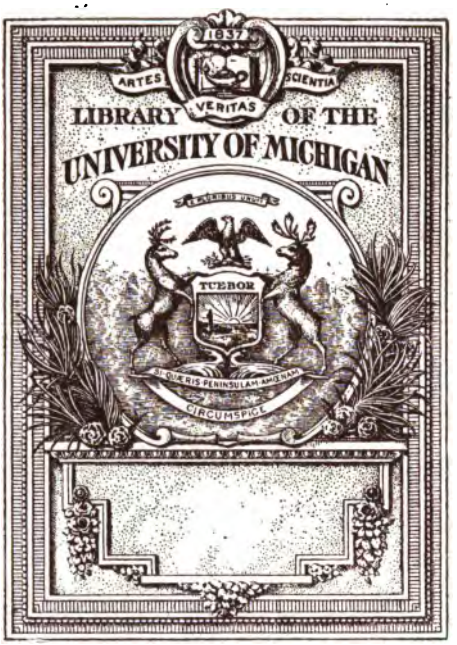
1837
ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
SUBORIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE

IN SEARCH OF A RELIGION

IN SEARCH OF A RELIGION

BY

DENNIS HIRD

(LATE RECTOR OF EASTNOR)

AUTHOR OF

"TODDLE ISLAND" "A CHRISTIAN WITH TWO WIVES' ETC.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK
27 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET

LONDON
24 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

The Knickerbocker Press

1897

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

IN SEARCH OF A RELIGION

CHAPTER I

"WHEN do you go down, Goode?"

"Not till next week."

"Why are you staying up so late?—I go down to-morrow."

"I have such a lot of reviewing to do, especially in comparative anatomy, that I must stay near the museum for the bones. You see, I am in the schools next May."

"You are a lucky fellow always, so you are sure to get a first. I wish I had made up my mind to read for 'Honours' in law when I came up, but it is too late now. I have just seen the Boss, and he does not seem very proud of my achievements for the term,—but, hang it all, what is a fellow to do? I did not come to Oxford to grind like a

schoolmaster. Now you won't forget you have promised to come and spend a week with us early in the New Year."

"All right, I won't forget, and I will write to you. So if I don't see you to-night, good-bye, Cooke."

This dialogue took place between two young men, about the middle of December, in Dial Quad, for they were both Commoners at Squire's College, Oxford.

Mark Goode and Frank Doubleday-Cooke had matriculated at the same time, and, though at first they had not met, for the last two terms they had seen a good deal of each other. They were unlike as two men well could be, except that they were both tall.

They belonged to the rich set at Squire's, among whom Cooke was called "All-Day-Cooke," or "No-Night-Cooke," and Mark Goode was called "Diogenes," or "Philosopher Di," for he was the only one who knew anything or who took 'varsity life seriously, or indeed any other life for that matter. It was an insoluble mystery to these youths that *any* one as rich as Goode should care a straw whether

birds and fishes were allied families or not, so long as he knew how to shoot the one and catch the other. Goode was not a bookworm or in any way a recluse. His wealth enabled him to secure the services of his fellow-men, from the books of professors to the stable-boy who brought his horse round. It is astonishing how many doors an active young man can unlock who possesses a sufficient number of golden keys. So Mark Goode was able to find time to hunt, play billiards, and take part in the Union debates, besides indulging in whist and music sometimes, and yet he pursued science with untiring zeal. At first his tutor would not believe that Goode meant to read for "a class" in science, but when he took a second in mathematics at the First Public examination, tutor, professor, and demonstrators began to take a keen interest in his career.

But remarkable as it was for a rich man to work with method, still more amazing was the fact that Goode kept his chapels with religious regularity, though he never seemed to take the least part in the service from beginning to end. The fact was, a beautiful anthem fired his imagination till it

spread through an infinite future, just as a common fossil lying in its tomb of rock fired his imagination till it sped through an infinite past. And on both occasions for him time was not, and his surroundings had no existence till the dream-rapture had blazed itself out in excess of ecstasy.

Here was another feature which puzzled tutors and professors; to the men of fixed routine, and to the men of limited facts, it argued some unsoundness of mind, that a youth should gaze on prehistoric remains with a thrill of reverence and an intensity of admiration supposed to belong only to religious women, who open the gates of paradise by their own hysteria.

It will be necessary to bear this in mind, because the relentless logic of his intellect was often hidden by the verdant tracery of his dreams, and even at this early period he sometimes shocked his set, either by saying he thought he should "take Orders," or by treating some question of ordinary morals with the intensity of an enthusiast.

The week devoted to reviewing comparative anatomy had gone, and Christmas was nearly here, a season which had always exercised a powerful

influence on Mark Goode's imagination. So he turned from the examination of bones, with their processes and foramina, to the grave question of his own career. He had been interested lately in some accounts of East London life, and, as he scarcely knew anything of the poor in masses, he thought he should like to see East London for himself. He had no need to walk more than a hundred yards to have seen some of the worst slums in England, but he did not know that, any more than the other gilded youth who flit in and out of Squire's, and do not even play at education.

He knew that East London was bad, because he had seen a report of the work of some Oxford society there, and there were the accounts of murders and mobs which occasionally enliven the dull pages of a daily paper. So to these slums Mark determined to go. He obtained the address of the Home where the Oxford men had their quarters, and a note of introduction, and determined to go for a few hours before he returned home. About eleven o'clock on the 24th of December he stepped into the broadest street in Whitechapel, and proceeded leisurely towards the Mile

End Road. To a man who has never seen this neighbourhood, it is one of the most striking sights in London. And at this season it was thronged with an eager, hurrying crowd, most of whom had no interest in the festival of Christmas beyond the fact that they found a chance of earning a few extra pence, which meant an extra drink, and also here and there in schoolrooms in the back streets there would be free teas or soup.

Mark wandered leisurely among the waves of these sordid, selfish unwashed; and though he might not be described as handsome, when compared with an artist's model, yet he was tall, strong, well-nurtured, well-dressed and well-groomed, so that the arabs of our East took him at once for a "tawf," and paid him some attentions which were troublesome. At length he turned down a side street to avoid the bustle and to see the slums in their native stagnation. At present he had not thought of inquiring for the Home, in which some Oxford men were dwelling a few weeks occasionally, in order to impart culture to Whitechapel. Though there was no fog such as the Londoner notes, yet the sky seemed to rest

on the chimney tops, and the day was gloomy and chilly. He had heedlessly taken several turns in this home of squalor and stench, when a young woman, clad in black, stepped out of a narrow alley. Her sad, sweet face brightened into a smile of recognition as she said, "Really, Mr. Goode, it is quite startling to see you here."

"Can it be Miss Burnett?" he inquired, amazed.

The two regarded each other in undisguised astonishment for a few seconds. Nor was this to be wondered at. They had met as children at Christmas parties, then the Burnetts had left the town, and just over two years ago they spent a lovely autumn day at a picnic, and the two had rambled away and botanised, and Mark Goode had explained to her that corn was not a well-developed grass but a degenerate lily. It had been a happy day, such as casually comes to healthy, well-to-do youth a thousand times over, only to be forgotten in new delights. Since that day they had not met, but Rachel Burnett had passed through experiences sufficient for a life-time.

Mark had heard something of this, that old

Burnett's affairs had gone wrong, that Mrs. Burnett had been found dead in her bed, that the two boys had gone abroad, no man knew whither, and that Miss Burnett had gone to live with an aunt, or taken up nursing as a profession. In strange confusion this history flashed upon him as the gentle, fair young woman stood before him and seemed like a flower growing amidst ruins. Then he noted her solemn black attire, showing still more sombre from its age. He wondered if she were poor! Good heavens!—and he had lots of money lying at the bank, and he had never asked whether the whole family had gone to the workhouse or not. All this, and much more, sped through his mind in a few seconds. As she held out her hand to greet him in answer to his question, he asked with some contrition and much gentleness, "Do you live here, Miss Burnett?"

"No, but I live close by. I was fetched to see a poor woman here who is very bad. She was terribly knocked about last night by her husband. The doctor wanted to remove her to the infirmary, but she resisted so violently, they sent for me to see if I could persuade her. Do you know Whitechapel?"

"No, I never was here before."

"Then come with me and see this woman. You won't be shocked, will you, Mr. Goode?" The gentle girl paused at the foot of the stairs as she asked this question.

"Certainly not. I have come to-day to see these slums; I will tell you why presently."

Miss Burnett led the way and softly opened the door of the room at the top of the stairs, in which lay the woman. It was a ghastly sight. The room seemed a garret-dungeon; very little light came through the window, as much of it was stopped with rags or paper to keep out the cold; there was only one chair, and the back was off that. A box seemed to serve as a table or stool, or both; the shattered iron bedstead was a wreck. On this lay a sight sickening for one to behold who was unaccustomed to want and misery. The face had been battered, the eyes were swollen up, a broken jaw was bandaged, and the poor woman had grown so excited, when they wished to remove her to the infirmary, that it had brought on violent hæmorrhage, so that the doctor had to plug the nostrils; the blood

had dripped on the face and the bandage, and dried there, and her life depended on her lying motionless. Mark Goode was shocked, in spite of his promise.

"I have come back, Mary," said Miss Burnett, "with a friend, and I will give you a little more beef-tea."

This was done, and then Mary clung to her benefactress, as a timid child clings to its mother in the dark.

Miss Burnett promised to return, and the two left.

Mark paused at the head of the stairs and took one searching look round the room, then, as if some overwhelming awe had fallen upon him, he descended. Once in the street, Miss Burnett turned her tender blue eyes upon him as if in inquiry.

He said, "Good God! Can this be England? Why does she refuse to go to the infirmary?"

"Because it is England, and the infirmary is the workhouse."

"I suppose the police have taken the brute."

"Why should they?"

"Rather, why should they not?"

"Because he is her husband! She would have to charge him, and give evidence in court against him; he might be sent to prison, and she would certainly have to go to the workhouse then. No, Mary won't 'peach'; she has had too many such rows for that, and Ted knows it."

Mark was silent from blank astonishment.

CHAPTER II

AFTER they had walked a few yards in silence, Miss Burnett said, "Will you come to my room? It is not far away."

