vehemence. He had been actuated by vanity in publishing his book—his article in the */Zeit Geist Review/*—she had said so; but there she had been wrong. He felt that she had done him a great injustice in that particular statement, and he tried to make his sense of this injustice take the place of the uneasy feeling of which he was conscious, when he thought over her other words. He knew that he was not actuated by vanity in adopting the bold course that was represented by his writings. He honestly believed that his efforts were calculated to work a great reform in the Church. If not in the Church, outside it.

But his duty in regard to the souls of the people— Oh! it was the merest sophistry to assume that such responsibility on the part of a clergyman is susceptible of being particularized. It should, he felt, be touched upon, if at all, in a very general way. Did that young woman expect that he should preach a sermon to suit the special case of every individual soul intrusted (according to her absurd theory) to his keeping?

The idea was preposterous; it could not be seriously considered for a moment. She had allowed herself to be carried away by her affection for her friend to make accusations against him, in which even she herself would not persist in her quieter moments.

He found it quite easy to prove that Phyllis had been in the wrong and that he was in the right; but this fact did not prevent an intermittent recurrence during the evening of that feeling of

uneasiness, as those words of the girl, "If Ella Linton were wicked, you would be held responsible for it in the sight of God/," buzzed in his ears.

"Would she have me become an ordinary clergyman of the Church of England?" he cried indignantly, as he switched on the light in his bedroom shortly before midnight—for the rushlight in the cell of the modern man of God is supplied at a strength of so many volts. "Would she have me become the model country parson, preaching to the squire and other yokels on Sunday, and chatting about their souls to wheezy Granfer this, and Gammer that?" He had read the works of Mr. Thomas Hardy. "Does she suppose that I was made for such a life as that? Poor Phyllis! When will she awake from this dream of hers?"

Did he fancy that he loved her still? or was the pain that he felt, when he reflected that he had lost her, the result of his wounded vanity—the result of his feeling that people would say he had not had sufficient skill, with all his cleverness, to retain the love of the girl who had promised to be his wife?

Before going to bed he had written replies to the two letters. The bishop had suggested an early hour for their interview—he had named eleven o'clock as convenient to himself, if it would also suit Mr. Holland. Two o'clock was the hour suggested by Mr. Linton, if that hour would not interfere with the other engagements of Mr. Holland; so he had written agreements to the suggestions of both his correspondents.

At eleven o'clock exactly he drove through the gates of the Palace of the bishop, and with no faltering hand pulled the bell. (So, he reflected for an instant,—only an instant,—Luther had gone, somewhere or other, he forgot at the moment what was the exact locality; but the occasion had been a momentous one in the history of the Church.)

He was cordially greeted by the bishop, who said:

"How do you do, Holland? I took it for granted that you were an early riser—that's why I ventured to name eleven."

"No hour could suit me better to-day," said George, accepting the seat—he perceived at once that it was a genuine Chippendale chair upholstered in old red morocco—to which his lordship made a motion with his hand. He did not, however, seat himself until the bishop had occupied, which he did very comfortably, the corresponding chair at the side of the study desk.

"I was anxious to have a chat with you about that book, and that article of yours in the *Zeit Geist*/, Holland," said the bishop. "I wish you had written neither."

"/Litera scripta manet/," said George, with a smile.

One may quote Latin in conversation with a bishop without being thought a prig. In a letter to the /Times/ and in conversation with a bishop are the only two occasions in these unclassical days when one may safely quote Latin or Greek.

"That's the worst of it," said the prelate, with a shake of his head that was Early Norman. "Yes, you see a book isn't like a sermon. People don't remember a man's sermons against him nowadays; they do his books, however."

"I am quite ready to accept the conditions of modern life, my lord," said George.

"I was anxious to give you my opinion as early as possible," resumed the bishop, "and that is, that what you have just published—the book and the /Zeit Geist/ article—reflect—yes, in no inconsiderable measure—what I have long thought."

"I am flattered, indeed, my lord."

"You need not be, Holland. I believe that there are a large number of thinking men in the Church who are trying to solve the problem with which you have so daringly grappled—the problem of how to induce intellectual men and women to attend the services of the church. I'm afraid that there is a great deal of truth in what you say about the Church herself bearing responsibility for the existence of this problem."

"There is no setting aside that fact, my lord."

"Alas! that short-sighted policy has been the Church's greatest enemy from the earliest period. You remember what St. Augustine says? Ah, never mind just now. About your book—that's the matter before us just now. I must say that I don't consider the present time the most suitable for the issue of that book, or that article in the /Zeit Geist/. You meant them to be startling. Well, they are startling. There are some complaints—nervous complaints—that require to be startled out of the system; that's a phrase of Sir Richard's. He made use of it in regard to my neuralgia. 'We must surprise it out of the system,' said he, 'with a large dose of quinine.' The phrase seemed to me to be a very striking one. But the Church is not neurotic. You cannot apply the surprise method to her system with any chance of success. That is wherein the publication of your article seems to me to be—shall we call it premature? It is calculated to startle; but you cannot startle people into going to church, my dear Holland, and that is, of course, the only object you hope to achieve. Your book and your article were written with the sole object of bringing intelligent

people to church. But it occurs to me, and I think it will occur to you also, that if the article be taken seriously,—and it is meant to be taken seriously,—it may be the means of keeping people away from the Church rather than bringing them to church. It may even be the means of alienating from that fond, if somewhat foolish old mother of ours, many of her children who are already attached to her. I trust I don't speak harshly."

"Your lordship speaks most kindly; but the truth—"

"Should be spoken as gently as possible when it is calculated to wound, Holland; that is why I trust I am speaking gently now. Ah, Holland! there are the little children to be considered as well as the Scribes and Pharisees. There are weaker brethren. You have heard of the necessity for considering the weaker brethren."

"I seem to have heard of nothing else since I entered the Church; all the brethren are the weaker brethren."

"They are; I am one of the weaker brethren myself. It is all a question of comparison. I don't say that your article is likely to have the effect of causing me to join the band of non-church-goers. I don't at this moment believe that it will drive me to golf instead of Gospel; but I honestly do believe that it is calculated to do that to hundreds of persons who just now require but the smallest grain of argument to turn the balance of their minds in favor of golf. Your aim was not in that direction, I'm sure, Holland."

"My aim was to speak the truth, my lord."

"In order to achieve a noble object—the gathering of the stragglers into the fold."

"That was my motive, my lord."

"You announce boldly that this old mother of ours is in a moribund condition, in order that you may gather in as many of her scattered children as possible to stand at her bedside? Ah, my dear Holland! the moribund brings together the wolves and the vultures and all unclean, hungry things to try and get a mouthful off those prostrate limbs of hers—a mouthful while her flesh is still warm. I tell you this—I who have from time to time during the last fifty years heard the howl of the hyena, seen the talons of the vulture at the door of her chamber. They fancied that the end could not be far off, that no more strength was left in that aged body that lay prone for the moment. But I have heard the howling wane into the distance and get lost in the outer darkness when the old Church roused herself and went forth to face the snarling teeth—the eager talons. There is life in this mighty old mother of ours still. New life comes to her, not as it did to the fabled hero of old, by contact with the earth, but by communing with

heaven. The bark of the wolf, the snarl of the hyena, may be heard in the debate which the Government have encouraged in the House of Commons on the Church. Philistia rejoices. Let the movers in this obscene tumult look to themselves. Have they the confidence of the people even as the Church has that confidence? Let them put it to the test. I tell you, George Holland, the desert and the ditch, whose vomit those men are who now move against us in Parliament, shall receive them once more before many months have passed. The Church on whom they hoped to prey shall witness their dispersal, never again to return. I know the signs. I know what the present silence throughout the country means. The champion of God and the Church has drawn his breath for the conflict. His teeth are set—his weapon is in his hand—you will see the result within a year. We shall have a government in power, a government whose power will not be dependent on the faddists and the self-seekers—the ignorant, the blatant bellowers of pitiful platitudes, the platform loafers who call themselves labor-leaders, but whom the real laborers repudiate. Mark my words, their doom is sealed; back to the desert and the ditch! My dear Holland, pardon this digression. I feel that I need say nothing more to you than I have already said. The surprise system of therapeutics is not suited to the existing ailments of the Church. Caution is what is needed if you would not defeat your own worthy object, which, I know, is to give fresh vitality to the Church.”

”That is certainly my object, my lord; only let me say that—”

”My dear Holland, I will not let you say anything. I asked you to come here this morning in order that you might hear me. That is all that is necessary for the present. Perhaps, upon some future occasion, I may have the privilege of hearing you in a discourse of some greater length than that which I have just inflicted upon you. I have given you my candid opinion of your writings, and you know that is the opinion of a man who has but one object in life—you know that it is the opinion of an old man who has seen the beginning and the end of many movements in society and in the Church, and who has learned that the Church, for all her decrepitude, is yet the most stable thing that the world has seen. I have to thank you for coming to me, Holland.”

”Your lordship has spoken to me with the greatest kindness,” said George Holland, as his spiritual father offered him his hand.

In a few minutes he was in his hansom once more.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I KNOW THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER MUCH TO GOD WHAT A MAN
THINKS ABOUT
HIMSELF OR HIS SOUL.

For the next hour and a half the Rev. George Holland had an opportunity of considering his position as a clergyman of the Church of England, and as one whose chief desire was to advance the interests of the Church. His bishop had assumed that he had been single-minded in his aims—that his sole object in writing that book and that paper had been to cure the complaint from which the old Church was suffering. His lordship had done him justice where Phyllis had done him a gross injustice. What would Phyllis have said he wondered, if she had heard that concession, made not under pressure, but voluntarily by probably the highest authority in the world, to his, George Holland's, singleness of aim?

But it was so like a girl to jump at conclusions—to assume that he had been actuated by vanity in all that he had just done; that he was desirous only of getting people to talk about him—being regardless whether they spoke well of him or ill. He only wished that she could have heard the bishop. He felt as a man feels whose character has just been cleared in a court of law from an aspersion that has rested on it for some time. He wondered if that truly noble man whom he was privileged to call his Father in God, would have any objection to give him a testimonial to the effect that in his opinion,—the opinion of his Father in God,—there was no foundation for the accusation against him and his singleness of aim.

But the bishop knew that it was not vanity which had urged him to write what he had written. The bishop understood men.

He was right; the bishop understood men so well as to be able to produce in a few words upon the man who had just visited the palace, the impression that he believed that that man had been impelled by a strong sense of duty without a touch of vanity. He understood man so well as to cause that same visitor of his to make a resolution never again to publish anything in the same strain as the */Zeit Geist/* article, without first consulting with the bishop. George Holland had pulled the bell at the palace gates with the hand of a Luther; but he had left the presence of the bishop with the step of a Francis of Assisi. He felt that anyone who would voluntarily give pain to so gentle a man as the bishop could only be a brute. He even felt that the bishop had shown himself to be his, George Holland's superior in judgment and in the methods which he employed. The bishop was not an overrated man.

For a full hour in the silence and solitude of the reading room of his club he reflected upon the excellence of the bishop, and it was with a sign of regret that he rose to keep his other appointment. He would have liked to continue for another hour or two doing justice to that good man out of whose presence he had come.

Mr. Linton's office was not quite in the City. Twenty minutes drive brought George Holland into the private room of Ella Linton's husband.

"It is very good of you to come to me, Mr. Holland," said Stephen. "There seems to be a general idea that a clergyman should be at the beck and call of everyone who has a whim to—what do they call it in Ireland—to make his soul? That has never been my opinion; I have never given any trouble to a clergyman since I was at school."

"It is the privilege of a minister to be a servant," said the Rev. George Holland.

"We were taught that at school—in connection with the Latin verb /ministro/, " said Mr. Linton. "Well, Mr. Holland, I am glad that you take such a view of your calling, for I am anxious that you should do me a great service."

He paused.

George Holland bent his head. He wondered if Mr. Linton wished to intrust him with the duty of observing his wife.

"The fact is, Mr. Holland," resumed Stephen Linton, "I have read your book and your paper in that review. The way you deal with a difficult question has filled me with admiration. You will, I need scarcely say, be outside the Church before long."