As this was just the thing that Mark desired, he readily assented. They soon arrived in John Street, where Miss Burnett lived. It was like the surrounding neighbourhood, only the houses looked newer, and were in straight rows on either side of the street. Entering one of these, she led the way to the back room on the first floor. It was about twelve feet square, clean and tidy, but so barely furnished that to the Oxford undergraduate it seemed very dreary. There were four old-fashioned chairs, a small and large table, a chest of drawers, and a large cupboard; what looked like another chest of drawers was the shut-up bed. Over the mantelpiece hung the one solitary picture, a print representing Christ at work in the carpenter's

shop, and beneath it was a card with the text, "Sirs, we would see Jesus."

Mark Goode was not ordinarily troubled with curiosity, but he longed to know the mystery of Miss Burnett's life. She was about a year younger than himself, and he had known her as the light-hearted, beautiful girl, who could play tennis all the summer afternoon, and then sing the sweetest songs after dinner, till the twilight air was peopled with visions of loveliness; and now she seemed years older, and her beauty had exchanged some of its sunshine for a mellowed sadness.

They had sat down, and not a word had he spoken since they entered the room. She said quite naturally, "This is my only room, and you ought to have luncheon, and I am so sorry that I cannot offer you any, neither, you see, can I ring a bell and ask for sherry and biscuits."

"Thank you," he replied; "I was not thinking of food. You have so astonished me that I am bewildered. May I ask questions?"

"Yes, ask any you like," and her tender, frank eyes fearlessly met his.

"Are you a nurse here?"

"No."

"Are you a district visitor, or Bible-woman, or something of that sort in this parish?"

"No. I have a Bible, and I often read it, but never outside of this room, and I do not even know in which parish I live."

"But then, by whom are you employed?"

"By no one. Now let me tell you, but it is rather a long story. We met two years ago last August at your aunt's picnic. I rode over from Dingley Dell. You remember, you lost hold of my horse, and what trouble we had to catch him, which made me so late that I rode most of the ten miles in the moonlight. It was so clear and lovely, and I dreamed such dreams! What a child I was! That was my last ride. You know what happened. Father had lost money in mines, which compelled us to go and live at Dingley Dell when we left Crowland, and to be quite safe he put the remainder into the Sanitary Cottagers' Company.

"This company was a Christian association, in response to the wail of 'Outcast London,' and was to furnish really comfortable homes for the poor, and to pay 6 per cent. dividend. My father and

the Company's solicitor had been churchwardens together, and the latter assured him it was a sound investment, so he put in every penny we had, that we might still be able to live as we had always done. Then came the crash; the secretary, who was a preacher of some sort, absconded with several thousands; the houses did not let,—they had not been well built, and needed thousands for repairs. The morning after my moonlight ride, dear father turned as pale as death at breakfast, over the letters, and told us something of the loss. He refused to live and face ruin—he was found dead in his room at noon. My mother only spoke once after the shock, and died within a week. After her funeral we sold all we could to pay debts, but one impatient creditor took legal action, and all our things were sold. Then our friends grew cautious; they blamed father, they shunned us, and some of them were positively rude to my brothers.

"Tom came back to our lodgings one day and said we could live there no longer, neither he nor Bertie could see any way of earning money in England, so I was to go and live with Aunt Maria,

and they would both join the Mounted Rifles at the Cape. I was so dazed with misery that if they had told me to join the Mounted Rifles, I think I should have gone. I have never heard a word from Bertie, and Tom is now in New Zealand. I found Aunt Maria intolerable: she had never been married; her world was an iron room which grew smaller every year. I had to go to seven o'clock celebration every Sunday and Saints' Day, and I never liked church; I was too religious, the number of things we had to do hindered me from praying; so this grew irksome, and when I had to argue with her every time I wanted sixpence, I determined to flee. Without word or warning I packed up and fled, as soon as I had found a post through an advertisement. This post was to be a sort of resident under-secretary to the Young Girls' Christian Comfort Society. I was to reside in the Home, answer letters, show lady visitors round, conduct Bible classes, etc., for which I received board and lodgings and necessary travelling expenses. It was a great change, and marvellous things happened, but the two which most influenced my whole

life were a sermon and a bonnet. You may well smile.

"The sermon was one of a Sunday afternoon series to which I went because it was too wet to go farther. The preacher intended to show the absolute necessity of the Church for personal salvation, and to establish this he pointed out that Christ gave no organisation in His lifetime, but left His disciples to found the Church and carry out details, or something of that sort. I heard no more of the sermon after this, but I thought only of the remarkable contrast between His life and modern Christian organisation. I went home and thought of this point all day long, and half the night sometimes. I read a Gospel through every day, then I copied them all out, to be sure I had missed nothing. I hope you won't be shocked, but the more I read the Gospels the less Christianity I found in them. You cannot understand this, of course, but remember I was heart-broken, lonely, and dying for sympathy. Religion had become everything to me, and I wanted to devote my life entirely to Christ; no one can realise the shock it was to me, when it

flashed upon me at prayer one morning that Church organisation had *necessarily* no more to do with the life and teaching of Jesus than a pantomime had. It seemed to me a horrid blasphemy to think it, and yet, had an angel from heaven appeared and told it me, I could not have been more certain. This revelation prostrated me, and I wept till my eyes were red. Miss Brown, the Principal of the Home, was glad; she thought I was 'under conviction for sin,' and that I was going to be 'converted.' I was indeed converted!

"Miss Brown had often sent me to bed to cry myself to sleep, by her harsh treatment of myself, or the girls. Whenever she sent for me to her room and began, 'My dear Miss Burnett, I do not feel quite happy about you. Let us talk, but first we will kneel down,' then I knew well some piece of peculiarly brutal treatment was in store for me. I do not know that I should have minded being lectured, but when she told God all about me from her point of view, and then bullied me in the name of Christ, I nearly went mad with despair. The Home was for girls employed in shops mostly, and when they had been away at business for twelve

hours, and had been rated by the master, bullied by the foreman, and worried or insulted by the customers, I thought it hard to expect them to suppress all mirth and to attend Bible classes and prayer meetings, till they loathed the name of religion. One evening I thought I would sing to them, and I sang that song you used to like rather, 'When the sparrows build.' Then they clamoured for more songs, and, as it seemed to give them pleasure, I sang, and we all forgot it was the night on which we must attend Miss Brown's class on the 'Parables,' so that we were quite ten minutes late. I won't venture to tell you the language used to me next morning. I was reported to the committee, and Mrs. Doubleday-Cooke, a lady famed for her godliness and wealth, was deputed to see me. Accordingly, one afternoon she drove up with her brougham and pair and two men-servants. She prayed fervently, and then gave me the most solemn roasting that one woman ever gave another. I sat in silence. She asked me if I thought such songs were likely to bring the girls 'to a sense of sin.' I frankly said I did not, and somehow this appeased her, and she left me, pro-

mising to pray for me three times a day, and asked me to meet her at the throne of grace.

"That storm blew over, but I was marked. Miss Brown dogged my steps, listened at the keyholes, asked the girls what I said to them. Sometimes, as secretary, I had to attend the committees, and there I learned their religion—it was a blend of self-assertion and self-advertisement. There was no trick to which they would not stoop for precedence and publicity.

"This perhaps prepared me to understand the difference between Christianity and the religion of Jesus. After the first shock, I fully counted the cost, and I determined to abandon all, and to model my life exactly on Christ's example. You think me a fanatic. Never mind; I had got an ideal, and to realise an ideal is to creep nearer God. I was seeking a plan; my last sixpence had gone; I could not write to my aunt for money; I could not stay at the Home; and how could I leave without money even for a night's lodging?

"And now, a bonnet, or rather a hat, changed my life. One of the girls from the country, who served in a stationer's shop, had been teased about

her old-fashioned hat. She could not afford a new one, and in her anxiety to appear well on Sunday, she had taken the hat to pieces; but do what she would, she could not put it together again. I found her weeping in despair. Now I had often taken my hats to pieces, because they seldom pleased me, so I picked up the fragments and very soon returned her a new hat. She watched me in amazement, and when it was done she threw her arms round my neck, and kissed me in her delight. First one girl and then another would come timidly and ask me to help them, till one day a girl, Ellen, who was out of a situation, brought some 'home-work,' which was to trim new hats. When she was in difficulty, she came to me. We found the hats gave satisfaction, and the girl was surprised at her earnings, as the shop gave her better work to do. She had a sister lodging in this house, who lived by flower-selling, but she had met with an accident in the street, so I was brought to see her one Sunday afternoon. I found I could lodge here, and I discussed the whole plan with Ellen; she said she could get me home-work. I had furniture of my mother's, which

could not be seized at the sale; some of this I sold to pay expenses, and some I brought here. I left the Home. I turned my back upon civilisation and religions. I determined to be a disciple of the Master, who for our sakes became poor. I found it hard at first, and I have gradually parted with nearly all my furniture. I have too much now, really, for this is luxury compared with the homes of most of my new friends. I am not fully a disciple yet, you see, but I am realising my ideal by degrees."

Mark Goode had sat riveted, as he listened to her story, and he filled in many horrors which she had omitted.

At times a sickening feeling, as he thought of his own disgusting selfishness, quite overwhelmed him.

At length he said, "I begin to understand now. Thank you for telling me so much. Have you no connection with any religious organisation?"

"None whatever."

"And have you no friend to whom you can go for help or change?"

"No one."

"But if you wish to take the vow of poverty, for Christ's sake, could you not have joined some Sisterhood, and have done just as good work?"

"Certainly not. As a 'Sister' you are dehumanised by a garb, and you have always good clothes to wear, a sufficiency of food, and a good home. The poor know all this, and will never regard a Sister as one of themselves. Now, Christ was one of the poorest, one of the helpless outcasts, and *there* may be the secret of His life,—at anyrate, there is the secret of being like Him. 'We forsook all, and followed Thee.'"

"Well, I grant you know better than I, and I am asking for information, Miss Burnett, out of no idle curiosity. But tell me, if you were seriously ill, who would know, and who would help you?"

"No one would know it but those around, and if it lasted more than a week, I should be taken to the infirmary. I have been there once. I had run down somehow a year ago, and I had had so many calls for help, that, a week before Christmas, I went to bed, without sixpence, in this room. On Christmas Eve I was taken to the workhouse. I had no pain, and they were kind to me, and the

place was clean and quiet. I amused myself on Christmas Day by thinking of all the bishops and cardinals and such decking themselves in finery to sing hymns to the Babe in the manger. Forgive me, but there is a jest in it all somewhere."