"I cannot allow you to assume that, Mr. Linton," said George gravely. "I should be sorry to leave the Church. I cannot see that my leaving it is the logical sequence of anything that I have yet written. My aim is, as doubtless you have perceived, to bring about such reasonable and, after all, not radical changes in the Church system as shall make her in the future a more potent agency for good than she has ever yet been, splendid though her services to humanity have been."

"Still you will find yourself outside the walls of your Church, Mr. Holland. And you will probably adopt the course which other sons of the Church have thought necessary to pursue when the stubborn old thing refused to be reformed."

"If you suggest that I shall become a Dissenter, Mr. Linton—"

"I suggest nothing of the sort, though you dissent already from a good many of the fundamental practices of the Church, if I may be permitted

the expression. Now, I should like to make a provision for your future, Mr. Holland.”

”My dear sir, such a proposition seems to me to be a most extraordinary one. I hope you will not think me rude in saying so much. I have not suggested, Mr. Linton, as other clergymen might, that you mean an affront to me, but I don’t think that anything would be gained by prolonging—”

”Permit me to continue, and perhaps you may get a glimmer of gain. Mr. Holland, I am what people usually term a doomed man. So far as I can gather I have only about six months longer to live.”

”Merciful Heaven!”

”Perhaps it is merciful on the part of Heaven to destroy a man when he has reached the age of forty. We’ll not go into that question just now. I was warned by a doctor two years ago that I had not long to live. It appears that my heart was never really a heart—that is to say, it may have had its affections, its emotions, its passions, but pneumatically it is a failure; it was never a blood-pump. Six months ago I was examined by the greatest authority in Europe, and he pronounced my doom. Three days ago I went to the leading specialist in London, and he told me I might with care live six months longer.”

”My dear Mr. Linton, with what words can I express to you my deep feeling for you?”

George Holland spoke after a prolonged pause, during which he stared at the white-faced man before him. A smile was upon that white face. George was deeply affected. He seemed to have stepped out of a world of visions—a world that had a visionary Church, visionary preachers, visionary doctrines—all unsubstantial as words, which are but breath—into a world of realities—such realities as life and death and— Ah, there were no other realities in existence but the two: life and death.

And Mr. Linton continued smiling.

”You may gather that I wrote to you in order that you may help me to make my soul. What a capital phrase! I didn’t do that, Mr. Holland. I have never been sanguine about man and his soul. I know that it doesn’t matter much to God what a man thinks about himself or his soul. It really doesn’t matter much whether he believes or not that he has a soul: God is the Principle of Right—the Fountain of Justice, and I’m willing to trust myself to God.”

”That is true religion, Mr. Linton,” said the clergyman.

”But I agree with those people who think that the world cannot get on

without a Church. Now, I am sanguine enough to believe that a Church founded on your ideas of what is orthodox would be the means of doing a great deal of good. It would do a great deal of good to my wife, to start with. She does not know that she is so soon to be a widow. Were she to know, the last months of my life would be miserable to both of us. I have noticed with some pain, or should I say amusement? perhaps that word would be the better—I have noticed, I say, that her life is one of complete aimlessness, and that, therefore, she is tempted to think too much about herself. She is also tempted to have longings for—well, for temptation. Ah, she is a woman and temptation is in the way of women. /Qui parle d’amour, fait l’amour/: temptation comes to the woman who thinks about being tempted. Now, I want to give her something to think about that shall lead her out of the thoughts of temptation which I suppose come naturally to a daughter of Eve—the first woman who thought about temptation and was therefore tempted. My wife is a perfectly good woman, and you will be surprised to find out when I am dead how fond of me she was—she will be the most surprised of all. But she is a woman. If she were not so much of a woman I don’t suppose I should ever have cared so much for her as I do. I cared so much for her, Mr. Holland, that I remained away from her in Paris for three months so that I might school myself to my fate, making no sign that would lead her to suspect the truth. Why should she have six months’ additional misery? I have strayed. The Church. I want to give my wife an aim in life; to make her feel that she is doing something worthy—to keep her from thinking of less worthy things. Now, I think you will agree with me that there is nothing women are really so fond of as a Church of some sort. To be devout is as much a part of a woman’s disposition as to love—the passion of devoutness sometimes takes the place of the passion of love in her nature. Now, I want to give her this idea of a Church to work out when I am dead. I want you to carry out as joint trustee with her your theories in regard to the ritual, the art, the sermon; and for this purpose I should of course provide an ample endowment—say three or four thousand a year; anything you may suggest: I shall leave a great deal of money behind me.”

”Your project startles me, Mr. Linton,” said George Holland. ”It startles me as greatly as the first revelation you made to me did. They may be mistaken—the doctors; I have known cases where the highest authorities were ludicrously in error. Let us hope that.”

”Well, we may hope; I may live long enough to lay the foundation stone of the Church myself. But I am most anxious that you should give the whole matter your earnest attention.”

”I am quite dazed. Do you suggest that I should leave the Church of England?”

”By no means. That is a question which I leave entirely to your own decision. My own idea is that you would like a free hand. You will

have to leave the Church sooner or later. A man with your advanced ideas cannot regulate your pace to that of an old woman. In twenty years the Church will think precisely as you think to-day. That is the way with the Church. It opposes everything in the way of an innovation. You stated the case very fairly in your paper. The Church opposes every discovery and every new thing as long as possible. It then only accepts grudgingly what all civilization has accepted cordially. Oh, yes, you'll find it impossible to remain in the Church, Mr. Holland. 'Crabbed age and youth,' you know."

"I should part from the Church with the greatest reluctance, Mr. Linton."

"Then don't part from it, only don't place yourself in its power. Don't be beholden to it for your income. Don't go to the heads of the Church for orders. Be your own master and in plain words, run the concern on your own lines. The widow of the founder will have no power to interfere with you in the matter of such arrangements."

"I shall have to give the matter a good deal of thought. I should naturally have to reform a good deal of the ritual."

"Naturally. The existing ritual is only a compromise. And as for the hymns which are sung, why is it necessary for them to be doggerel before they are devotional?"

"The hymns are for the most part doggerel. We should have a first-rate choir and anthems—not necessarily taken from the Bible. Why should not Shakspeare be sung in churches—Shakspeare's divine poetry instead of the nonsense-rhymes that people call hymns? Shakspeare and Milton; Shelley I would not debar; Wordsworth's sonnets. But the scheme will require a great deal of thought."

"A great deal; that is why I leave it in your hands. You are a thinking man—you are not afraid of tradition."

"Tradition—tradition! the ruts made in the road by the vehicles that have passed over it in years gone by!"

"The road to the Church is sadly in need of macadamizing, Mr. Holland—or, better still, asphaltting. Make a bicycle road of it, and you are all right. Now, come with me to my club and have lunch. We'll talk no more just now about this matter."

They went out together.

CHAPTER XXX.

THERE IS NO ONE I LIKE BETTER THAN PHYLLIS.

Phyllis Ayrton had spent a considerable time pondering over that problem of how best to save a man and a woman from destruction—social, perhaps; eternal, for certain. She felt that it had been laid upon her to save them both, and she remembered the case of one Jonah, a prophet, who, in endeavoring to escape from the disagreeable duty with which he had been intrusted, had had an experience that was practically unique, even among prophets. She would not try to evade her responsibility in this matter.

A few days after Herbert Courtland had witnessed by the side of Ella the representation of "Carmen," he had met Phyllis at an At Home. He had seen her in the distance through a vista of crowded rooms, and had crushed his way to her side. He could scarcely fail to see the little light that came to her face as she put out her hand to him, nor could her companion of the moment—he was one of the coming men in science, consequently like most coming men, he had been forced into a prominent place in the drawing room—fail to perceive that his farewell moment with that pretty Miss Ayrton had come. She practically turned her back upon him when Herbert Courtland came up.

For some moments they chatted together, and then it occurred to him that she might like some iced coffee. His surmise proved correct, and as there was at that moment a stream of people endeavoring to avoid the entertainment of the high-class pianoforte player which was threatened in a neighboring apartment, Phyllis and her companion had no trouble in slipping aside from the panic-stricken people into the tea room.

It was a sultry day, and the French windows of the room were open. It was Phyllis who discovered that there was a narrow veranda, with iron-work covered with creepers, running halfway round the house from window to window; and when he suggested to her that they might drink their coffee on this veranda, she hailed the suggestion as a very happy one. How did it come that none of the rest of the people had thought of that? she wondered.

In another instant they were standing together at the space between the windows outside, the long-leaved creepers mingling with the decorations of her hat, and making a very effective background for his well-shaped head.

For the next half-hour people were intermittently coming to one of the windows, putting their heads out and then turning away, the girls with gentle little pursings of the mouth and other forms that the sneer

feminine assumes; the men with winks and an occasional chuckle, suggestive of an exchange of confidence too deep for words.

One woman had poked her head out—it was gray at the roots and golden at the tips—and asked her companion in a voice that had a large circumference where was Mrs. Linton.

Now, Herbert Courtland had not lived so long far from the busy haunts of men (white) as to be utterly ignorant of the fact that no young woman but one who is disposed to be quite friendly with a man, would adopt such a suggestion as he had made to her, and spend half an hour drinking half a cup of iced coffee by his side in that particular place. The particular place might have accommodated six persons; but he knew, and he knew that she knew also, that it was one of the unwritten laws of good society that such particular places are overcrowded if occupied by three persons. It was on this account the old men and maidens and the young men and matrons—that is how they pair themselves nowadays—had avoided the veranda so carefully, refusing to contribute to its congestion as a place of resort.

Herbert Courtland could not but feel that Phyllis intended to be friendly with him—even at the risk of being within audible distance of the strong man who was fighting a duel /a outrance/ with a grand piano; and as he desired to be on friendly terms with a girl in whom he was greatly interested, he was very much pleased to find her showing no disposition to return to the tea room, or any other room, until quite half an hour had gone by very pleasantly. And then she did so with a start: the start of a girl who suddenly remembers a duty—and regrets it.

That had pleased him greatly; he felt it to be rather a triumph for him that by his side she had not only forgotten her duty but was glad she had forgotten it.

”Oh, yes!” she said, in answer to his question, ”I have two other places to go to. I’m so sorry.”

”Sorry that you remembered them?” he had suggested.

She shook her head smiling.

”What would happen if—I had continued forgetting them?” she asked.

”That is the most interesting question I have heard in some time. Why not try to continue forgetting them?”

”I’m too great a coward,” she replied, putting out her hand to him, for now her victoria had drawn up and the footman was standing ready to open the door.

"Good-by," said he.

"Oh, no! only /au revoir/," she murmured.

"With all my heart—/au revoir/ at The Mooring," said he.

That /au revoir/ had reference to the circumstance that they were to be fellow-guests at Mrs. Linton's house at Hurley-on-Thames, known as The Mooring. Phyllis had told him that she was about to pay that visit, and when he said:

"Why, I am going as well," she had raised her eyes to his face, an unmistakable look of pleasure on her own, as she cried:

"I am so glad! When do you go?"

"On Thursday."

"I go on Tuesday—two days sooner."

The tone in which she spoke made him feel that she had said:

"What on earth shall I do during those dreary two days?" or else he had become singularly conceited.

But even if she had actually said those words they would not have made him feel unduly vain. He reflected upon the fact which he had more than once previously noticed—namely, that the girl, though wise as became a daughter of a Member of Parliament to be (considering that she had to prevent, or do her best to prevent, her father from making a fool of himself), was in many respects as innocent and as natural as a girl should be. She had only spoken naturally when she had said that she was glad he was to be of the riverside party—when she had implied by her tone that she was sorry that two whole days were bound to pass before he should arrive.

What was there in all that she had said, to make such a man as he vain—in all that she had implied? If she had been six years old instead of twenty-three, she would probably have told him that she loved him. The innocence of the child would have made her outspoken; but would his vanity have been fostered by the confession? It was the charming naturalness of the girl that had caused her to speak out what it was but natural she should feel. She and he had liked each other from the first, and it was quite natural that she should be glad to see him at Hurley.

That was what he thought as he strolled to his rooms preparatory to dressing for some function of the night. He flattered himself that he was able to look at any situation straight in the face, so to speak. He flattered himself that he was not a man to be led away by vanity.

He was, as a rule, on very good terms with himself, but he was rather inclined to undervalue than overestimate the distinction which he enjoyed among his fellow-men. And the result of his due consideration of his last meeting with Phyllis was to make him feel that he had never met a girl who was quite so nice; but he also felt that, if he were to assume from the gladness which she had manifested not merely at being with him that day, but at the prospect of meeting him up the river, that he had made an impression upon her heart, he would be assuming too much.

But all the same, he could not help wishing that Ella had asked him to go to The Mooring on Tuesday rather than Thursday; and he felt when Tuesday arrived that the hot and dusty town with its ceaseless roll of gloomy festivities contained nothing for him that he would not willingly part withal in exchange for an hour or two beside the still waters of the Thames in the neighborhood of Hurley.

Stephen Linton had bought The Mooring when his wife had taken a fancy to it the previous year, when she had had an attack of that river fever which sooner or later takes hold upon Londoners, making them ready to sell all their possessions and encamp on the banks of the Thames. It had been a great delight to her to furnish that lovely old house according to her taste, making each room a picture of consistency in decoration and furniture, and it had been a great delight to her to watch the garden being laid out after the most perfect eighteenth-century pattern, with its green terraces and clipped hedges. She had gone so far as to live in the house for close upon a whole fortnight the previous autumn. Since that time the caretaker had found it a trifle too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, he had complained to Mrs. Linton. But she knew that there is no pleasing caretakers; she had not been put out of favor with the place; she hoped to spend at least a week under its roof before the end of the season, and perhaps another week before starting for Scotland in the autumn.

She suddenly came to the conclusion one day that her husband was not looking well—a conclusion which was certainly well founded. She declared that a few days up the river was precisely what would restore him to robust health. (But here it is to be feared her judgment was in error.) He had been thinking too much about the new development of the mine and the property surrounding it at Taragonda Creek. What did his receiving a couple of hundred thousand pounds matter if his health were jeopardized, she inquired of him one day, wearing the anxious face of the Good Wife.

He had smiled that curious smile of his,—it was becoming more curious every day,—and had said:

”What, indeed!”

"Up the river we shall go, and I'll get Phyllis to come with us to amuse you—you know that you like Phyllis," his wife cried.

"There is no one I like better than Phyllis," he had said.

And so the matter had been settled.

But during the day or two that followed this settlement, Ella came upon several of her friends who she found were looking a trifle fagged through the pressure of the season, and she promptly invited them to The Mooring, so that she had a party of close upon a dozen persons coming to her house—some for a day, some for as long as three days, commencing with the Tuesday when she and Phyllis went off together. Mr. Linton had promised to join the party toward the end of the week.

And that was how it came about that Herbert Courtland found himself daily admiring the cleverness of Phyllis Ayrton when she had the punt pole in her hands. He also admired the gradual tinting of her fair face, through the becoming exertion of taking the punt up the lovely backwater or on to the placid reaches beyond. Sometimes the punt contained three or four of the party in addition to Herbert, but twice he was alone with her, and shared his admiration of her with no one.

CHAPTER XXXI.

YOU MAY TRUST MR. COURTLAND.

Mrs. Linton was greatly amused—she certainly was surprised. The surprises were natural, but the amusement was not quite logical. It was, however, quite natural that her guests—two of them excepted—should be amused when they observed her surprise.

Could anything be funnier, one of these guests asked another in a whisper, than Mrs. Linton's chagrin on finding that her own particular Sir Lancelot had discovered an Elaine for himself?

Of course the guest who was so questioned agreed that nothing could possibly be funnier; and they both laughed in unison. If people cannot derive innocent fun from watching the disappointment of their hostess, in what direction may the elements of mirth be found?

It was agreed that Mrs. Linton had invited Herbert Courtland up the river for her own special entertainment—that she had expected him to punt her up the river highways and the backwater by-ways, while Phyllis Ayrton and the rest of her guests looked after themselves, or looked after Mrs. Linton's husband; but it appeared that Herbert

Courtland had not been consulted on this subject, the result being that Mrs. Linton's arrangements had been thrown into confusion.

The consensus of opinion among the guests was to the effect that Mrs. Linton's arrangements had been thrown very much awry indeed. But then the guests were amused, and as it is getting more and more difficult every year to amuse one's guests, especially those forming a house-party at a season when nothing lends itself to laughter, Mrs. Linton would have had every reason to congratulate herself upon the success of her party, had she been made aware of the innocent mirth which prevailed for some days among her guests.

She would possibly have been greatly diverted also at the overshrewdness of her guests, who were, of course, quite ignorant of the conversation regarding Phyllis Ayrton which had immediately preceded her invitation to Herbert to spend a few days on the river.

But though Ella had undoubtedly given Herbert to understand that she was anxious to have him at The Mooring while Phyllis was there, in order that he might have an opportunity of seeing more of her, and to obtain his agreement that her theory that the man who truly loves a woman should be ready to marry that woman's dearest friend, still it must be confessed that she was surprised to observe the course adopted by both Phyllis and Herbert. She had expected that all her tact and diplomacy would be required in order to bring the young people—with all the arrogance of the wife of twenty-six years of age she alluded to a girl of twenty-three and a man of thirty-two as the young people—together.

She had had visions of sitting in the stern of an out-rigger built for two, remonstrating with Herbert—he would of course be at the oars—for choosing to paddle her up the river while he allowed some of the other men to carry off Phyllis in, say, the Canadian canoe. A picture had come before her of the aggrieved expression upon the face of Herbert when she would insist on his going out by the side of Phyllis to feed the peacocks on the terraces in the twilight; and she had more than once seemed to hear his sigh of resignation as she, with a firmness which she would take pains to develop, pleaded a headache so that he and Phyllis might play a game of billiards together.

She soon found out that her imagination had not been prophetic. Immediately after drinking tea—it was a few minutes past six—on the evening of the arrival of Herbert, she went out of doors to find him and give him a lecture on the need there was for him to refrain from waiting about the garden far from the other guests until she, Ella, could go on the river with him for a quiet drift before dinner; the other guests would certainly think him worse than rude, she was ready to explain. The explanation was not needed; she learned that Mr. Courtland had just taken Miss Ayrton out in one of the punts.

Of course she was pleased—after an hour by the side of her husband to perceive that Herbert had lost no time in making an effort to prove to her how amply he recognized her object in asking him to The Mooring. But at the same time, if pleased, she was also surprised. At any rate, she would take good care that he did not lapse in his attentions to Phyllis; as she knew lovers are but too apt to lapse, especially when they begin well. She would, for instance, send him from her side in the garden after dinner, to walk with Phyllis up to the woods where a nightingale was said to be in the habit of singing when the lovely summer twilight had waned into the lovely summer night. With the nightingale's song in their ears, two ordinary young persons with no preconceived theories on the subject of love, have been known, she was well aware, to become lovers of the most aggressive type. Yes, she had great hopes of the nightingale.

So, apparently, had Herbert Courtland.

After dinner there was smoking in the garden, some feeding of the peacocks on the terraces, while the blackbirds uttered protests against such an absorption by foreign immigrants of the bread that was baked for native consumption. Then there was some talk of the nightingale. One man suggested that it was a nightingale attached to a music box which the enterprise of a local inn had hired for the summer months, sending a man to wind it up every night for the attraction of visitors. Then it was that Mr. Courtland said he knew a spot where a nightingale had been in the habit of singing long ago, when his explorations of the Thames River had preceded those of the Fly River. He found three persons who expressed their willingness to accept his guidance on the spot, if it were not too far away. One of these was Phyllis, the other two were notorious lovers. Off they started without hats or caps.

This Ella heard when she returned to the garden, whence she had been called away for ten minutes to interview a man who had an electric launch for sale.

The news, communicated to her by her husband in answer to her inquiry, had surprised her. That was why she had given a little laugh with a tone of derision in it when she had said:

"A nightingale! How lovely! I hope they may find it. It shouldn't prove so arduous as the quest of the meteor-bird. I do hope that those children will not catch cold. It is a trifle imprudent."

"Imprudent?"

"Going off that way with nothing on their heads."

"Or in them. Happy children!" cried a moralizing novelist, who was smoking an extremely good cigar—it had not come from his own

tobacconist.

"We can't all be novel-writers," said one of the women.

"Thank the Lord!" said one of the men, with genuine piety.

In three-quarters of an hour the members of the quest party returned. They had been fully rewarded for their trouble; they had been listening to the nightingale for nearly twenty minutes, they said; it had been very lovely, they agreed, without a single dissentient voice. It probably was; at any rate they were very silent for the rest of the night.

"You have begun well," said Ella to Herbert, when they found themselves together in the drawing room, later on, shortly before midnight. Someone was playing on the piano, so that the general conversation and yawning were not interfered with. "You have begun well. You will soon get to know her if your others days here are like to-day. That nightingale! Oh, yes, you will soon get to know her."

He shook his head.

"I doubt it," said he, in a low tone. His eyes were turned in the direction of Phyllis. She was on a seat at an open window, the twilight of moonlight and lamplight glimmering about her hair. "I doubt it. It takes a man such as I am a long time to know such a girl as Phyllis Ayrton."

That was a saying which had a certain amount of irritation for Ella. He had never said anything in the past about her, Ella, being beyond the knowledge of ordinary men.

"That's a very good beginning," said she, with a little laugh that meant much. "But don't despair. After all, girls are pretty much alike. I was a girl once—it seems a long time ago. I thought then that I knew a great deal about men. Alas! all that I have learned since is simply that they know a great deal about me. Am I different from other women, I wonder? Am I more shallow—more transparent? Was I ever an enigma to you, Bertie?"

"You were always a woman," he said. "That is why—"

"That is why—"

"That is why I am here to-night. If you were not a true woman I should be far away."

"You are far away—from me, Bertie."

"No, no! I am only beginning to appreciate you—to understand you."

"I am to be understood through the medium of Phyllis Ayrton? Isn't that like looking at happiness through another's eyes?"

He did not appear to catch her meaning at once. He looked at her and then his eyes went across the room to Phyllis. At the same instant the performance on the piano ceased. Everyone said "Thanks, awfully good," and there were some audible yawns.

There was a brandy and soda yearning in the men's eyes.

"We'll get off to bed; someone may begin to play something else," whispered the hostess to one of her lady guests.

The men looked as if they had heard the suggestion and heartily approved of it.

The next evening Ella was fortunate enough to get beside Herbert once again—she had scarcely had an opportunity of exchanging a word with him all day. He had been with Phyllis alone in the Canadian canoe. It only held two comfortably, otherwise— But no one had volunteered to put its capacity to the test. Ella had gone in one of the punts with four or five of her guests; but the punt never overtook the canoe. It was those of the guests who had been in the punt that afterward said it was very funny to observe the chagrin of Queen Guinevere when she found that her Sir Lancelot had discovered an Elaine.

"You have had a delightful day, I'm sure," said Ella. She had found him at the bottom of the garden just before dinner. It was not for her he was loitering there.

"Delightful? Perhaps. I shall know more about it ten years hence," he replied.

"You are almost gruff as well as unintelligible," said she.

"I beg your pardon," he cried. "Pray forgive me, Ella."

"I'll forgive your gruffness if you make yourself intelligible," said she. "You frighten me. Ten years hence? What has happened to-day?"

"Oh, nothing whatever has happened! and as for ten years hence—well, in ten years hence I shall be looking back to this day either as one of the happiest of my life, or as Francesca looked back upon her /tempo felice/."

"Oh, now that you get into a foreign language you are quite intelligible. You have not spoken?"

"Spoken? I? To her—to her? I have not spoken. I don't believe that I shall ever have the courage to speak to her in the sense you mean."

Ella smiled as she settled a rose on the bodice of her evening dress—its red petals were reposing in that little interspace that dimpled the soft shell-pink of her bosom. The man before her had once kissed her.

She smiled, as she knew that he was watching her. She wondered if he had forgotten that kiss.

"Why should you lose courage at this juncture?" she asked. "She hasn't, up to the present, shown any very marked antipathy to you, so far as I can see. She is certainly not wanting in courage, if you are."

"Ella," he cried, but in a low voice, "Ella, when I look at her, when I think of her, I feel inclined to throw my bag into a trap and get back to town—get back to New Guinea with as little delay as possible."

"You would run away?" said she, still smiling. She had begun to work with the rose in her bosom once more. "You would run away? Well, you ran away once before, you know."