This was so novel to Mr. Goode that he gazed upon her in wonder.

"You amaze me. I can scarcely believe my senses. You in the workhouse last Christmas Day!"

"But surely you must be aware that all through England many people go to the workhouse, through compulsion, who have stronger claims to be outside than I could make,—thrifty men and women who have worked hard for fifty years; but I never remember to have heard a protest against it from a single rich or educated person."

There was a pause. Soon Mr. Goode said, "Do tell me, then, what you do now, how do you live, and what is your religious work?"

"I earn twice as much as I require by millinery, of which I can usually get plenty. I can make artificial flowers, if I am pressed for funds. What I can actually live without, I spend on my religion.

I nurse aged sick, and I feed children; then nearly every night somebody comes to see me here, and I teach them to read, or sing, or trim hats, or make flowers. Sometimes I tell them of the poverty and suffering of Jesus, and of His great love for all. You see, as I never go to church or chapel, I gain more than eight weeks a year, which others waste in idle worship, and in which I go about doing good."

"Will these poor wretches let you do them good?"

"Certainly, far more than I can find time to help."

"And is it always safe to go about in such a low neighbourhood, quite alone?"

"Always, where I am known, and I have never experienced any unpleasantness, except from drunken people. I have had a black eye given me twice, but they were drunk, and I ought to have kept away from them."

The novelty of the situation, the unexpected meeting, the originality of the conception of Jesus of Nazareth, and the heroic daring of this young girl, all combined to dumbfound Mark. He sat in silence a while. He longed to place gold on the

bare table, but that he knew to be impossible. So he asked timidly, "What shall you do with that poor woman I saw?"

"If she lives, I shall feed and nurse her till she can get about."

"Now, as you have taken me to see her, I feel a keen interest in her, and she will cost you money; you might allow me to go into partnership over this case, will you?"

Miss Burnett smiled playfully and said, "Yes, I will allow you, for I am tired, and this season of the year is bad, and I may not make enough money during the next fortnight. You may leave her five shillings a week for two weeks."

He murmured something about the small amount, and succeeded in forcing a pound upon this new banker; he noticed that she was pale and ill, and gladly would he have taken her back to the comforts of wealth, but he breathed no word of this. As he rose to go, she inquired after his uncle and aunt, and when he would reach their home, as naturally as she could have done on that August evening when he had helped her to vault into her saddle.

He noted the number of the house, and then he walked down the miserable back streets of Whitechapel, like a man who had passed through death, and was feeling his benumbed way into a new life.

At length he secured a boy to show him the nearest railway station. He had twenty minutes at Paddington before the train left for Crowland, just time for a little food, and to send a wire announcing his arrival. In all that eager bustle, there seemed to be no heart so burdened with its secret problem as his own. As the train whirled away, he took his largest cigar, and abandoned himself to the luxury of dreams and to this problem, "What is the religion of Jesus?"

CHAPTER III

WHEN the train reached the old Cathedral city of Crowland, it was nearly six, and much colder. There was apparently going to be a sharp frost, and the clear air showed a myriad stars and a crescent moon. In such a light the city looked its best. The Cathedral pile had once enshrined a faith, and now, mellowed and sombre, it seemed embalmed in the pathos of the past, almost like some crumbling idol in a lonely grove, which is the only survivor of a forgotten cult.

For ten years Mark Goode had returned to Crowland for his holidays or vacations. He was an orphan, and lived with his uncle and aunt at the Deanery. The Very Reverend the Dean had married Miss Goode when he was an ordinary country parson, the Reverend Hubert Drewe. She was then considered a beauty, and possessed vast wealth; her family thought she had rather thrown

herself away. Certainly at that time the Reverend Hubert Drewe's Church prospects were not brilliant: he belonged to no party; he had no reputation for ability or scholarship from Oxford; but he had always done everything which his station demanded: he had passed through Harrow without notoriety, he had enjoyed to the full the mild revels of college life, he had travelled, he was a keen sportsman, though he had never donned the scarlet since he became a parson; an unexpected legacy had given him a fortune which, coupled with Mrs. Drewe's, made him very rich; his uncle had built a Conservative Club, and had been duly promoted from a baronet to a peer, so that the Reverend Hubert Drewe soon obtained a West End living; as Rural Dean he feasted the clergy and entertained the Bishop like a prince; he was on twenty-five committees of Church Societies, and he subscribed to every one of which the Bishop was a patron; at elections his carriage and his purse were at the disposal of the Conservatives: thus it came to pass that the Government felt something must be done for Mr. Drewe; when the old Dean of Crowland died, they required a rich

man who was of no party, for the Cathedral must be restored, and the clergy of Crowland were crotchety. Mr. Drew was the man: he was lavish with his wealth, and no living being knew his beliefs. So the clergy explained when he received his preferment. The Dean was now nearly sixty, dignified, affable, kind to all, loved by the poor, and especially devoted to his wife's nephew, Mark Goode.

Mrs. Drewe had long since found the satisfaction of a realised ideal; in her supremacy of power she was Queen of Crowland, there was no one to compete with her in wealth except Mrs. Carlton, the brewer's wife. And though Mrs. Carlton could buy the finest of broughams and horses, and servants with resplendent liveries, she could not buy the six centuries of ecclesiastical dignity which had slowly gathered beneath the feet of the Dean. Ecclesiastical position and unlimited wealth are a blend of power, which neither the courts nor the markets of time could despise, for that power would triumph anywhere, except at the Day of Judgment. It is true some few people regarded the Bishop and his wife as the leaders of Crowland, but even envy

could not deny that Mrs. Drewe could buy up the Bishop's palace and all that therein is, and almost endow a new bishopric on the ruins. Mrs. Drewe had great ability, and, mingled with some pomposity, a fair share of generosity to her inferiors. In her opinion, worldly prudence and devotion to the Church were the highest form of Christian morality, and she deplored the absence of either as a fatal flaw in the young.

When her only brother, Mark Harold Goode, married a young widow, Mrs. Drewe was deeply disappointed. A woman seldom forgives a widow for marrying, and never if the second husband is wealthy; it seems to her a form of highway robbery. Mrs. Drewe had been devoted to her brother; he was not strong, and he possessed a fortune nearly double her own. It was "so silly, to be captured by a designing widow," seeing he was thirty-five. Then came rumours of financial losses, mad expenditure on travelling, gay life at Paris, illness at Madeira, all of which was put down to the folly of the designing widow, who had been too poor to know how to spend money in a well-bred manner. But a sudden end came to all

this by the news that the Goodes had left Madeira for England, that he had died on the voyage, and his wife had never spoken after his body was lowered into the sea. She lingered awhile, and languished out of life, leaving her infant boy, Mark, not six months old.

The news afflicted Mrs. Drew with conflicting emotions; it was necessary to preserve a character for worldly prudence, and at the same time to burn incense to that form of religion which is represented by the Church in general, and by an ecclesiastical dignitary in particular. It was a trying ordeal, through which only a woman of the world could pass unscathed. The trustees found in due course that the Goodes had not lost so much as rumour declared; there was at least a safe fifty thousand pounds, and should certain shares rise ever so little, so as to become marketable, this sum would be considerably increased.

Mrs. Drewe went to see the infant, and as she had no children, it was soon arranged that little Mark should be brought up by her. The usual army of servants necessary for the welfare of a wealthy child were employed, and the laws of

physiology fulfilled their course. He went to Eton at twelve, he was grown up at fifteen, and at twenty-one (a year before this history commenced) he found himself master of over £5000 per annum. The love of the Drewes for their nephew was greater than that of many parents for their children, and Mark was devoted to them. Only on one point had he ever given his aunt trouble—he was terribly lacking in worldly prudence. When quite young, he once gave a tramp half a crown, and some hours after, the man reeled to the parsonage, to inquire for the "blessed young gentleman"; and on his first return from Eton, he met a woman with two little girls, who were crying in the snow, and he gave her half a sovereign. Two days after, the coroner held an inquest on one of the girls; the doctor said the child had died of starvation, but the jury added a rider to say that death had been accelerated by surfeit. Mrs. Drewe pointed out to Mark these terrible consequences of a misdirected generosity, with judicious repetition, and she flattered herself that now Mark would walk past an army of starving children in the snow, with Christian forbearance, and keep his

money for organised philanthropy—but she was wrong.

A critical time had now come. Mark would leave Oxford in a few months, and she was anxious. She wished him to settle down on a scheme of this sort: buy a large country estate, marry Miss Carlton, receive the whole of her own wealth and the Dean's—some day, enter Parliament, render distinguished services to his party, and die a peer.

Such was the home at Crowland to which Mark had come on this starlit Christmas Eve. He had dreamed many dreams, but solved no problem on his journey.

The Dean was on the platform, and the brougham was waiting outside. His uncle's warm, joyous greeting fell on his wounded heart like a balm of Gilead. This clasp of comradeship and the charm of association steadied him and helped him to rise a little out of the thickening mysteries of this eventful day. He asked a few commonplace questions, and they were soon at the Deanery. When he had saluted his aunt, lest she should discover his perturbation, he said, "I see the Cathedral is lighted up. I suppose the decorations

are not quite finished. I should like to look in." Mrs. Drewe assented and smiled approvingly, for she knew that Clara Carlton was among the decorators, and she thought it was a mere excuse of his to see Clara.

Mark took the path across the garden, through the Dean's door, and was there in a minute. Inside the Cathedral was a truly marvellous scene. It was not fully lighted, which seemed to fill the aisles and chancel and tombs with the pomp of gloom, whilst the illumined parts showed a sad radiance, as of some melancholy splendour or early despair. He stood partially behind one of the pillars. The organist was rehearsing a new piece of Christmas music, and around slept the dead—bishops and abbots and mighty barons. As the eye became accustomed to the dim light, he noticed the artistic beauty of the screen decorations, and there, in the pulpit, was the lovely Miss Carlton, kneeling down to fasten the last bunch of ivy, whilst her young face was festooned with wreaths of red-berried holly; below, at the lectern, was her cousin Miss Fenwick. Few combinations could have presented such an excess of the unspeakable;

centuries seemed to thicken in the gloom behind the pillars, all the mysteries of every religion thrilled into hallowed life in the jubilant chords of the organ, while life itself led by the hand immortal youth, clad in the beauty of these two young girls. In a reflective, emotional, imaginative being, such a scene might well burn up consciousness in ecstasy. As he felt this and pondered, he was paralysed by some ineffable beauty, till the sight grew dim and the brain reeled.