She could not altogether keep the sneer out of her voice; she could not quite deprive her words of their sting. They sounded to her own ears like the hiss of a lash in the air. She was amazed at the amount of bitterness in her voice—amazed and ashamed.

He stood before her, silently looking at her. There was no reproach in his eyes.

"Oh, Bertie, Bertie, forgive me!" she said, laying her hand on his arm. "Forgive me; I don't know what I am saying."

There was some piteousness in her voice and eyes. She was appealing to him for pity, but he did not know it. Every man thinks that the world was made for himself alone, and he goes tramping about it, quite careless as to where he plants his heavy feet. When occasionally he gets a thorn in one of his feet, he feels quite aggrieved. He never stops to think of all the things his foot crushes quite casually.

Herbert Courtland had no capacity for knowing how the woman before him was suffering. He should have known, from the words he had just heard her speak. He should have known that they had been wrung from her. He did not know, however; he was not thinking of her.

"Bertie," she said again, "Bertie, you are not angry? I did not know what I was saying."

"You are a woman," he said gently, and it was just by reason of this gentleness that there seemed to be a reproach in his voice. He reproached her for being a woman.

"I am a woman—just as other women, just as other women." Her voice sounded like a moan. "I thought myself different, stronger—perhaps worse than other women. I was wrong. Oh, Bertie! cannot you see that she loves you as I loved you long ago—oh, so long ago? And someone has said that there is no past tense in love! No, no! she does not love you as I loved you—guiltily; no, her love is the love that purifies, that exalts. She loves you, and she waits for you to tell her that you love her. You love her, Bertie?"

There was a long pause before he said:

"Do I?"

"Do you not?"

"God knows."

And it was at this point that Phyllis came up. Was there no expression of suspicion on her face as she looked at them standing together?

If there was, they failed to notice it.

"I came out to get a rose," she said. "How quickly you dressed, Ella! Ah, you have got your rose—a beauty! Your gardener is generous; he actually allows you to pluck your own roses."

"Mr. Courtland will choose one for you," said Ella. "You may trust Mr. Courtland."

"To choose me a rose? Well, on that recommendation, Mr. Courtland, I think I may safely place myself in your hands. I will accept a rose of your choosing."

And she did.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LET THEM BOTH GO TOGETHER TO PERDITION.

There could be no doubt whatever that, after all, he had not proposed to her.

That was what Herbert Courtland's fellow-guests said when they learned that he had left for London by an early train on Monday morning.

And the way she had thrown herself at his head, too!

Of course she pretended not to feel his departure any more than the rest of the party; and equally as a matter of course, Mrs. Linton protested that Mr. Courtland had disappointed her.

And perhaps he had, too, some of the guests whispered to one another.

Mr. Linton shrugged his shoulders and remarked that business was business.

Everyone agreed with the general accuracy of this assertion, but it was not one that required much boldness to make, and what it had to do with Mr. Courtland's hurried departure no one seemed quite able to perceive.

The general idea that had prevailed at The Mooring on the subject of Mr. Courtland was that he would remain at the house after all the other guests—Miss Ayrton only excepted—had left.

During Monday several were to return to town, and the remainder on Tuesday, including Miss Ayrton. She required to do so to be in time for a grand function at which Royalty was to be present on that night. Mrs. Linton herself meant to return on Wednesday afternoon.

It was late on Sunday night when Herbert had gone to Ella's side and told her that he found it necessary to leave for town early in the morning instead of waiting until Tuesday evening.

"Good Heavens!" she cried; "what is the meaning of this? What will people say? You do not mean to tell me that she—she— Oh, no; that would be impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible," said he. "Nothing—not even my running away."

"You have told her—"

"I have told her nothing. I am not sure that I have anything to tell her. I am going away to make sure."

"Oh! very well. But I must say that I think you are wrong—quite wrong. There is that Mr. Holland; he is coming into greater prominence than ever since that article of his appeared in the */Zeit Geist/*. Stephen says he will certainly have to leave the Church."

"What has Mr. Holland got to say to—"

"More than meets the eye. You must remember that three months ago she was engaged to marry him. Now, though I don't mean to say that she ever truly loved him, yet there is no smoke without fire; it is very often that two persons who have become engaged to be married love each other. Now, if Phyllis ever had a tender feeling for Mr. Holland, and only threw him over because his theories are not those of Philistia, in the midst of which she had always lived, that feeling is certain to become tenderer if he is about to be made a martyr of. Would you like to see her thrown away upon George Holland?"

Herbert looked at the woman who could thus plead the cause—if that was not too strong a phrase—of the girl whom he had come to love. He felt that he was only beginning to know something about woman and her nature.

"I must go," he said. "I must go. I am not sure of myself."

"You had best make sure of her, and then you will become sure of yourself," said Ella.

"That would be to do her an injustice. No. I feel that I must go," he cried.

And go he did.

Those of the guests who remained during Monday did their best to find out how Phyllis was disposed to regard his departure; and there was a consensus of opinion among them that she seemed greatly mortified, though she made a splendid fight, trying to appear utterly indifferent.

There was, however, no ignoring the circumstance that Ella was elated at his departure; some of her guests even went so far as to suggest that she had accelerated his departure, giving him to understand that, however a young woman might throw herself at his head,—and didn't Phyllis just throw herself at his head?—he had no right to give her all his attention; a hostess has a right to claim some of his spare moments.

It was not until Tuesday, when Mr. Linton had left for London, and Phyllis was alone with Ella for an hour before lunch, that the latter endeavored to find out what she thought of Herbert Courtland.

"Has Stephen been speaking to you about George Holland?" she inquired. She thought that the best way to lead Phyllis to talk about Herbert would be by beginning to talk about George Holland.

"Oh, yes!" said Phyllis. "He appears to be greatly interested in Mr.

Holland. He thinks that he must leave the Church."

"That would be very sad," remarked Ella. "It would seem very like persecution, would it not?"

"I cannot see that there would be any injustice in the matter," said Phyllis. "If a man chooses to write such things as he has written, he must take the consequences. I, for my part, intend keeping away from the church as long as Mr. Holland remains in the pulpit."

She did not think it necessary to refer to the remarks made by Mr. Holland upon the occasion of his last visit to her, though these words might not be without interest to Ella.

"But it seems hard, doesn't it, to deprive a man of his profession simply because he holds certain views on what is, after all, an abstract subject—the patriarchs, or the prophets and things of that sort?" said Ella.

"Lady Earls court said that he should be forgiven, because he really didn't hold the views which he had preached," laughed Phyllis. "She also said that he should not be regarded as an atheist, because he believed not only in one God, but in two."

"I wonder how many Herbert Courtland believes in," said Ella. "You told me he talked to you on that topic the first night you met. Was it about God you and he have been talking lately?"

"I'm afraid it was not."

"Oh! you found a more interesting topic, and one of more importance to two people in the bloom of youth?"

"Ella!"

"Oh, my dear, I don't mean anything dreadful. Only, you know as well as I do that a healthy man and a healthy woman will never talk, when they are alone together, about God, when they can talk about each other. I think Herbert Courtland is about the healthiest man I know, and I'm sure that you are the healthiest girl. You and he are most sympathetic companions. You are not at all stupidly coy, my sweet maiden."

"I like Mr. Courtland, and why should I be coy?"

"Why, indeed? I wonder what the people who have just left us will say about it?"

"About it? About what!"

"You coyness—or absence of coyness. Will they say that you threw yourself at his head?"

(As a matter of fact, as is already known, that is just what the majority of the guests did say about her.)

Phyllis reddened and seemed—for a moment or two—almost angry. Then she made a little gesture, expressive of indifference, as she cried:

"After all, what does it matter what they said? I don't care about them. It is for you I care, Ella—you, only you."

"Heavens! how seriously you say that!" cried Ella. "There's no cause for seriousness, I hope, even if you do care a great deal for me, which I know you do. If you said so much to a man,—say, Herbert Courtland,—it would be quite another matter. There would be sufficient cause for seriousness then. But you didn't say so much to him. He ran away before you could say it."

"Oh, Ella! please don't talk in that way. It is not like yourself to talk in that way."

"How do you know what is like myself and what is not? You have only seen one side of me, and I don't think that you have understood even what you have seen. Great Heavens! how could I expect that you should. Not until within a few months ago had I myself any idea that my nature was made up of more than one element. Do you fancy now that you will always be in the future as you have been in the past? The same placid, sweet English girl, with serious thoughts at times about your own soul and other people's souls? a maiden living with her feet only touching the common clay of this earth? Wait until your hour comes—your hour of love; your hour of fate; your hour of self-abandonment, and pray to your God that you may come through it as well as I came through mine."

"Ella, dearest Ella!"

"You know nothing of that hour—that terrible hour! Wait until it comes to you before you think a word of evil against any woman that lives in the world. Wait until your hour of jealousy comes—wait until you find that your hair is turning gray. The most tragical moment in a woman's life is when she finds that the gray hairs will not be kept back. That is the time when she thinks of Heaven most seriously. I have not yet found a single gray hair in my head, but I have suffered all else; and I have been an astonishment to myself—as I have been to you more than once before now, and as I certainly am to you at the present moment."

She had spoken at first with quivering lips, her fingers interlaced, her eyes flashing. She had sprung from her seat and had begun to pace the room just as she had paced Phyllis' drawing room on that night

when she had missed the performance of "Romeo and Juliet," but she ended with a laugh, which was meant to make a mock of the seriousness of her impassioned words, but which only had the effect of emphasizing her passion in the ears of the girl.

While she was still lying back, laughing, in the chair into which she had thrown herself once more, Phyllis went to her and knelt at her feet, taking her hands just as Herbert had taken her hands in the evening when he had knelt at her feet in her own house after the little dinner at Mr. Ayrton's.

"Ella, Ella," she whispered, "I also am a woman. Oh, my dearest! I think that I can understand something of your heart. I know a little. Oh, Ella, Ella! I would do anything in the world to help you—anything—anything!"

"Would you?" cried the woman. "Would you do anything? Would you give up Herbert Courtland in order to help me?"

She had grasped Phyllis by the wrists and had bent her own head forward until her face was within an inch of Phyllis'. Their breaths mingled. Their faces were too close to admit of either of them seeing the expression that was in the eyes of the other.

"Dearest Ella, you will not break my heart!" said the girl piteously.

"Will you give him up for your love of me?" the woman cried again, and Phyllis felt her hands tighten upon her wrists.

"I will forget that you have said such words," said the girl.

The woman flung away her hands after retaining them for a few moments in silence, and then throwing herself back in her chair, laughed loud and long.

Phyllis rose to her feet.

"You poor dear!" cried Ella. "It was a shame—a shame to play such a jest upon you! But I felt in a tragic mood, and the line between comedy and tragedy is a very fine one. Forgive my little freak, dear; and let us be human beings once more, living in a world that cannot be taken so seriously. Don't go by the evening train, Phyllis; stay all night with me. I have so much to say to you. I want to talk to you. How can you leave me here all alone?"

Phyllis could have told her that how she could leave her all alone was because Herbert Courtland had left for London on the previous day. She did not make an explanation to her on this basis, however; she merely said that it would interfere with her plans to remain longer at The Moorings. She had to attend that great function with her father that

night.

Ella called her very unkind, but showed no desire to revert to the topic upon which they had been conversing, when she had thought fit to ask her that jocular question which Phyllis had said she would forget.

But Phyllis did not keep her word. On the contrary she thought of nothing else but that question all the time she was in the railway carriage going to Paddington.

It was a terrible question in Phyllis' eyes for a woman with a husband to put to her girl-friend.

More than once during the week Phyllis had been led to ask herself if she was quite certain that her terrible surmise regarding the influence which dominated Ella's recent actions was true. Now and again she felt an impulse to fall upon her knees and pray, as she had once before prayed, that the sin of that horrible suspicion might be forgiven her. How could it be possible, she thought, that Ella should forget all that a true woman should ever remember!

But now—now, as she sat in the train on her way back to London, there was no room left in her mind for doubt on this matter. The tragic earnestness with which Ella had asked her that question, tightening her fingers upon her wrists? ”/Will you give up Herbert Courtland in order to help me?/”—the passionate whisper, the quivering lips—all told her with overwhelming force that what she had surmised was the truth.

She felt that Ella had confessed to her that her infatuation—Phyllis called it infatuation—had not passed away, though she had been strong enough upon that night, when her husband had so suddenly returned, to fly from its consequences. No, her infatuation had not died.

But Herbert Courtland—what of him? He had also had strength—once. Would he have strength again? He had told her, while they were together in one of the boats drifting down the placid river, that he believed in the influence which a woman could exercise upon a man's life being capable of changing his nature so completely as if a miracle had been formed upon him. She had not had the courage to ask him if he had any particular instance in his mind that impressed this belief upon him.

Had he been led to cast that infatuation—if he had ever been subjected to it—behind him, by reason of her influence over him since she had repeated to him the pathetic words of Mrs. Haddon, and he had gone straight aboard the yacht on that strange cruise?

She could scarcely doubt that he was ready to acknowledge how great had been her influence upon his life. He had shown her in countless

ways that she had accomplished all that she had sought to achieve. She had had no need to throw herself at his head—the phrase which Ella suggested her fellow-guests would probably employ in referring to the relative positions of Phyllis and Herbert. No, she had ever found him by her side, and it did not need her to exercise much cleverness to keep him there.

But then, why had he so suddenly hurried away from that pleasant life beside the still waters?

This was the question which was on her mind as the train ran into the station at Paddington. She got out of the carriage, and while her maid went to look after the luggage, she glanced down the platform for the footman. He came up to her in a moment and took her dressing-bag and jewel-case.

”The brougham is here, I suppose?” she said, as she walked down the platform.

It was at the entrance to the station, he told her.

She paused for a moment, and glanced back to see if there had been much luggage in the train which she had left—if her maid would be likely to be kept waiting for long. At that instant a porter, with a portmanteau on his shoulder and a Gladstone bag in his hand, hurrying up by the side of the train which was ready to depart from the next platform, shouted to a group of Eton boys who were blocking the way:

”By your leave, gents!”

She started and took a step to one side, and that instant was sufficient to make her aware of the fact that the portmanteau carried by the porter to the train which was about to leave for Maidenhead was Herbert Courtland’s. There was no mistaking it. It bore on one end his initials and his private sign.

She took a few steps nearer the train by which she had come, and followed the porter with her eyes.

He put the portmanteau into the luggage van, and then returned with the Gladstone bag to the side of a compartment. She saw him place it in the network, and touch his cap as he received his /douceur/ from the passenger who sat at the door with an evening paper in his hand.

She saw that that passenger was Herbert Courtland.

She told the footman who stood beside her to take her bag and case to the brougham and then return to help her maid with the rest of the luggage. He followed her down the platform.

In a short time she was being driven home, her maid following with the luggage in another vehicle.

She did not begin to change her traveling dress immediately on retiring to her room. She did not even take off her hat. She stood at the window looking out over a scene very different from that which had been before her eyes every day during the previous week. After a quarter of an hour's listlessness at the window, she spent another quarter of an hour sitting motionless in a chair. Then she rose and looked at herself in a mirror that showed her herself from head to foot. She examined her feet with curious deliberation, and then looked with a critical side glance at the reflection of her face. (She could not fail to have noticed that it was unusually pale.) She removed her hat, surveyed herself once more, then, turning away with an exclamation of impatience, she crumpled up her hat with both her hands and flung it, just as a wicked child would have flung it, across the room.

"Let them both go together to perdition—to perdition—to perdition!" she said with a bitterness that had never previously been in her voice. "Let them go together. I have done my best for them—for her—for her. I give them up now for evermore."

After a minute or two of statuesque passion she went across the room and picked up her bruised hat. She looked at it, turning it round in her hands. Then she dropped it suddenly, and flung herself upon the sofa, crying out in a whirlwind of tears:

"Oh, Ella, Ella, I would have saved you—I meant to save you, indeed! I would have done everything to save you—everything!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I WONDER IF I EVER LOVED YOU UNTIL THIS MOMENT.

It was a rather tedious evening for Ella Linton after Phyllis had taken her departure. Why on earth, she asked herself, had she been such a fool as to lay out her plans to have this lonely evening? Then she remembered that two of her guests had meant to stay until Wednesday morning, but had received a letter necessitating their departure for town on Monday night. But this fact should not have condemned her to a solitary evening, Ella reflected. She should have been thoughtful enough to change her own plans to correspond with the change in the plans of her guests. A nice, quiet, contemplative evening beside the still waters may suit the requirements of some temperaments, but it was not just what Ella regarded as most

satisfying to her mood of the hour. It was a long time since she had spent a lonely evening, and although she had now rather more food for contemplation than at any other period of her life, she did not feel contemplative.

Then it suddenly occurred to her to ask herself why, after all, should she be condemned to a contemplative evening? What was there to hinder her taking a train to town after she had dined? Once in town she knew that all prospect of contemplation would be at an end.

She rang her bell and told her maid that she had changed her mind in regard to staying another night at The Mooring; she would leave after dinner; wasn't there a train about nine from Maidenhead?

It was when she was about to go down to dinner that she heard the sound of wheels upon the gravel walk. Was it possible that her newly made plans might also be deranged? Was this a fresh visitor arriving by a fly from Maidenhead—she saw that the vehicle was a fly.

There was no one in the room to hear the cry of delight that she gave when she saw Herbert at the porch of the house, the driver having deposited his portmanteau and Gladstone bag at his feet.

He had returned to her—he, whom she fancied to be far away; he who had forsaken her, as she thought, as she feared, as she (at times) hoped, forever. He had returned to her. There was no one now to stand between them. He was all her own.

She flung off the dress which she was wearing,—it was her plainest evening gown,—and had actually got on another, a lovely one that she had never yet worn, before her maid arrived at her dressing room.

"Louise," she said, "send a message downstairs to show Mr. Courtland to his room, and mention that he will dine with me. Come back at once. I have got so far in my dressing without you; I can't go much further, however."

In a quarter of an hour she was surveying herself in her mirror just as Phyllis had been doing an hour sooner; only on her face was a very different expression from that which Phyllis had worn. Her eyes were brilliant as they never had been before, except once; her face was not pale, but full of soft color, as if she were standing beneath the shadow of a mighty rose-leaf with the sunlight above. Her neck and arms were of the same delicate tinge. Her smile she gave as she surveyed herself was a smile of triumph, very different from the expression on poor Phyllis' features as she flung her hat across the room.

"Mine, mine, mine!" she whispered, nodding with a smile at the lovely thing so full of warm life that faced her with a smile. "He is mine—"

he has come back to me, I will keep him. I shall be able to keep him, I think."

She had scarcely entered the drawing room before he was beside her, and he had scarcely entered before a servant announced that dinner was served. They were seated at the dinner table before they had exchanged half a dozen words—before she had time to ask him why he had returned.

And at the table, with a servant at each end, what could they say?

Well, she gave in detail, with the accuracy of a railway time-table, the hours of the departure of the various guests, down to the last departed guest, who chanced to be Miss Ayrton. Yes, she was obliged to go up to town to be present at that important function which was to be given in the presence of Royalty, though, she, Mrs. Linton, was convinced that Phyllis would much prefer remaining in the midst of that exquisite quietude which seemed to be found only up the river. She had wanted her dear Phyllis to stay until the morrow, but poor Phyllis' sense of duty had been, as unfortunately it always was, too great for her inclination.

"Unfortunately?" said Herbert.

"Did I say unfortunately?" she cried. "How funny! I meant of course, unfortunately for her friends—for myself in this particular case. But, after all, we had a delightful week together. It has done us all good—even you."

"Why the 'even'?" he asked, with a laugh.

"Oh, well, because you are not expected to feel the fatigues of a London season. And then you must remember that you had a yachting cruise which must have done you a world of good," she added, with a smile born of the mood which was on her—a mood of joy and laughter and daring. She felt that she could say anything she pleased to say to him now; she could have referred with a laugh to his running away on that strange cruise of his.

"Yes," he said, "it did me a great deal of good."

He spoke slowly, and her quick ear detected a tone of gravity in his voice. What could he mean? Oh, yes.

"I hope that that last phase of the mine will soon be settled," said she. "It was that which curtailed your cruise, you will remember."

"I certainly do remember."

"I hope the business will soon be settled one way or another. I don't think this running to Paris so frequently is good for Stephen. Haven't you noticed how poorly he has been looking of late?"

"He didn't seem to me to be particularly robust. But I think that he pulled himself together while he was here. Oh, yes! another week will see us free from this business."

"And with an extra million or so in your pockets."

"Well, something in that way."

That was how they talked while the servants were present—about business and money and matters that may be discussed in the presence of servants.

Then they went together into the drawing room. It was not yet dark enough for the candles to be lighted. The exquisite summer twilight was hanging over the river and the banks opposite, wooded from the water's edge to the summit. It was the hour of delicate blue touched with pink about the borders. The hour of purple and silver stars had not yet come.

She threw open one of the windows on its hinges, and in a moment the room was flooded with the perfume of the roses of the garden. She stood in the opening of the window and seemed to drink in the garden scents before they floated into the room. Then from some secret nestling place in the dark depths of the clipped hedge there came the even-song of a blackbird. It was replied to from the distance; and the silence that followed only seemed to be silence. It was a silence made vocal by the bending of a thousand notes—all musical. The blackbirds, the thrushes, the robins made up a chorus of harmony as soothing to the soul as silence. Then came the cooings of the wood pigeons. The occasional shriek of a peacock was the only note out of harmony with the feeling breathed by the twilight.

She stood at the open window, her back turned to him, for some time. He felt slightly embarrassed. Her attitude somehow suggested to him an imprisonment; he was captured; she was standing between him and the open air; she was barring his passage.

Suddenly she turned. With her movement there seemed to float into the room a great breath of rose-scent. It was only that the light showed him more clearly at that moment the glowing whiteness of her neck and shoulders and arms.

"Why have you come back?" she cried, almost piteously.

"Surely you know why, Ella," said he.

"I know nothing: a man is one thing one day and quite the opposite the next day. How can I know anything of what is in your mind to-day—in your heart to-day?"

"I came back thinking to find her here still—I fancied that you said she would stay until you were returning to-morrow."

"You came back for her?"

"I came back to see her—I find that I cannot live without seeing her."

"You have only found that out since you left here yesterday morning?"

"Only since I left here. I told you that I was not sure of myself. That is why I went away."

"You went away to make sure of yourself, and now you return to make sure of her?"

"Ah, if I could but think that! If I could only be as sure of her as I am of myself. But what am I that I should dare to hope? Oh, she is above all womankind—a crown of girlhood! What am I that I should ask to wear this crown of girlhood?"

"You are a king of men, Bertie. Only for the king of men is such a crown."

She laughed as she stood looking at him as she leaned against the half open door of the window, one hand being on the framework above her head.

"Ella, you know her!" he cried, facing her. She began to swing gently to the extent of an inch or two, still leaning on the edge of the hinged window. She was looking at him through half-closed, curious eyes. "Ella, you know her—she has always been your friend; tell me if I should speak to her or if I should go back to the work that I have begun in New Guinea."

"Would you be guided by me, Bertie?" she asked, suddenly ceasing her movement with the window and going very close to him indeed—so close that he could feel the gracious warmth of her face and bare neck and shoulders. "Would you be guided by me, I wonder?"

"Have I not been guided by you up to the present, Ella?" said he. "Should I be here to-night if it were not for your goodness? I laughed some time ago—how long ago it seems!—when you told me—you said it was your dearest wish—I did not then believe it possible—"

"And do you fancy that I believed it possible?" she asked, with some sadness in her voice.

"Great Heavens! Ella, do you mean to tell me that you— Oh, no, it is impossible! You knew me."

"I fancied that I knew you, Bertie. I fancied that I knew myself."

"Ella, Ella, for God's sake don't let us drift again. Have you no recollection of that terrible time through which we both passed—that ordeal by fire. Ella, we were plucked from the fire—she plucked us from the very fire of hell itself—oh, don't let us drift in that direction again!"

He had walked away from her. He was beginning to recall too vividly the old days, under the influence of her gracious presence so close to him—not so close as it had been, but still close enough to bring back old memories.

"Come here and stand beside me, Bertie," said she.

After a moment's hesitation he went to her, slowly, not with the rapture of a lover—not with the old passion trembling in his hands, on his lips.