. . . . . .

He thought of Rachel Burnett. She had risen above all this by the impulse of a new life. Was she right? Had she read the true interpretation of the life of Jesus? It seemed an atrocity to disturb the associations of Christmas Eve in the Cathedral which he loved, but there was no denying the fact that Jesus made His life free from the glamour of antiquity, the gauds of delight, and the gloom of mystery. Why were we taught, under every form of solemn emphasis, that His life was to be the standard value of all aim and all achievement, only to go out into the world to shun every part of it which might cause us the

least inconvenience? Was the teaching a solemn fraud, or His life a sacred fiction?

. . . . . .

No explanation of such a mood as this has yet been given, unless it be that certain natures can hypnotise themselves by an unknown past or an inconceivable future.

But the spell was broken; the decorations were finished, and the ladies were preparing to leave, so Mr. Goode walked up to them, and subdued salutations were interchanged, then he admired the beauty of their work, and they turned and left. Once through the door, he learned that they were to dine at the Deanery, and he conducted them by the short path across the garden.

CHAPTER IV

THEY all met in the drawing-room; the young ladies apologised for not dressing, as if it were a matter of deep religious moment to show both ends of their necks at an evening meal. The old butler announced dinner with the usual ceremony and punctuality. Fortunately for Mark Goode, there was all the excitement of the season to keep conversation going about the thousand trifles which make the lives of most of us. The parish of St. Thomas had a bachelor vicar, and Mrs. Drewe had virtually taken the parish into her hands, so that Christmas was a great season with her—clothing clubs, coal clubs, choir, and Sunday school had all to be remembered, and of these she told many stories illustrative of the greed, the jealousy, and the unconscious humour of "the lower orders." But unfortunately she observed that her nephew had declined more than one dish,

so she said, "I wish you would take something to eat, Mark. I ordered hare because you like it, and now you refuse to take any. Are you ill?" Poor Mark had to explain that he had been working too hard to eat much, that he had some food at Paddington, that he had smoked all the way in the train, and really he was not hungry. These were lame excuses, but as the highest civilisation is a form of lameness, they passed muster. And to divert attention, he told his aunt that the Cathedral decorations were better than usual this year, and he lavished great praise upon the beautiful design on the screen. Small praise sometimes pays great bills, and is the cheapest oil yet invented for the machinery of social life. So delighted was Mrs. Drew, that she poured floods of the same sweet oil on Miss Carlton, lauding her skill, taste, devotion, and many virtues.

Miss Carlton had to reply to such a storm of compliments, and said, "I think it is pretty, but really I can't take all the credit for it. I first got the idea from Rachel Burnett years ago at St. Thomas's. She had quite artistic and original ideas on church decorating."

„ I wonder where she is; it seems so strange that she never writes to anybody," said Miss Fenwick.

"One can hardly wonder at that," said Mrs. Drewe, with the stateliness of a worn-out dogma. "She was a sharp girl, and I think she soon learned that the only thing to do, when the family had gone down under a cloud, was to start afresh somewhere. She wrote to me soon after their fall, and proposed to come and stay a week, as she wanted much counsel, but I could hardly have her here just then, as Lord Bleacham was staying with us, and, besides, I did not know what it might involve, so I wrote a kind, sympathetic letter, and put her off, but she never replied. Perhaps afterwards she saw her plan was not quite the thing."

"I wonder where she is. Some one said she went to London," said Miss Fenwick.

"I heard of her quite by accident, when I was last in London," said Mrs. Drewe. "Madame du Tweezier is on a committee for managing one of the Christian Comfort Homes, and she told me they employed Rachel as secretary to Miss Brown, but they found her quite impossible. She

used to play dance music to the girls on a Sunday, I believe."

"I did not know she could play dance music," said Miss Carlton. "She sang beautifully, I used to think, but she never touched the piano except to play her own accompaniments."

"Well, it may not have been exactly dance music," said Mrs. Drewe; "but it was that kind of thing, don't you know?—something quite unsuitable for poor girls; for if you allow them the least liberty, they are sure to abuse it."

"I am surprised," said Miss Fenwick; "for I was confirmed at the same time she was, and during the two months of her preparation she used to pray two hours a day."

"Never!" said Miss Carlton.

"You can't mean it really!" said Mrs. Drewe.

"She used to do what?" asked the Dean in an absent-minded sort of a way.

"Pray two hours a day," repeated Miss Fenwick and she blushed at her unexpected notoriety.

"That sounds rather exaggerated," said the Dean.

"I never heard of such a thing of anyone, unless it was of one of the martyrs," said Miss Carlton.

"I think it has happened," said Mrs. Drewe. "I believe John Wesley—no, perhaps it was not he; but, at anyrate, I read somewhere, not long since, that some of the early Methodists used to pray *three hours* a day; and I could after all nearly believe it of Rachel, for she was prone to extremes—extreme gaiety or extreme moodiness."

"Still, the early Methodists were fanatics—it has been proved so; but I believe the Wesleyans are quite respectable now, and I am sure they do not pray three hours a day," said Miss Carlton.

"I should hope nobody is so selfish nowadays," said Mrs. Drewe. "You would say it was quite unnatural from a scientific point of view, would you not, Mark?"

"From a scientific point of view, yes, but from a Christian point of view, I should say it was the most natural thing in the world. I believe Jesus prayed all night sometimes," answered Mark.

"Yes, but," said Miss Carlton,—"but—but He was—well—He was different."

"Now, Clara," said Mrs. Drew, "don't you let him tease you. I have heard him before on this kind of thing. He said last vacation that Church

people would be very good Christians if it were not for the life of Christ, which proves that they are mostly gingerbread pagans; and I really think the poor Archdeacon believed him, for he told me afterwards he was quite shocked at the notions young men got in Oxford nowadays. It is very naughty of you, Mark, brought up under the shadow of the Church."

"Perhaps there has been too much *shadow*," added the Dean playfully, for he objected to religious discussions at dinner.

The ladies laughed their approval of the Dean's well-timed jest, and over dessert discussed the advantages vegetarianism offered to the poor, and also the blind folly of the poor in not eating more fruit and fish, till such high discourse ended by their rising to leave the gentlemen over their wine, which act in this case was a blind homage to a blind custom.

It was not the occasion for Mark to discuss problems with his uncle, so they chatted over Cathedral repairs and such like, then joined the ladies. Miss Carlton's carriage was announced early, as she explained that she wished to be at

the seven o'clock communion, and so must go to rest early. The two ladies left, and soon after Mrs. Drewe pleaded fatigue and retired to her room. Mark made the same excuse, and shortly after ten he had escaped to the quiet bliss of his bedroom, where a blazing fire roared up the chimney. He put on his dressing-gown, drew the curtain tight behind his door after he had locked it, drew up the blind, looked at the Cathedral lying in moonlight and shadow, and murmured to himself, "Poor Rachel!" He was tossed with the unrest for which no name has been discovered —the dreams of the future, the awakening of love, the puzzles of religion and friendship, the response of youth's passion to the throb of life, and the far-away fleeting visions of truth. That one day had opened to him new kingdoms of infinite extent and measureless wealth; he felt like an inexperienced mariner tossed in a frail bark, who cannot cull one shell of beauty from the rock of Time, before the hungry waves have swept him to bleach on the black shore of the Past. It is ever thus; real life is choked by its own excess, and the larger part of truth is the unuttered.

CHAPTER V

MARK sat by the blazing fire, smoking and thinking, till the fire burned low. He felt that it was no easy matter to deal with religion, if he meant to understand it and to live it. In his case it was not rendered the more easy by the ardour of his temperament, the complexity of his organisation, and the power of unbroken associations. When the harmony of the Christmas waits broke in upon his musing, his fired imagination lighted up the known history of the earth's past, as by electric flashes, while he thought of the countless æons through which nature had fashioned her offspring, and of the myriad nations whose beauty had been blighted by decay. It was no small matter to discern the trend of time and the pathway of man. In past years he had felt the holy calm of hallowed expectancy in this festival, and the old hymns, floating through the midnight air, had rung like

pæans of hope to greet an answering heaven; but —but this was not so clear now: it was too early for the wisest man to say what would be the final effect on human development of this religion of yesterday. And ever among his visions there came the radiant image of Rachel Burnett, mellowed by the aureole of her sweet sadness. He had been seeking an interpretation of Christ's life; she had shown him one. Which was the faithful reflection of the despised and downtrodden Nazarene,—the life of this pure girl in the bare room in Whitechapel, or the abundant luxury and conventional correctness of the Deanery, garnished often with an affluence of creeds and the splendour of worship? Would his aunt or Miss Carlton change a single sentiment, and have less of worthy motive or exalted conduct, if the hours of this night stole away their Christ, and left them in the morning at the shrine of Buddha or on the altar steps of Apollo? Generations of Christian teachers of all schools had reiterated that they held the absolute truth by a divine revelation, and their challenge left no way of escape; every logical mind must face the deadly issue. Christians in their creeds, at

least, have burned the world's house of compromise. This was only one of a hundred difficulties equally great, and it held the first place by virtue of the day's experience and the associations of that night.

Harassed by many perplexities, feverish with multitudinous yearnings, and utterly weary, he sought slumber.

. . . . . .

At six the Cathedral bells pealed forth their Christmas greeting. Sleep had soothed and steadied his nerves, and he listened to their jubilant modulations with a sweet and sensuous delight.

At seven he was kneeling in the Cathedral. Everywhere the jubilations of triumph and the pulsations of hope thrilled the senses—the music, the lights, the decorations, the soft tread of gathering worshippers, and, when the organ paused, the holy calm, as of some new life before the dawn, enraptured the heart, while the ancient towering arches, scarcely illumined, seemed fitting gateways to unknown glories. To have thrilled in response to the voices of such an hour, is to have plucked fresh fruit from the tree of life.

The Dean was the celebrant, for the eight

o'clock service was fully choral, and he left this to the more musical canon. The breakfast-table was laden with breakfast and presents of many kinds.

The eleven o'clock service was marked by an elaborate anthem and a short sermon from the Dean.

At three the choir gave a selection of carols. Then Christmas Day was over at the Deanery, for the evening service was left to the populace. Peace and plenty reigned within, the dinner was on a scale of magnificence which befitted so grand a festival, and after dinner there was that hush of drowsy luxury, which comes when every duty has been done, every sense gratified, and consciousness of the future is put to sleep. Such must be the paradise of favourite houris.

After Christmas Day, Crowland awoke to festivities in which the name of Jesus was never heard. There were the Mayor's ball, the Hunt ball, the County ball, and last, but hardly least, Mrs. Carlton's ball. The frost was keen, and the young people of the favoured circle skated by day and danced by night.

Mark had dreaded all this, since his return—he

was expected everywhere, and he did not know how to bear this mockery of a mirth which he did not share; it was like asking a condemned man to the hangman's banquet. But on the morning after Christmas Day, he cleared his brain and nerved his courage, by two natural aids: he determined to win the love of Rachel Burnett, even though he should have to live with her in Whitechapel, and he resolved also to have a frank talk with his uncle on his religious difficulties and future career. Thus he gained time, and partly recovered his natural joyousness, and none suspected the unknown drama. When possible, he would walk home alone from a festive scene, and in the sweet silence of night he would commune with Rachel and with the stars. She walked by his side ever, and he dreamed only of winning her love. All the plans of his future were woven around her, and with fairy pictures of more than earthly delight he soothed his heart daily. He never rode alone now in the lanes, and what glorious rides in the early summer mornings that were to come did he picture! Such dreams are life's first and only unalloyed bliss. If they were ever clouded, it was by the one

anxious, half-foreboding question—would she love him?

So it was she had rivalled and outshone the stars, his old cherished friends. They had been ever with him, and they had aroused his first doubt concerning his early religious beliefs. They were so vast in number, so sublimely grand in their silent, changeless march, with such infinitude of distance, that their amazing brilliance hid our earth-history in a canopy of light. To Mark that was a new birth. From that moment man's highest achievement was expressed by the relation of a speck to the infinite. Temples and worship, religions and philosophies, inventions and wealth, crumbled into handfuls of dust in unknown graves, while the stars held the revel of dawning youth. The splendour of this apocalypse was never clouded. In some ways it dimmed the fine gold of life, but Mark felt his heart throb with a force which pulsed through all stars, and that throb shook off the pall of doom.

So his days were given to Rachel, and his nights were divided between Rachel and the stars.

CHAPTER VI

AMID the festivities of the season, Mark's one delight had been on New Year's Eve to send Rachel a box of exquisite flowers and a charming card, on which Crowland Cathedral was the chief feature, together with a few lines of affectionate greeting. Early in the new year, he found a favourable opportunity for a long talk with the Dean, in his study one evening after dinner. They had just lighted their cigars and drawn easy chairs to the fire, when Mark began, "Have you time for a long talk, uncle?"

"Certainly, my dear boy. I have nothing else to do, and I have hardly seen you since you came."

"I am in an awful fog about religion, and I cannot make up my mind whether to take Orders or not. Will you tell me exactly what you make out about religion?"

"Yes. I have said very little to you about

religion. You see, religious boys generally come to a bad end, and I did not want to force your growth in the least. I thought at Oxford you would form your own opinions, but I suppose your science reading has unsettled you. Still, never mind, tell me all about it; I shall not be the least shocked. Of course I have no idea where you are, but tell me freely."

"I do not know where I am, and that is why I wish to talk to you. I can find no theology in nature; the design argument seems a bit of bad fiction, a special revelation seems to contradict all we know of the history of the Bible, and I cannot find any such thing as sin. This may give you some general notion of my difficulties."

"Yes, there is no mistaking them. Let us begin for a moment on the other side. Do you hold that the life of the total universe, from the farthest fixed star to a potato, is under one and the same law?"

"Yes, I seem quite clear on that. I began to learn it years ago from looking at the stars. My first feeling was that the book of Genesis does not leave room for the universe as it is. Rather is it

the picture of a large Christmas tree, on which are hung a few dolls and flowers and fruit, while the sun, moon, and stars are thrown in as candles to light up the tree to amuse little boys and girls; but there is no life in the whole thing, and all the laws of growth have been outraged to produce it."

"That is quite true. We must consider the universe as a whole, or else we only play at blind-man's buff in a fool's paradise. This leads us to the realm where professional theology is not. As for the design argument, it must take rank as one of the highest fictions of man. I only marvel that any one living in the country for a year or two can be taken in by the fiction. How often in the last fifty years has the promising bloom of April been cut off by the frosts of May?

"That is not a fair design.

"As for the doctrine of special revelation, it is nowhere found in the Bible, and it is often contradicted by the Bible itself. If people only read the Bible as much as they talk about it, this doctrine would have been dead and buried long since. Those who hold this view have no God, for they replace God by a watchmaker, who has

made his watch (the world) so badly that he must needs come and touch the regulator now and then, because he did not put it right at first. Our best theologians are giving up this idea now, and they are nearly ready to abjure it openly. I know the clergy pretty well, and nearly all the more intelligent of them are evolutionists, which gives a much grander idea of God than the watchmaker jumble."

"That is most cheering, uncle. Do you think we may look for the clouds of superstition to roll away?"

"Not yet. Superstition is the child of prehistoric instincts; it appeals to a very early form of consciousness in man, it has all the force of custom, and it offers all the rewards of a vested interest. I should like to know what you think of sin?"

"To me it seems that there are no flaws in man, which do not appear in the rest of nature. Everywhere there are the developed and the defective—the good and the bad. There are worn-out suns, stone-deaf puppies, and withered branches on trees; but we do not call a stone-deaf puppy a sinner, or a withered branch wicked. Some pears will

keep, and some won't. I had a bad walnut at dinner. The same occurs in every part of the universe known to us, and, as far as I can make out, sin is an invention due to man's vanity."

"Very good, Mark. That is the origin of many things both good and bad, which have no existence outside of the imagination. So you see I am with you on all these points and on all they involve, and I am glad to find you have so early acquired this wide view of the universe. You have the start of me by a quarter of a century. Great God! when I think of the nightmares of my youth, I am paralysed with amazement, and when I see the cruelties, with which our false creeds fill the lives of our poor ignorant folk, only the knowledge of the utter impossibility of teaching them to think, enables me to live in silence and be a dean! Most of my brethren have given up some of the cruder superstitions, and I only differ from them in having given up all. My bishop does not believe that every man has by nature an immortal soul; my neighbouring dean does not believe there is any devil or any resurrection of this body; all sorts of confused theories are held by the clergy about

inspiration and the atonement; and not one in twenty believes in an everlasting hell. So I merely differ from them in degree. I suppose you are a little surprised, my dear boy, to find I hold these views."

"Yes, I am, a little. You see, I have had no chance of knowing what you thought. It is the worst of your profession, that a bad thing of yesterday is honoured more than the best thing of to-day. It seems to me often that the whole Church is organised on purpose to *prevent* that very religious growth which it is supposed to foster. Darkness, dust, and death; the dead fixity of the fossil skeleton, where there ought to grow the flowers of hope in the light of truth! I wonder the weight of this death has not crushed you into the grave! Perhaps you hold with Gibbon that 'all religions are equally false and equally useful?'"

"Yes, or, which is the same thing, all are equally true and equally useful. We have agreed that everything in the universe, including man and his religions, has grown in obedience to one continuous law. The most effete religion doubtless was good

once, just as a dead sun was; even such a jumble as Popery served its part in the development of man, just as the Protestant reformation cleared the way for Monism. Perhaps we only injure the cause of truth by calling any religion false; they are all attempts, all gropings in the dark, 'ejaculations of imaginative men,' as Emerson said. But their origin does not destroy their value; we just have to take them as we find them. So far, religion has been necessary to the development of man, and so long as he finds it helpful, so long will he cherish it. To the man who finds a religion helpful, that religion is true."

"I like that, and if it were openly acknowledged, it would remove much bitterness out of life. What natural explanation do you offer for this power of religion over man, and in so many cases, for its being an ennobling power?"

"That is a most interesting question. It was the solution of that problem which opened the way of truth to me on this subject. I was seeking for all the features common to all religions. I soon saw that they primarily rested on emotion,—hope and fear especially,—and that from the fear

of an angry God, and the hope of pleasing Him, men had devised their various systems, step by step; but I did not find the key to many other difficulties. There were these two features in addition to the ennobling power to which you have referred, viz. the cohesive power which religion exerted on communities, and the force with which it spread over certain areas, like an infection. I sought some generic cause of all these. About that time Professor Winchley of Cambridge came to stay with me,—though he is no longer professor, for he resigned in order to be free to carry on his researches in neuro-pathology. He knew more about nerves and nervous diseases than any man in England. I was talking the matter over with him, when I observed him give a knowing smile, as much as to say, 'I could tell you if I dare.' So I soon freed his mind from the fear of giving me offence, and got him to talk freely. It was a long explanation, and I can only give you an *outline*, which may not sound convincing, but he convinced me. I will read you some notes I made."

CHAPTER VII

THE Dean went to a drawer, took out some notes, and proceeded—"Professor Winchley had enjoyed singular opportunities for acquiring a vast variety of facts. He was brought up a Methodist, and, as a boy, he had attended all their meetings, had been converted, and knew intimately the good and bad of that religion. He told me of scenes which he had witnessed, which I should have once said were incredible; these marvels usually had occurred when they had 'revivals' or special missions; they used to hold these for a week or a month in the winter, with a view to making new converts. He had seen strong working men lie on their backs and groan for hours until they had 'obtained pardon'; he had witnessed young servant girls fall back rigid from the 'penitent form,' with their eyes and lips quivering, and struggle in their agony till the repeated assurance of the converted

enabled them to 'believe' and feel that they were 'saved'; then followed revels of ecstasy that were of indescribable fury. He had seen men and women praising God, and jumping in a sort of rhythm, rising some feet in the air; he had seen a man bound from his knees into the air, and remain suspended some seconds. Once, when a young reprobate of a praying family was being converted, he seemed to go mad in his horror of the hell that yawned before him; his contortions, his wails and groans, his maniacal writhings grew so fierce that it took four men to hold him, till at length, with glazed eyes and foaming mouth, he fell rigid into their arms. In one village, a young girl of nineteen was the chief leader of cottage prayer meetings. During a 'revival' she used to sing a hymn with a refrain—

'There's a Friend above all others,
O how He loves!'

and again and again, when she began to sing that hymn, and to wave her pocket-handkerchief, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, all present would be melted into tears before she had finished the first verse; the 'saved' were in ecstasies of

bliss, the 'unsaved' were crying for mercy. There were some very remarkable features about this case: the girl would live for days without any food, and give herself to prayer; some man or woman would come miles to attend one meeting, make a copy of the hymn, and go home to sing it to friends there, when exactly the same scenes were witnessed in that village. Many of the people thus influenced ceased to be religious in two or three months, but some of the worst characters never went back, they lived moral, devoted, holy lives till the day of their death.