He went to her.

She put her hands behind her and looked at him in the face for a long time. The even-songs of the birds mixed with the scent of the roses; the blue shadow of the twilight was darkening over the trees at the foot of her garden.

"Do you remember the oleanders?" she said. "I never breathe in such a twilight as this without seeing before me the oleanders outlined against its blue. It was very sweet at that old place on the Arno."

"Ella, Ella—for God's sake—"

"You told me that terrible secret of your life—that you loved me. I wonder if I knew what it meant, Bertie? I told you that I loved you: that was more terrible still. I wonder if you knew what that meant, Bertie?"

He did not speak.

The bird's songs outside were becoming softer and more intermittent.

She gave a sudden cry as if stung with pain, and started away from the window. She threw herself down on the couch, burying her face in the pillows—he could see through the dim room the whiteness of her arms.

She was breathing convulsively; but she was not sobbing.

He remained beside the open window. He, too, was not breathing so regularly as he had breathed a short time before.

He heard the sigh that came from her as she raised her head from the pillow.

Then she said:

"I wonder if you ever really loved me, Bertie."

"Oh, my God!"

"I wonder if you ever loved me; and I wonder if I ever loved you until this moment."

There was a silence. Outside there was a little whisper of moving wings, but no voice of bird.

There was a silence, and out of it a low voice cried softly, softly:

"Bertie, Bertie, my love, come to me."

He took a step toward her, a second step—and then he stood, rigid, breathless, for he heard another soft voice that said:

"/His honor is the honor of his mother and his sister, upon which no stain must come./"

He heard that voice, and with a cry he covered his face with his hands, and turning, fled through the open window into the garden.

She lay there on her couch, that lovely white creature who had been saved so as by fire. There are two fires: the one is the fire that consumes the heart until all that is left of it is the dust of ashes; the other is the fire that purifies the soul even unto its salvation; and yet both fires burn alike, so that men and women know not which is burning within them.

Did she know that she was saved so as by fire?

She laughed as though he could still hear her; but after her laugh there came a few moments of overwhelming bitterness that sent her on her knees by the side of the couch in self-abasement.

"Kill me—kill me, O God!" she wailed. "Kill me, for I am not fit to live!"

But she was spared.

After a time she found strength to rise. She seemed surprised to find that the room was in darkness. She struck a light, and in a few minutes a dozen candles were flaring round the walls; and then she went mechanically to close the window. One side she had just fastened when it seemed to her that she heard the sound of voices approaching. She listened, her head bent forward through the side of the window that remained unclosed.

Yes, their voices were sounding clearly through the still night—his voice and—what trick was being played upon her by her hearing? Phyllis' voice? How could it be Phyllis' voice? Phyllis had returned to London. Oh, it was some trick! Her nerves were playing some trick upon her—they were out of order, they were beyond her control. Phyllis' voice— Great Heavens! it was Phyllis herself who was walking through the garden by his side!

Ella stood at the open side of the window staring out at them. They stood at the foot of the half dozen steps that lead up to the window. Phyllis laughed,—was there a trace of mockery in her laugh?—but he was silent.

"I don't wonder at your fancying that I am a ghost, Ella," cried the girl. "I feel that I deserve to be treated as discourteously as most poor ghosts are treated when they visit their friends. You never yet heard of a ghost being asked to stay to dinner, did you, Mr. Courtland? But a ghost may fairly claim to be asked to enter the house of her dearest friend, especially after a double railway journey."

Ella had not moved from her place at the open space of the window while Phyllis was speaking, but the moment that the girl's laugh sounded, she too laughed. She ran down the steps and put her arms about Phyllis, kissing her on the face.

"This is more than the most exacting of ghosts could reasonable look for," cried Phyllis. "Oh, Ella! I'm so glad that I followed my own impulse and came back to you. I thought you were here all alone—how could I know that Mr. Courtland would return in the meantime to complete his visit?—and when I looked out on the dust and the smoke of the town and thought of this—this—this exquisite stillness,—you can just hear the water of the weir,—this garden, this scent of roses, but chiefly when I thought of you sitting in your loneliness— Well, is it any wonder that I am here now?—you implored of me to stay, you know, Ella."

"It is no wonder indeed, being what you are—a good angel, my good angel, Phyllis," cried the woman. "Oh, dearest, you are welcome! Why did you leave me Phyllis? Why did you leave me? Oh, the good angels can never be trusted. You should not have left me to myself, dear. I

am only a woman. Ah, you don't yet know what a woman is. That is the worst of angels and men; they don't know what a woman is. Come into the house, Phyllis. Come in, Herbert. How did you manage to meet?"

"You know I went out to the garden—" said the man.

"Yes; I knew that—you left me alone," said the woman, and she gave a laugh.

"I strolled from the garden to the road—I had to ask the people at the Old Bell to keep a room for me, of course."

"Of course."

"And just outside the inn I came face to face with Miss Ayrton's fly. Miss Ayrton was good enough to get out and walk with me, sending the fly on with her maid. I told the man to wait in order to take my portmanteau to the inn. It must be at the hall door now. We entered by the garden gate."

"Nothing could be simpler," said Ella. They had by this time walked up the steps into the drawing room. "Nothing could be simpler." Then she turned to Phyllis. "But how did you contrive to evade the great function to-night?"

"Papa did not feel very well," said Phyllis, "and I know that he was only too glad of an excuse to stay at home."

"And you forsook your sick father to come to me? Oh, my dear Phyllis, what have you done?"

"If you ask me in confidence I should say that papa is not quite so ill as to stand in need of a nurse," she whispered. "Oh, no! Make your mind easy. I have neglected no duty in coming to you."

"Except your duty to yourself; you could not have had time to take any dinner at home. I shall have you a servants' hall supper in ten minutes."

"Please get nothing for me. I had a capital sort of dinner at home. But I should dearly like a cup of tea."

"It will be ready for you the moment you return from taking off your hat. I'll go up with you to your room; Mr. Courtland knows that even I make myself at home in this house. He will pardon us."

"I mustn't keep the fly waiting for my portmanteau," said Mr. Courtland. "If you will allow me, I shall look to it now, and say good-night."

"What! Oh, you mustn't think of running off in this way," said Ella. "What reason had you for returning at all if you run off at this hour?"

"It is getting quite late. I mustn't keep the good people of the Old Bell up on my account," said he. "Besides, a man represents a certain inharmonious element upon such an occasion as this. Miss Ayrton returned expecting to be with you alone. I know the disabilities of a man quite well. Yes, I must say good-night."

"Nonsense! Pray talk to him, Phyllis," cried Ella. "You may make him amenable to reason."

But Phyllis stood mute with her hand on the handle of the door; she only smiled, and there is neither reason nor argument in a smile.

"Good-night!" said he.

"Oh, well, if you really have nothing to say to either of us,—to either Phyllis or me,—you had better go, I suppose," said Ella, giving him her hand, but she did not look at him in the face while his hand was touching hers.

Curiously enough, neither did Phyllis look at him as was her wont.

And so he left them that night.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME—GIVE HIM BACK TO ME!

They seemed to have been parted for months instead of hours, so much had they to say to each other, and so rapidly did they say it. Rapidly?—feverishly rather. Phyllis had only to remove her hat and smooth her hair at places, disordering it at others, in order to be all right; but half an hour had gone by before they went downstairs, arm in arm, after the manner of girls who have been talking feverishly and kissing every now and again.

It was madness for Phyllis to think of tea at that hour of the night, Ella declared; but she knew Phyllis' fancies in the past—she knew that what would set other girls' nerves in motion, would only have the effect of soothing hers. So Phyllis drank her tea and ate her cake in the drawing room, and Ella lay back on the sofa and watched her with a curious interest in her eyes.

"I am so glad that we are spending together in this way the last night of our delightful week," said Phyllis. "What a lovely week it has been! and the charm of it is, of course, to be found in the fact that it has been stolen from the best part of the season. In another month it would not be nearly so delightful—everyone will be hurrying off to the river or elsewhere."

"Such a week is one of the incidents that a person plans but that rarely comes off according to one's views," said Ella. "I told you when I set my heart upon Hurley what my idea was."

"And you have certainly realized it during this week. What a pity it is that this is our last night together!"

"Do you know, Phyllis, the way you said that suggested to me that you meant 'What a pity it is that Herbert Courtland is not one of our party to-night'!"

Ella was still lying on the broad pillows of the couch, her hands clasped at the back of her head. She was still watching Phyllis through her half-closed eyes.

"I was not thinking about Mr. Courtland in the least when I spoke. How can you fancy that I should be so insincere? I say it is delightful for us, you and me only, mind, to be together to-night, because we can say just whatever occurs to us—I thought we could, you know; but since you made that horrid suggestion I think I must take back all that I said. It is, after all, not nearly so nice to be alone with you as one would imagine."

"That was, I'm afraid, the conclusion that Herbert Courtland came to some time ago," said Ella. "He was alone with me here—yes, for some minutes; but he left me—he left me and found you."

"It was so funny!" cried Phyllis. "Who would have thought of seeing such a figure—bareheaded and in evening dress—on the road? I knew him at once, however. And he was walking so quickly too—walking as if—as if—"

"As if the devil were behind him—that's how men put it," said Ella. "It would never do for us to say that, of course, but in this particular case we might venture on it for the sake of strict accuracy; the devil was behind him. He escaped from it by the aid of his good angel. Didn't he call you his good angel once, my Phyllis?"

"Yes, he called me so once," said Phyllis. "But why should we talk about Mr. Courtland? Why should we talk about anybody to-night? Dearest Ella, let us talk about ourselves. You are of more interest to me than anyone in the world, and I know that I am of more interest to you than to anyone else. Let us talk about ourselves."

"Certainly we shall talk about ourselves," said Ella. "To begin, I should like very much to know if you were aware that Herbert had returned to this house after his day or two in town."

Phyllis undoubtedly colored before she said, with a laugh:

"Didn't you promise to talk solely about ourselves? I decline to talk on any other topic."

She arose from where she had been sitting before a cup of tea at a little table that also held cake, and threw herself back in a fanciful seat shaped like a shell.

"That being so, I should like very much to know how you learned that he meant to return," pursued Ella.

"You are becoming quite horrid, and I expected you to be so nice," said Phyllis, pouting very prettily.

"And I expected you to confide in me," said Ella reproachfully. "I have been watching you for some time—not merely during the past week, but long before; and I have seen—what I have seen. He could not have told you that he meant to return—you must have crossed each other in the trains. How did you know, my dear girl? Let me coax it out of you."

Phyllis made no answer for some time; she was examining, with a newly acquired, but very intense interest, the texture of the sheen of the blouse which she was wearing. At last she raised her eyes, and saw how Ella was looking at her. Then she said slowly:

"I saw him in the train that was leaving when our train arrived."

"Heavens! that is a confession!" cried Ella quite merrily.

"You forced it from me," said Phyllis. "But why should there be any mystery between us? I'm sure I may tell you all the secrets of my life. Such as they are, you know them already."

"They are safe in my keeping. My dear Phyllis, don't you know that it has always been my dearest hope to see you and Herbert Courtland—well, interested in each other? I saw that he was interested in you long ago; but I wasn't sure of you. That is just why I was so anxious for you to come down here for the week we have just passed. I wanted to bring you both together. I wanted to see you in love with each other; I wanted to see you both married."

"Ella—Ella!"

"I wanted it, I tell you, not because I loved you, though you know that I love you better than anyone in the world."

"Dearest Ella!"

"Not because I knew that you and he would be happy, but because I wished to snatch my own soul from perdition. I think it is safe now—but oh, my God! it is like the souls of many other mortals—saved in spite of myself! Phyllis, you have been my salvation. You are a girl; you cannot understand how near a woman may go to the bottomless pit through the love of a man. You fancy that love lifts one to the heaven of heavens; that it means purity—self-sacrifice. Well, there is a love that means purity; and there is a love that means self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice: that is, that a woman is ready to sacrifice herself—her life—her soul—for the man whom she loves. I tell you—I, who know the truth—I, who have been at the brink. It is not that the pit is dear to us; it is that the man is dear to us, and we must go with him,—wherever he goes,—even down into hell itself with him."

"Oh, Ella, Ella! this is the love of the satyr. It is not the love of the one who is made in the image of God."