"On one occasion, he was taken to a Cornish chapel to hear the most celebrated revival preacher. He gave out the separate verses of the opening hymn in tones of incantation, often his hands or his face would be uplifted to heaven, and before the hymn was finished, the whole congregation were singing with that strange pathos of a consuming faith. The preacher led them step by step, and during the sermon, he could see the people thrilled, as waves of emotion passed from pew to pew. At length came the crowning manifestation, which had made this preacher famous. Many of

the congregation began to see a light round the pulpit, the brightness increased, and soon, in a moment of supreme ecstasy, the preacher sprang into the air, and descended a distance of several feet into the body of the chapel, unharmed and wrapt as in a vision. Then the service was turned into a prayer meeting, and in many parts penitents were 'crying for mercy.' It was indeed a hardened sinner who ever passed from such a service without being 'saved.'

"These were the things the boy saw, and felt, and believed; they were to him the first principles of divine manifestation, and they bore along his young life as in a chariot of fire.

"He did well at school, took a scholarship at Cambridge, read science, became a doctor. The examiner was struck by the ability displayed in his thesis for the M.D. degree, in which he had examined 'Manifestations of Nerve Energy in Art and Religion,' and he was urged to pursue his inquiries.

"Of course, long before this, he had outgrown his early religious notions. He never went to a Methodist chapel, and he could not have said

whether such a thing as a 'revival' any longer took place. But he told me that, one summer, he went home for a short visit. His aunt had grown feeble, and could not often go to chapel, so on Sunday afternoons two or three friends and neighbours used to look in, tell her about the sermon, and perhaps sing a favourite hymn. On this particular afternoon he had been reading the history of animal magnetism, and had come downstairs to have a friendly chat with the callers. Presently they began to sing—

> 'Talk with us, Lord, Thyself reveal,
> While here o'er earth we rove,' etc.

His aunt was greatly moved, and by degrees became ecstatic; her eyes shone, her face was illumined, tears of joy and hope flowed down her cheeks, and she felt that her Lord was revealing Himself. The ecstasy spread to all present more or less, and he himself felt a thrill which he had not known since boyhood, but when the neighbours went home rejoicing, he strolled into the old garden, full of strange thoughts, and he said to himself, This is hypnotism.

"He is a most religious-minded man, but when

his aunt, in her rejoicing, had recounted the old story of her conversion in her youth, she let fall this striking sentence—'When I first received the Holy Ghost, I fell instantly on the floor, and lay as one dead.'

"Now it required little reflection to convince anyone that the Holy Ghost would not throw a young woman on the floor; he knew the facts of his aunt's holy life: what, then, was the cause of the facts, since the cause she alleged could not be entertained for a moment? He had just been reading of similar cases by mesmerists and hypnotists, who claimed no divine power, and it flashed upon him that the explanation of all the strange scenes of his childhood lay in the one word—hypnotism.

"He at once devoted himself to collecting facts, conferring with religious people, interviewing specialists in nerve disorders, then he spent years in arranging his material for a scientific treatment of the subject. I have been looking for his book a long time.

"He found that very old men, who had led religious lives, and who had been able to convert

many, when they were in the full vigour of life, usually lost that power, as they lost their physical vigour.

"He learned from all sorts of preachers, that if they preached 'full of the Spirit' in the morning, they seldom were 'full of the Spirit' in the evening; but, on the contrary, if their morning sermon fell flat, more frequently in the evening they would be 'full of the Spirit.' He also found it universally admitted that after a sermon, in which the preacher had been 'full of the Spirit,' great exhaustion followed. These were the sort of facts he gathered from the people who believed and practised.

"Now he concluded that no one would for a moment suppose that the Holy Ghost could only act in young or vigorous people, or that He was limited in His operations to once a day, morning or evening, or that He was exhausted after a manifestation.

"When he came to study hypnotism, he found all the leading religious phenomena repeated, only they did not call it religion. Under the power of the hypnotist, men did what they had never done before in their lives, their moral characters

changed, and even some drunkards gave up their drunkenness. He also found that the hypnotists felt exhausted after exerting this power, just as the preacher did, and often the power failed, if they repeated the experiments too often, or left them altogether as they grew old.

"Afterwards he extended his observations to other groups of phenomena, which require to be told in medical terms, and I did not note them so fully—they were paralysis, epilepsy, hysteria, sexual passions, religious mysticism, and some wonderful varieties of hallucination. It may sound marvellous to you, but all these fell by degrees under the same general laws, and could be excited or repressed by the same methods.

"Hysterical women were the most easily hypnotised, and made the finest saints, but men devoid of passions had no animal magnetism, and possessed very little power either as hypnotists or preachers. When he came to consider the means employed, he again found great similarity of method. The real secret seemed to be to fix the attention until some nervous derangement was set up, and then the patient was under the absolute control of suggestion

from without, or hallucination from within. A man may be hypnotised by gazing on a sugar-basin, or a bottle neck, if he concentrates his attention upon it long enough. So, in religion, the ecstasy of divine communion may be brought about in many different ways. The pious monks of Mount Athos used to enter their closet and shut the door, and when they had fixed their attention long enough on the most marvellous, but the least interesting part of the body, they were filled with 'ineffable joy,' and they saw a light which they held was 'the perfect essence of God Himself.' The Indian devotees were less clumsy; 'they could throw themselves into an ecstasy of communion with God, by contemplating for hours an *imaginary* point in space.' No form of religious hypnotism can exceed this. Most Christians require some external aid, varying in degree according to their imagination: some require to hear the familiar strains of a well-known tune, others to take a wafer into their hands after watching the performance of well-rehearsed genuflexions and passes; but in all ages the imaginative, neurotic few, after a little practice, can hypnotise themselves at will almost in an instant."

CHAPTER VIII

"Now I have given you a mere outline of Professor Winchley's method. I should have written down much more, but I thought his book would soon be out. However, that is not of importance, as I was finally convinced by an experiment. You remember my cousin Bob Drewe, the great Low Church missioner. He came to stay with me shortly after the Professor had told me of his conclusions, and, supposing he would be able to give me some examples of kindred marvels, I read him some of these notes. He was horrified, he raved like a madman, and called Winchley a materialist, an atheist, even Antichrist himself. We nearly had a quarrel, and the next day, without telling me, he wrote to Winchley and called upon him, in God's name, to recant, and he threatened that, unless he did so, he would expose him in the press as a proselytising atheist. His letter caused no

small alarm, for the Professor had just taken consulting-rooms in the West End, and patients would have been scarce for a blackguardly atheist. The Professor at once came down to see me, and I apologised sincerely for disclosing his secret. I took Bob Drewe severely to task, and brought every pressure to bear I could, to reduce him to something like common sense. Still, his righteous indignation knew no bounds, and we had quite a scene when he was brought face to face with Winchley. But I think he was staggered by the calm, dignified assurance of the Professor, for when Bob grew calmer, he said, 'Now, sir, you will not settle this very great question by bad language. I will give you a fair challenge to a proof. I say that all religious influence is as natural as any other influence, and obeys certain fixed, physical laws, the chief of which are exactly the same as the laws of ordinary hypnotism. Now, if you will find me a parish, where some Low Church clergyman has a large mission hall, and where I may go and hold a fortnight's mission, I will stake the truth of my theory on the results of that mission. Dare you do it?'

"Bob was greatly shocked, and I am bound to say I did not like the idea at first; but I had got the Professor into this row, and felt I must get him out of it, so in the end I supported his proposal, and after unheard-of difficulties, Bob assented. Winchley told him beforehand the kind of men he should select to convert the women, and the kind of women he should select to convert the men. There was to be six months' preparation, and the mission was to begin three days after Christmas Day, so as to get the advantage of the solemnity of a New Year's Eve service at midnight. He furnished a list of the hymns he wished them to practise, and the whole thing was as carefully arranged as a scientific experiment in a laboratory, and on the same principles.

"Bob was to be there and see for himself, only he was to be absolutely unknown, and to speak to no one on the subject of the mission.

"Notwithstanding extraordinary difficulties, the arrangement was made at last. The mission was to be at Deyrick, a town of 35,000 inhabitants, and the missioner's name was to be Ebenezer Paul Winton, from Australia, and if fifty persons were

converted in the fortnight, he was to have proved his case. All this and other details were put down in writing.

"He won his case. Even you might think it profane if I told you all the details of his method. Bob was thunderstruck, as he watched. All the wild joy of pardon following the horrors of self-accusation for sin was manifested, just as he had seen it in his own missions; and when at the end of the fortnight ninety-two people publicly confessed that they had found a new life, Bob shook hands with Winchley and apologised handsomely.

"I was glad when it was over, though I found considerable satisfaction in the proof. Do you not think it marvellous?"

"Very! It is most striking and most helpful! What happened to those ninety-two people, do you know?"

"Yes, I forgot that. There were among them some of the worst characters of Deyrick, and from that day they were changed men. Bob knew the vicar intimately, and from him he learned that the percentage of those who 'remained faithful' was twice as high as that of any previous mission."

"What did Bob Drewe do afterwards?"

"He gave up mission work and accepted a country living, where I think his chief object is rearing thorough-breds."

"And do you anticipate that this result will become general as men discover the sources of religious enthusiasm?"

"Not necessarily. As men develop, they become more neurotic and not less, and so long as they find religious ecstasy helpful or enjoyable, so long will they cherish it. Many think that putting the poker into the fire makes it burn, but when they learn it is the oxygen, they will not, on that account, cease stirring the fire. Of course we cannot tell what form the religion of the future will take."

"Had Professor Winchley any theory about animal magnetism?"

"I think not. He said it made no difference to his position, whether 'molecular magnetism' could be proved or disproved, or whether it could be established that men were 'positive' in electricity and women 'negative.' He merely maintained that there is a something akin to magnetism or electricity, by virtue of which one human being

can affect another in such varying degrees, that hitherto it has been attributed to a supernatural power."

"I must reserve many questions I meant to ask you, but will you let me have the notes meantime? You have interested me beyond anything I expected, and I shall probably take the subject up, after my degree, as a special study."

CHAPTER IX

AFTER this long conversation, Mark found a new zest in life, because he had a new key to the conduct of men. The lack of years and experience had not allowed him to come face to face with some of the greatest problems of man's history, but in religions he had taken an unusual interest, and had therefore felt their difficulties more than most youths of two-and-twenty.

It was with some curiosity that he went to stay a few days at the Doubleday-Cookes'. Frank met him at the station, and the brougham soon took them to the Woodlands, a mansion of considerable size and beauty, surrounded by two hundred acres of trees and fields.

Mr. Reginald Doubleday-Cooke was on the Stock Exchange, and knew sufficient of those dread mysteries to have amassed a colossal fortune, which he was daily augumenting. He was a portly, rosy-

cheeked man of about fifty, and his chestnut hair had lost some of its profusion and some of its colour.

Mrs. Doubleday-Cooke had been a chronic invalid for years, after the birth of Frank. Left alone day by day, often bedridden for months, and being a sensitive, imaginative, emotional woman, she had developed the religious sentiments to an excessive degree. These sentiments were of the extreme Low Church school. She was the same age as her husband, within a year or two.

The only other member of the family was a niece, who lived there, Miss Eva Nettlewood. She had imbibed the religion of her aunt years ago, and had augmented its fervour by the force of youth. She was now about thirty.

Mark was received with a frank cordiality which favourably impressed him. It was one of Mrs. Cooke's best days, and when afternoon tea was over, she showed him the marvels of a most gorgeous conservatory. Everywhere was the profuse luxury of a millionaire, from the tyred wheels and C springs of the brougham to the rare exotics which bloomed in the hall and corridors and rooms. The turning-point of all religion with Mrs.

Cooke was "to know that I am saved," and with this she held many notions of a primitive character. For instance, if she wanted a fine day to give a Sunday school treat, or to attend a committee, she prayed for it, and she could give many instances where wet mornings had been averted, or, if not, they had given place to fine afternoons, in time for her appointments. She was soon drawn to Mark, for he had a certain solemnity of character, and took an interest in many subjects to which rich young men are usually indifferent. She soon determined that he must be "brought to a knowledge of saving grace" before he left the house. When the young men went to the billiard-room, she told her plans to her niece Eva, and they at once knelt down to pray for divine guidance, and they agreed to pray half an hour night and morning for him during his stay. Eva rejoiced at the prospect of taking any part in "saving the soul" of a clever, rich young man, who might become "an instrument," if it pleased God, "to turn many to righteousness." She spent her days in seeking for conversions, or bringing assurance to the faint-hearted. She had many rules of conduct, which

bound her, as by a direct divine command, and two of these were, that she should speak about their souls to all visitors to that house, and go round to all the servants every night and give them an appropriate text of Scripture. These texts were called "pillows," and it was the correct thing for them to quote her a text in reply.

The young men enjoyed billiards till the dressing-bell rang. The billiard-room was of such luxury and magnificence that it was one of the features of the neighbourhood.

When Mark had dressed, he sat waiting for the bell, and wondered what Rachel was doing, and still more what would be her thoughts, had she known that he was actually staying with the Doubleday-Cookes. She had not replied to his note, but he could scarcely expect that, after what his aunt had reported of her reply to Miss Burnett.

On descending, Mr. Cooke received him most warmly, with all the assurance, not to say superiority, of the middle-aged man who has fought the world and conquered, and who knows that he could buy any religious advantage or physical pleasure which the markets of the world

can supply. Dinner was not marked in any way, except by the magnificence of its luxury. Two women of pronounced religious opinions would usually prevent conversation from rioting into much brilliance; and as this was practically a home party, and Mark was rather *distrait*, because he was really at Whitechapel, there was only disjointed tittle-tattle about the doings of the vacation, the dreariness of winter, and the horrors of fatiguing festivities. The men lingered over their wine and cigars, and upon joining the ladies, there was a little gossip about a new book and a little music from Miss Nettlewood, whilst coffee was served. At ten the bell went for prayers, and they all returned to the dining-room, when the butler, two valets, and eight maid-servants decorously took their places at the far end of the room. Mr. Doubleday-Cooke read the daily portion of Scripture with distinctness and solemnity, and likewise the prayers. Then the ladies said good-night, and the men went to the billiard-room. No one would have taken them for the same beings as those in the drawing-room. They were full of life and mirth, and almost brilliant.

They retired about twelve. Frank had warned Mark that they had prayers at eight and breakfast at 8.30, and that he had succeeded in getting off prayers lately and got down to breakfast about 8.45. Frank had been the subject of innumerable prayers and tears, all to no avail. Just as too much love on the part of a wife will drive away the most devoted husband in the world, so too much religion would drive into practical atheism any young fellow, though he had the most reverent ideals. Frank had no ideals. He was twenty-two, and had not outgrown all the cubbishness of the schoolboy. He knew something about horses, and he was sure that he was a good judge of wine and women. He was not without a certain practical ability, and he had that dashing defiance which has been the glory of the cavalry officer.

His father intended him for a successful barrister, a judge, perhaps the Lord Chancellor; but in these plans he had consulted neither the ability nor the inclination of his son, which is the orthodox method of education in this country.

Next morning, breakfast over, Mr. Cooke had gone to the city, as usual, and the young men had

a good two hours' ride before luncheon. In the afternoon, Frank took his guest in the dogcart to see a young fellow three miles off, and they stayed till long after dark, and only just returned in time to dress for dinner.

The bell rang a little before seven, for Mrs. Cooke had one of her great religious events that night. It was the New Year's tea, to be followed by a religious meeting in the mission hall, which had been built by the Cookes to gather in the scattered population of labourers, who never went to church. At dinner was Mrs. Jayne, a good-looking woman about forty, who had come to give the address of the evening. She was a solicitor's widow, and had devoted herself to conducting gospel missions for the last five or six years.

Conversation ran on the meeting, and former meetings, and former experiences.

"How well I remember your first mission, Mrs. Cooke!" said Mrs. Jayne. "It was one of the most remarkable outpourings of the Spirit I ever saw."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Cooke. "We had indeed 'times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.' The mission has never looked back since then,

and that must be quite five years ago, or is it six?"

"It is eight. Do you remember the last night of all, when we came home about eleven, and your new servant Polly had not surrendered herself to God in the mission hall, and I found her crying as she was going up to bed, and I brought her down, and we held a prayer-meeting in the dining-room. What a fight we had with 'the powers of darkness!' We sang and prayed, and the poor child sobbed in an agony of supplication, but could not find peace; it seemed as if she dared not venture all on the blood of the Lamb. It had struck one o'clock when you took her hand and sang softly, 'Just as I am, without one plea,' and in a moment the light came, and with a wild cry of joy she fell on the floor. It really seemed as if the Lord had taken her at the moment of self-surrender. We were quite frightened at her deathly face. Is she still living near you?"

"Yes; you must go and see her to-morrow. She has much trouble, but she clings to Christ. Her husband drinks, and sometimes strikes her, and she has buried a child, and I fear at first she was

inclined to rebel, and thought God was harsh towards her; but I showed her that 'whom he loveth He chasteneth,' and that all these light afflictions are to draw us to Himself; and the next time I saw her, she was so sweet, I felt quite cheered."

So the conversation went on. Mr. Cooke could hardly be described as radiant, and Frank was ashamed that this should be forced upon Mark, for at Squire's they would as soon have lived like Jesus as have talked religion. But his shame gave place to sheer consternation, when Mrs. Jayne turned and asked him if he were going to the meeting. Never had he known such a horror of self-restraint, for he declined, firmly, but politely.

For some days Mark had been thinking of religion as a branch of hypnotism, and it occurred to him that this was a chance of gaining a little knowledge at first hand, so he amazed them all by saying that he would like to go to the meeting. Mrs. Cooke was not able to go out, but she prayed an hour for Mark, and Mr. Cooke had most urgent private business letters to write. Frank attended them to the door, and then vanished, to indulge in a form of very general hypnotic pleasure, for he

had been captivated by the charms of Miss Ethel Keane, who was governess to the four children of Mrs. Spratt, a wealthy widow. Perhaps no occupation has yet been invented which is so great an outrage upon all that is best in a young girl's nature, as that of being governess in a "highly respectable family." When she ought to be learning to fill life with laughter, she is converted into a slave by the burden of responsibilities which are thrust upon her in the name of fictitious moralities proprieties, and religions. As far as pleasure is concerned, she is a little higher than a worm, and a little lower than the kitchen-girl.

When Ethel Keane, therefore, received attentions from Frank, it was no wonder that they thrilled her life with an unknown joy, so that she soon dared to set common caution, if not common propriety, at defiance. She was banished to her own room always at eight; at the window of this room Frank could announce his presence, and she could steal out by a side door, which she had done on two or three occasions. Thither Frank went while the meeting proceeded.

CHAPTER X

THE meeting presented many novelties to Mark. He had only learned a Christianity of the utmost severity of decorum, and these irregular proceedings did not quite harmonise with his idea of the fitness of things.

Miss Nettlewood had superintended the tea, with the Scripture-reader as her henchman. The room was full, the ventilation bad, and the men and women, overfed, presented that confusion of jolly animals wishing to feel religious, which is one of the wonders offered by man to Heaven.

Miss Nettlewood presided at the harmonium, and after a hymn Mrs. Jayne called upon one to "engage in prayer," whereupon a neighbouring coachman, a Plymouth Brother, heartily and familiarly approached "the throne of grace," as he informed the Almighty. Then Mrs. Jayne herself, with more refinement and considerable emotion,

led the assembly into deeper solemnity. Another hymn followed, after which Mrs. Jayne read the psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd," etc., on every verse of which she made comments, sometimes solemn, sometimes jubilant, and occasionally humorous. On "the valley of death" she uttered sepulchral whispers, and then burst forth in strains of triumphant joy, which moved many hearts. Apparently she was quite unconscious of the fact that the verse made no more reference to dying than it did to the parish clerk. After another hymn the addresses began. The Scripture-reader presented a report of the year's work and elicited cheers and laughter, but before he sat down he grew solemn on the dread issues of the year before them, and the near presence of death every hour; and then, with a clap of thunder, he said, "Only three weeks since to-day, I was reading God's holy word to an old man on the verge of the grave, when his daughter came in. I tried to speak a word in season to her, but she only made light of it, and, Felix-like, put it off to a more convenient season. The day after she met with an accident (as worldly people say), and in a week

she was a corpse. She 'had been called to her account,' and she was not ready. To-night that young woman is in hell."