"Let it be what it is; it is a power that has to be reckoned upon so long as we remain creatures of the earth, earthy."

"It is a thing that we should beat into the earth from which it came." The girl had sprung to her feet, and was speaking with white face and clenched hands. "Down into the earth"—she stamped upon the floor—"even if we have to throw our bodies into the grave into which we trample it. Woman, I tell you that the other love,—the love which is the truth,—is stronger than the love of the satyr."

"Is it? is it, Phyllis? Yes, sometimes. Yes; it was a word that you spoke in his hearing that saved him—him—Herbert—and that saved me that night when I came to you—when I waited for you—you did not know anything of why I came. I will tell you now—"

"No, no, no! Oh, Ella! for God's sake, tell me nothing! I think I know all that I want to know; and I know that you had strength given to you by God to come to me that night. I had not to go to you. But I have come to you to-night. We are together, you and I; and we are the same as when we were girls together—oh, just the same! Who shall come between us, Ella?"

"Who? Who? You came here to save me. I knew it. But you had saved me before you came. Phyllis, in this very room I was alone with him. I was mad—mad with jealousy at the thought of losing him—though I knew that I had lost him—I was mad! The passion breathed from the roses—the twilight full of the memories of the spring we spent together in Italy—all took possession of my heart—my soul. I whispered to him to

come to me—to come to me. And he came.”

The cry the girl gave, as she covered her face with her hands and dropped back into her chair, was very pitiful.

”He came to me—but only one step—one little step, Phyllis; then there came before his eyes a vision of your face—he felt your hand—cool as a lily—upon his wrist—he heard your voice speaking into his ear; he turned and fled—fled through that window—fled from the demon that had taken possession of this room—I said so to you.”

”Thank God—oh, Ella, thank God!”

”That is my cry—thank God—thank God; and yet—and yet—God help me! I feel ready to throw myself at your feet and say ‘Give him back to me! Give him back to me!’ ”

She had stood with her hands clasped above her head at her first utterance of that imploration—”Give him back to me!” Then she threw herself on her knees and passionately caught both the girl’s hands in her own, crying, ”Give him back to me!”

Phyllis flung her arms about her neck, and bowed her own head down to the shoulder of the woman whom she loved and pitied.

And then—

Then through the silence of the house—the hour was almost midnight—there sounded the loud and continuous ringing of a bell.

It was only the usual visitors’ bell of the house; but its effect at that hour was startling—shocking!

The two women were on their feet, waiting in silence, but with wildly beating hearts, for what was coming—they felt that something terrible was coming. The bell had an ominous jangle. They heard the footsteps of the one servant who remained up to put out the lights, going to answer the summons of the bell—they heard a man’s voice speaking in a low tone in the hall—they heard a man’s steps approach the door of their room. The door opened, and Mr. Ayrton appeared before them.

He closed the door slowly, and stood there staring not at his daughter, but at Ella Linton. On his face was an expression that Phyllis had never seen on it before. It frightened her. She could not speak.

He stood there, with his eyes fixed upon Ella Linton—rigid—silent as a figure that symbolizes Death.

The silence became appalling.

"For God's sake speak, if you are living!" cried Ella in a whisper tremulous with terror.

He did not speak—he stood there, staring at her.

"What does he mean? What does he mean?" said the woman, after another dreadful pause. "Why does he stand there, Phyllis, staring at me? Why— Oh, my God! I see it—I see it on his face—my husband—Stephen—dead—he is dead—you came to bring the news to me. Look, Phyllis, he cannot say 'No'—he would say 'No' unless I had guessed the truth—he would say it—he would have some pity. Is it the truth? Man—speak—say yes, or no—for God's sake! for God's sake!"

She had taken half a dozen rapid steps to him and grasped him by the arm, gazing into his face.

He bowed his head.

She flung his arm from her, and burst into a laugh.

"Ah, Phyllis! I see it all now. He was the man I loved—I know it now—he was the man I loved. It was for him I cried out just now—'Give him back to me—give him back to me!' "

The wild shriek with which she cried the words the second time rang through the house. She fell upon her knees, clutching at Phyllis' hand as before, and then, making a motion as if about to rise, she fell back and lay with her white face turned to the ceiling, her white arms stretched limply out on each side of her like the arms of a crucified woman.

Servants came with restoratives.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IF GOD WOULD ONLY GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE!

"Poor creature! Poor creature!" said Mr. Ayrton. He had just returned from the room to which they had carried Ella. Phyllis was lying on the sofa with her face down to the pillow. "Poor creature! No one could have had any idea that she was so attached to him! She will be one of the richest women in England. He fell down in the club between nine and ten. His heart. Sir Joseph was not surprised. He said he had told him a short time ago that he had not six months to live. He cannot

have let his wife know. Well, well, perhaps it was for the best. His man came to me in a terrible state. How was it to be broken to her? I just managed to catch the last train. He must have been worth over a million. She will be one of the richest women in England. Even in America a woman with three-quarters of a million is reckoned moderately well off. Poor creature! Ah! the shorn lamb!—the wind is tempered. 'In the midst of life—' Dear Phyllis! you must not allow yourself to break down. Your sympathetic nature is hard to control, I know, but still—oh, my child!"

But Phyllis refused to be comforted. She lay sobbing on the pillow, and when her father put his arm about her and raised her, she put her head on his shoulder, crying:

"He is gone from me forever—he is gone from me forever! Oh, I am the cruelest woman on earth! It is not for her terrible blow that I am crying, it is because I have lost him—I see it—I have lost him!"

Her father became frightened. What in the world could she mean by talking about the man being gone from her? He had never heard of a woman's sympathy extending to such limits as caused her to feel a personal deprivation when death had taken another woman's husband.

"Oh, I am selfish—cruel—heartless!" sobbed Phyllis. "I thought of myself, not of her. He is hers; he will be given back to her as she prayed—she prayed so to me before you appeared at the door, papa. 'Give him back to me! Give him back to me!' that was her prayer."

"My dearest child, you must not talk that way," said the father. "Come, Phyllis, your strength has been overtaxed. You must go to bed and try to sleep."

She still moaned about her cruelty—her selfishness, until the doctor who had been sent for and had been with Ella in her room, appeared in order to let them know that Mrs. Linton had regained consciousness. The blow had, of course, been a terrible one: but she was young, and Nature would soon reassert herself, he declared, whatever he meant by that. He thought it strange, he said, that Mrs. Linton had not been aware of her husband's weakness. To him, the physician, the condition of the unfortunate gentleman had been apparent from the first moment he had seen him. He had expected to hear of his death any day. He concluded by advising Phyllis to go to bed and have as long a sleep as possible. He would return in the morning and see if Mrs. Linton might travel to London.

Phyllis went to her room, and her father went to the one which had been prepared for him. For a minute or two he remained thoughtful. What could his daughter have meant by those self-accusations? After a short time, however, he smiled. The poor thing had been upset by the shocking news of the death of the husband of her dearest friend. She

was sympathetic to quite a phenomenal degree. That sympathy which felt her friend's loss as though it were wholly her own was certainly not to be met with every day.

In the morning Phyllis showed traces of having spent a bad night. But she spoke rationally and not in the wild way in which she had spoken before retiring, and her father felt that there was no need for him to be uneasy in regard to her condition. He allowed her to go to the side of her friend, Ella, and as he was leaving them together in each other's arms, he heard Ella say:

"Ah, Phyllis, I know it now. He was the man who had all my love—all—
all! Ah, if God would only give me another chance—one more chance!"

Mr. Ayrton had heard that passionate appeal for another chance upon more than one previous occasion. He had heard the husband who had tortured his wife to death make a passionate appeal to God to give him another chance. He knew that God had never given him another chance with the same wife; but God had given him another wife in the course of time—a wife who was not made on the spiritual lines of those who die by torture; a wife who was able to formulate a list of her own rights, and the rights of her sisters, and who possessed a Will.

The man who wanted another chance had no chance with such a woman.

He had heard the wife, who had deserted her husband in favor of the teetotal platform, cry out for another chance, when her husband had died away from her. But God had compassion upon the husband. She did not get him back.

He pitied with all his heart the poor woman who would be one of the richest women in England in the course of a day or two, and he said so to Mr. Courtland when he called early in the morning. Mr. Courtland did not remain for long in the house. It might have been assumed that so intimate a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Linton's would be an acceptable visitor to the widow; but Mr. Courtland knew better. He hurried away to town without even asking to see her. He only begged of Mr. Ayrton to let him know if he could be of any use in town—there were details—ghastly; but he would take care that there was no inquest.

Phyllis went up to town with poor Ella, and remained by her side in that darkened house through all the terrible days that followed. Mr. Linton's death had an appreciable influence upon the quarter's revenue of the country. The probate duty paid by the executors was a large fortune in itself, and Ella was, as Mr. Ayrton had predicted she would be, one of the richest women in England. The hundred thousand pounds bequeathed to some unostentatious charities—charities that existed for the cause of charity, not for the benefit of the official staff—made no difference worth speaking of in the position of Mrs. Linton as one of the richest women in England.

But the codicil to the will which surprised most people was that which placed in the hands of Mrs. Linton and the Rev. George Holland as joint trustees the sum of sixty thousand pounds, for the building and endowment of a church, the character and aims of which would be in sympathy with the principles recently formulated by the Rev. George Holland in his book entitled "Revised Versions," and in his magazine article entitled "The Enemy to Christianity," the details to be decided by the Rev. George Holland and Mrs. Linton as joint trustees.

The codicil was, of course, a very recent one; but it was executed in proper form; it required two pages of engrossing to make the testator's desires plain to every intelligence that had received a thorough training in legal technicalities. It was susceptible of a good deal of interpretation to an ordinary intelligence.

When it was explained to Mrs. Linton, she also was at first a good deal surprised. It read very like a jest of some subtlety: for she had no idea that her husband had the slightest feeling one way or another on the subject of the development of one Church or another; and as for the establishment of an entirely new Church—yes, it struck her at first that her solicitor was making a bold and certainly quite an unusual attempt to cheer her up in her bereavement by bringing under her notice a jest of the order /pachydermato/.

But soon it dawned upon her that her husband meant a good deal by this codicil of his.

"I am getting to understand him better every day," she said to Phyllis. "He knew that I loved him and him only. He has given me this work to do, and with God's help I will do it thoroughly. You did not believe in the value of George Holland's doctrines. Neither did I: I never thought about them. I will accept my husband's judgment regarding them, and perhaps I may think about them later on. Our Church will be the most potent influence for good that the century has yet seen. Yes, I will throw myself heart and soul into the work. After all, it must be admitted that the Church has never done its duty as a Church."

Phyllis said nothing.

But the Rev. George Holland had a good deal to say on the subject of the codicil, when he was alone with Mrs. Linton, a few days later. He had by no means made up his mind to sever his connection with the dear old mother Church, he said. He could not see that there was any need for his taking so serious a step—an irrevocable step. It was his feeling at that moment, he declared, that he might be able to effect the object of his life—which was, of course, the reform of the Church—better by remaining within its walls than by severing himself from it. He must take time to consider his position.

He left Mrs. Linton greatly disappointed. It had been her belief that Mr. Holland would jump at the chance—that was the phrase which she employed in expressing her disappointment to Phyllis—of becoming the founder of a brand-new religion.

She was greatly disappointed in Mr. Holland. If Buddha or Edward Irving, or some of the other founders of new religions had had such a chance offered to them in early life, would they not have embraced it eagerly? she asked.

And it was to be such a striking Church! She had made up her mind to that. It was to be a lasting memorial to the largeness of soul of her husband—to his appreciation of the requirements of the thinking men and women of the age. She had made up her mind already as to the character of the painted windows. The church would itself, of course, be the purest Gothic. As for the services, she rather thought that the simplicity of the Early Church might be effectively combined with some of the most striking elements of Modern Ritualism. However, that would have to be decided later on.

But when the bishop heard of the codicil he had another interview with George Holland, and imparted to that young cleric his opinion that he should avail himself of the opportunity offered to him of trying what would undoubtedly be a most interesting experiment, and one to the carrying out of which all true churchmen would look forward most hopefully. Who could say, he inquired, if the larger freedom which would be enjoyed by an earnest, sincere, and highly intellectual clergyman, not in immediate contact with the Establishment, might not avail him to perfect such a scheme of reform as would eventually be adopted by the Church?

That interview was very helpful to George Holland in making up his mind on the subject of the new Church. He resigned his pastorate, greatly to the regret of the churchwardens; though no expression of such regret was ever heard from the bishop.

But then a bishop is supposed to have his feeling thoroughly under control.

This happened three weeks after the death of Stephen Linton, and during these weeks Herbert Courtland had never once asked to see Ella Linton.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARRIAGE IS THE PICTURESQUE GATEWAY LEADING TO A COMMONPLACE ESTATE.

So soon as Phyllis Ayrton had returned home, she got a letter from Herbert Courtland, asking her if she would be good enough to grant him an interview. She replied at once that it would please her very much to see him on the following afternoon—she was going to Scotland with her father in a week, if Parliament had risen by that time.

He came to her. She was alone in the drawing room where she had always received him previously.

The servant had scarcely left the room before he had told her he had come to tell her that he loved her—to ask her if he might hope to have some of her love in return.

He had not seated himself, nor had she. They remained standing together in the middle of the room. He had not even retained her hand.

”Why have you come to me—to /me/?” she asked him. Her face was pale and her lips, when he had been speaking to her, were firmly set.

”I have come to you, not because I am worthy of the priceless gift of your love,” said he, ”but because you have taught me not merely to love you—you have taught me what love itself is. You have saved my soul.”

”No, no! do not say that; it pains me,” she cried.

”I cannot but say it; it is the truth. You have saved me from a degradation such as you could not understand. Great God! how should I feel to-day if you had not come forward to save me?”

He walked away from her. He stood with his back turned to her, looking out of the window.

She remained where he had left her. She did not speak. Why should she speak?

He suddenly faced her once again. The expression upon his face astonished her. She had never before seen a man so completely in the power of a strong emotion. She saw him making the attempt to speak, but not succeeding for some time. Her heart was full of pity for him.

”You—you cannot understand,” he managed to say. ”You cannot understand, and I cannot, I dare not, try to explain anything of the

peril from which you snatched me. You know nothing of the baseness, the cruelty, of a man who allows himself to be swayed by his own passions. But you saved me—you saved me!”

”I thank God for that,” she said slowly. ”But you must not come to me to ask me for my love. It is not to me you should come. It is for her who was ready to sacrifice everything for you. You must go to her when the time comes, not now—she has not recovered from her shock.”

”You know—she has told you?”

”I knew all that terrible story—that pitiful story—before I heard it from her lips.”

”And yet—yet—you could speak to me—you could be with me day after day?”

”Oh, I know what you would say! You would say that I led you on—that I gave you to believe that I loved you. That is what you would say, and it would be the truth. I made up my mind to lead you on; I gave you to understand that I cared for you. But I confess to you now that I did so because I hoped to save her. You see it was a plot on my part—the plot of one woman anxious to save her sister from destruction. I succeeded. Thank God for that—thank God for that!”

”You succeeded—you succeeded indeed.” He spoke slowly and in a low tone, his eyes fixed upon her burning face. ”Yes, you led me on—you led me from earth to heaven. You saved her—you saved me. That is why I am here to-day.”

”Oh, it is not here you should be, Mr. Courtland.” She had turned quickly away from him with a gesture of impatience and had walked to the other end of the room. There was more than a suspicion of indignation in her voice. ”You should be with the woman whom you loved; the woman who showed you how she loved you; the woman who was ready to give up everything—honor—husband—God—for you. Go to her—to her—when the numbness has passed away from her, and there is no barrier between you and her. That is all I have to say to you, Mr. Courtland.”

”Is it indeed all, Phyllis?” he said. ”But you will let me speak to you. You will let me ask if Ella alone was ready to sacrifice herself? You say that you led me to love you in order to save her. How did you lead me on? By giving me to understand that you were not indifferent to me—that you had some love for me. Let me ask you if you were acting a lie at that time?”

”I wanted to save her.”

"And you succeeded. Were you acting a lie?"

She was silent.

"You were willing to save her?" he continued. "How did you mean to save her? Were you prepared to go to the length of marrying me when I had been led on to that point by you? Answer me, Phyllis."

"I will not answer you, Mr. Courtland—you have no right to ask me to answer you. One terrible moment had changed all the conditions under which we were living. If she had been free,—as she is now,—do you fancy for a moment that I should have come between you—that I should have tried to lead you away from her? Well, then, surely you must see as clearly as I do at the present moment that now our relative positions are the same as they would have been some months ago, if Ella had been free—if she could have loved you without being guilty of a crime? Oh, Mr. Courtland do not ask me to humiliate myself further. Please go away. Ah, cannot you see that it would be impossible for me to act now as I might have acted before? Cannot you see that I am not a woman who would be ready to steal happiness for myself from my dearest friend?"

"I think I am beginning to see what sort of woman you are—what sort of a being a woman may be. You love me, Phyllis, and yet you will send me away from you lest you should do Ella a wrong?"

"I implore of you to go away from me, because if Ella had been free a month ago as she is to-day, she would have married you."

"But she fancied that she loved me a month ago. She knows that she does not love me now. You love me—you, Phyllis, my love, my beloved; you dare not say that when you led me to love you, you were not led unthinkingly to love me yourself. Will you deny that, my darling?"

He had strode passionately up to her, and before she could resist he had put his arms about her and was kissing her on the face. For a moment only she resisted, then she submitted to his kisses.

"You are mine—mine—mine!" he whispered, and she knew that she was. She now knew how to account for the brilliant successes of the man in places where every other civilized man had perished. He was a master of men. "You love me, darling, and I love you. What shall separate us?"

With a little cry she freed herself.

"You have said the truth!" she cried; "the bitter truth. I love you! I love you! I love you! You are my love, my darling, my king forever. But I tell you to go from me. I tell you that I shall never steal from any sister what is hers by right. I would have sacrificed myself—I

did not love you then—to keep you from her; I am now ready to sacrifice myself—now that I love you—to give you to her. Ah, my love, my own dear love, you know me, and you know that I should hate myself—that I should hate you, too, if I were to marry you, now that she is free. Go, my beloved—go!”

He looked at her face made beautiful with tears. ”Let me plead with you, Phyllis. Let me say—”

”Oh, go! go! go!”

He put out his hand to her.

”I am going!” he said. ”I am leaving England, but from day to day I shall let you know where I am, so that you can send to me when you want me to return to you. Write on a paper, ’Come to me,’ and I will come, though years should pass before I read those words. I deserve to suffer, as I know I shall suffer.”

He held out his hand. She took it. Her tears fell upon it. She did not speak as he went to the door. Then she gave a cry like the cry of a wounded animal. She held out her hands to him.

”Not yet! Not yet!” she said.

She flung herself into his arms, kissing him and kissing him, holding him to her with her arms about his neck.

”Good-by! Good-by, my darling, my best beloved. Oh, go! Go, Herbert, before I die in your arms. Go!”

She was lying along the floor with her head on the sofa.

He was gone.

She looked wildly around the room, wiping the tears from her eyes. She sprang to her feet, crying:

”Come back! Come back to me, my beloved! Oh, I was a fool! Such a fool as women are when they think of such things as heaven and truth and right! A fool! A fool!”

An hour afterward Ella called to say good-by to her. She was going to Switzerland first, she said, to a quiet spot that she knew, where she might think out some of the details of the Church. Mr. Holland would meet her in Italy in the winter to consider some of the architectural details.

When the hour of her departure was at hand she referred to another matter—a matter on which she spoke much more seriously than she had

yet spoken on the subject of the Church.

"I could not go, my dear Phyllis," said she, "without telling you that I know Herbert Courtland will come to you."

"No!" said Phyllis. "He will not come to me. He has been with me. He is now gone."

"Gone? That would be impossible!" cried Ella. "You would not send him away. He told you that he loved you."

"Yes, he told me that."

"And yet you sent him away? Oh, Phyllis, you would not break my heart. I know that you love him."

"Do I?"

"You do love him. Oh, my Phyllis, I told him months ago that it was the dearest wish of my heart to see you married to him. At that time he laughed. Oh, it is horrible to me to recall now how he laughed. Shall I ever forget that terrible dream? But now he loves you. I know it. What! you think him unworthy of you because of—of that dream which was upon us? Phyllis, don't forget that he fought with the sin and overcame it. How? Ah! you know how. He overcame the passion that is of earth by the love that is of heaven. It was his pure love for you that gave him the victory. Why should you send him away?"

"He knows. He understands. He is gone."

"But I do not understand."

She held Phyllis' hand and looked into her face. She gave a sudden start—a little start.

"Oh, surely, my Phyllis, you don't think that I—I— Oh, no! you cannot think that of me. Oh, my darling, if you should be so foolish as to think that I—that I still— Ah, I cannot speak about it. Listen to me, Phyllis: I tell you that as he conquered himself by the love which is of heaven, so have I conquered by the same Divine Power. The love which is in heaven—the love which is mine—has given me the victory also. Dear Phyllis, that man is nothing to me to-day. I tell you he is nothing—nothing! Ah, I don't even hate him. If I should ever speak to him again it would be to send him back to you."

Phyllis said nothing, and just then her father came into the room, and after a few minutes' conventional chat Ella went away.

Mr. Ayrton remarked to Phyllis that her dearest friend was looking better than she had looked for many months, and then he laughed.

Phyllis did not like his laugh. She looked at him—gravely—reproachfully.

”Pardon me, my dear,” said he; ”but I was only thinking that—well—that she— Ah, after all, what is marriage?”

Phyllis did not reply. She saw by his eyes that he had found another phrase. What were phrases to her?

”Marriage is the most honorable preliminary to an effective widowhood,” said he.

She went out of the room.

During the next eight months Phyllis received many letters from Ella—some from Switzerland, some from Italy, and one from Calcutta. Ella had gone to India to make further inquiries on the subject of Buddhism. At any rate, no one whose heart was set upon building up a New Church could afford, she said, to ignore Buddhism as a power.

Mr. Holland agreed with her, she said. He had gone through India with her.

She returned to England in April, and of course went to see Phyllis without delay. Some men had wanted to marry Phyllis during the winter, as everybody knew, but she had been pleasantly irresponsive. Some of her closest friends (female) laughed and said that she had found out how silly she had been in throwing over Mr. Holland.

It was not, however, of these suitors that Ella talked to her. It was of Herbert Courtland.

Had she heard from him? she asked.

Yes; he occasionally sent her his address, Phyllis said—that was all.

”You will write to him to come back to you, Phyllis?” said Ella entreatingly.

Phyllis shook her head.

”Dearest child,” continued Ella, ”I know the goodness of your heart. I know the high ideal of honor and faith which you have set before you. I saw Herbert when our steamer stopped at Port Said. He had been in Abyssinia—you know that?”

”I knew that.”

”I talked with him for an hour,” said Ella. ”He told me a great deal about you—about your parting from him. You will write those words to

him before I leave this room.”

Phyllis shook her head.

”Oh, yes, you will, when I tell you what I did not tell him—when I tell you that George Holland and I have agreed that our positions as joint trustees of the New Church will be immeasurably strengthened if we are married.”

”What?”

Phyllis had risen.

”We are to be married in three months. The matter is, of course, to remain a secret—people are so given to talk.”

Phyllis fell into her arms and kissed her tearfully—but the tears were not all her own.

”Now you will write those words,” said Ella.

Phyllis ran to a little French escritoire and snatched up a sheet of paper.

”Come to me, my beloved,” she wrote upon it; then she leaned her face upon her arm, weeping happily.

Ella came behind her. She picked up the paper and folded it up. She pressed the bell.

”Please give that to Mr. Courtland in the study,” she said to the servant.

Phyllis sprang up with a cry.

”I forgot to tell you, my dearest, that I brought back Herbert Courtland in that steamer with me, and that he came with me to-day. He is coming to you—listen—three steps at a time.”

And that was just how he did come to her.

”Bless my soul!” cried Mr. Ayrton, ten minutes later. ”Bless my soul! I always fancied that— Ah, after all, what is marriage?”

”Oh!” cried Phyllis.

”The last word that can be said regarding it is that marriage is the picturesque gateway leading to the commonplace estate.”

"Oh!" cried Phyllis