An awful shudder ran through the assembly, and Mark nearly rose to his feet, for he longed to say, "You brute!" but they were instantly singing a hymn with a chorus—

> "O that will be joyful, joyful, joyful,
> When we meet to part no more."

Mrs. Jayne gave an adroit address: she began with a few pathetic references to the past, scattered promises of a brighter future, told bright anecdotes, provoked laughter, and then melted them into tears. She created great enthusiasm, and after her address, three or four joined in prayer, then they sang a hymn of solemn dedication on their knees, and Mrs. Jayne closed the meeting with "the grace."

Mark was sorry that the meeting had not been more specially of a mission character, as he wished to have seen some conversions, but there was no lack of considerable magnetic power. As Mrs. Jayne was struggling with her jacket, three or four men rushed up to assist, then one found her

umbrella, another her Bible, and, with cheeks flushed with fervour and eyes sparkling with excitement, she smiled, full of holy content, and said, "The Lord always sends me men."

At the door Frank joined them, and they all proceeded across the fields home, by the aid of lanterns. When they arrived, prayers were over, and coffee was brought into the drawing-room. Mrs. Cooke reclined on the sofa, waiting to hear the news. She called over a mental list of names to know if those had been present and were still faithful, and so forth. Without any particular object, Mark inquired about the man who offered the first prayer. Miss Nettlewood answered, "His name is Smithson; he is a coachman for Sir John Kidney, and lives at one of the houses on the other side of the parish. He is a very earnest man."

"So he is, dear," said Mrs. Cooke; "but I wish he would not push himself forward so much. He is really not one of our mission, and he might go to Church; he is near enough. I hear that he gave the Sacrament last Sunday night in his house, and that some of our people went. I shall certainly speak to them if I find out who they were."

"Does the Vicar know of that?" asked Mr. Cooke.

"Yes, dear, for I told him this morning," said she.

"I never liked the fellow," said he.

"I fear he is not altogether a good influence among our people. Poor old lame John, the cobbler, was quite rude to me yesterday. I had taken him a little basket, as I do sometimes, and before leaving I gave him a text, 'I will guide thee with Mine eye,' when he replied, 'Woe unto you that are rich!' I said, 'Really, John, what do you mean? Are you turning a Radical?' Then he answered, 'I don't know about that, ma'am, but you taught me to believe every word Jesus said, and He said that. Did you never read it, ma'am? Now, I want to know what our Saviour meant.'

"I tried to show him that probably the rich in our Lord's time were many of them without religion, as the poor are in this country, and that this might have led Him to use this strong expression, so unlike our Blessed Lord. At this John grew quite insolent, and sneered about our rich having so much religion, and told me some story about his three daughters in service in rich families, and what they

had seen. I made no reply, and left him, but I learned afterwards that Smithson goes there often, and that he is a Socialist."

"How awful!" said Mrs. Jayne.

"Darling, I am so sorry!" said Miss Nettlewood.

"The blackguard!" said Mr. Cooke. "I will see Sir John about this; we are not going to have our contented folk stirred to rioting by that oily villain. You might send him a message and just bid him not to come to the mission hall any more. It is your own hall."

Amidst the indignation, sighs, regrets, condolences, and other respectable Christian forms of resenting the poor and comforting the rich, the party broke up.

The two young men made for the smoking-room. Poor Miss Nettlewood had hurried out to distribute her "pillows," and on her return she met Mark. Now, as he had been to the meeting, she thought she might give him a "pillow." So she stopped and said solemnly, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm xxvii. 1). Remembering the story of lame John, which secretly he had enjoyed, Mark said, "A man hath no pre-eminence above a

beast, for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Ecclesiastes iii. 19, 20).

"Mr. Goode," she almost wailed out, "surely you do not believe that! My verse is one of the Lord's precious promises. How can you be so morbid? Or is it mockery?"

"Neither, Miss Nettlewood. You quote me a verse from the Bible; from the same Bible I quote you one, by which I am greatly puzzled. You say your verse is a promise of the Lord; then what is mine, for it is a revelation from the same God? Perhaps you do not believe Ecclesiastes?"

"I believe every word of the Bible, but some verses are more precious than others, and seem to speak more directly to my soul."

"In other words, Miss Nettlewood likes the sentiments of some and not the sentiments of others, and so she prefers to choose the sweet and neglect the bitter! It is the way with all of us, whether in religion or anything else. But pray forgive me if I have not answered properly."

"But I don't choose—I—I believe everything——every word, every letter."

Frank appeared in search of Mark, and cut short this beautiful confession of confusion. Miss Nettlewood sighed, as an injured seraph might sigh, and retired to pray for Mark Goode.

CHAPTER XI

NEXT morning, Mrs. Cooke felt there was no time to be lost with regard to Mark's conversion, so she told off Miss Nettlewood to take charge of Mrs. Jayne, and she waylaid Mark before Frank and he could go out riding. She began—

"I am so glad, Mr. Goode, that you went to our meeting last night. I cannot do much personally in the Master's service, since it has pleased our Heavenly Father to lay great affliction upon me, but that mission is one of my little efforts to evangelise the masses. I hope you felt encouraged by what you saw."

"I am afraid," he replied, "that I rather felt puzzled."

"How, Mr. Goode? Ten years ago, most of those people whom you saw were leading godless lives; now they are Christians—not in name, but whole-hearted Christians. Surely that is encouraging."

"I cannot say, quite. I have never met any whole-hearted Christians."

"Oh, Mr. Goode, how can you say so? How sad! No wonder you young men leave Oxford full of all men's opinions, but with no knowledge of the simple salvation in Christ."

"Mrs. Cooke, it is no use you and I playing with words. I probably do not use the term 'whole-hearted Christian' in the sense in which you apply it. A whole-hearted Christian surely is one who DOES what Christ did. If we are to arrive at any understanding, I must ask you to allow me to talk quite naturally and very plainly, for I see many difficulties in the whole question of religion."

"Perhaps you lay great stress on doing something. Now this is not what our dear Lord wants. He only asks you to accept Him, cast your soul simply upon Him—'believe and be saved.' Can anything be simpler than that?"

"Apparently not; but is that the religion of Christ? I do not read anywhere of Christ's going and telling people to save their souls. He laid much greater stress on *doing* than believing. It is

they that have *done* good who are to come forth to the resurrection of life—salvation by faith is quite a recent invention. Christ never seems to have treated the soul as something separate from the body."

Mrs. Cooke gasped! Had the heavens fallen, or was she face to face with Antichrist! Her eyes filled with tears of a yearning pity; she longed to kneel down there and then, and make an appeal to the Saviour of souls to open the eyes of this young man; but she said, with the calm gentleness of absolute truth—

"Surely you remember, Mr. Goode, that Christ asked, 'What shall a man give in exchange for his SOUL?' There is no mention of a body there." And she triumphantly passed the Bible to Mark open at St. Matthew xvi. 26, that he might read for himself. He read, and said, with the gentleness of sound scholarship—

"Surely, Mrs. Cooke, your clergy are careful to explain to you that 'soul' here is a mistranslation for life. It is merely 'What shall a man give in exchange for his *life*?' I fear we have taken some heathen idea of soul, and have put it into the Bible."

"No, no, Mr. Goode!" wailed Mrs. Cooke; "that is wicked of you. The Bible is all about the soul, from the creation to the book that tells us 'there shall be no more sea.' This was the crowning gift of God to man. 'And man became a living soul.' I suppose you remember that, Mr. Goode?" she asked, with a cheerful note of triumph.

The young man looked steadily at her, and, could she have seen it, that look was full of pity. He did not wish to disturb, still less annoy, Mrs. Cooke. Yet she had sought him in her eagerness to make a proselyte. So he said calmly—

"Among your books there, I see a commentary. Will you take it and read the remarks on that line from Genesis?"

"Gladly, for it is by dear Bishop Ellicott, one of our few faithful bishops."

She found the passage, Genesis ii. 7, and read: "'Man became a living soul.' The word translated 'soul' contains *no* idea of a *spiritual* existence. For in Chapter 1–20, 'creature that hath life,' and in verse 24, 'the living creature,' are literally *living soul.* Really the word refers to the natural life of *animals* and men, maintained by breathing."

Then came one of those awkward pauses which are real trials in social life. Mrs. Cooke seemed paralysed by astonishment; the Bishop's commentary dropped from her hands, and slid on the floor. Mark placed it on the table, and said—

"Mrs. Cooke, had we not better stop quibbling about odd words, and look for some guiding principle in the life and teaching of Jesus as a whole, apart from the small, hard creeds of any particular school? I am as interested as you can be in seeking the truth."

"But, Mr. Goode, I found the truth years ago. I simply took my Saviour, and I had peace. I have had griefs, afflictions, disappointments, but this comfort has never failed me. You cannot deny that. It is my experience."

"I do not wish to deny it. I do not wish to disturb it. We are not discussing that point. It is not my experience, and if it were, it would not throw a single ray of light on the teaching of Jesus. It is well known that people have found *comfort* in every religion of the world, whether before Christ's time or since. If consolation to the believer is to be the test, then no religion fails.

The Roman Catholic finds as much consolation in his religion as a Methodist does in his—a Buddhist is as self-satisfied as a bishop, yet in their outlook and their faith they differ on almost every vital point. Their very contradictions prove that none of them are likely to have the religion of Jesus."

"You bewilder me and fill me with grief. However, thank God, I know in whom *I* have believed, and if men blindly quarrel, well, they must."

"I do not wish to quarrel. I wish to understand. If the Roman Catholics are right, then most of the religious enthusiasm of the last three centuries is a baseless fraud; if the Roman Catholics are wrong, then the majority of those who trust in Christ are spending the energies of a lifetime in cultivating deadly despair to come. If both are wrong, then it is allowable to examine the Gospels for ourselves. I do this, and I find no word about justification by faith, and I do find an almost fanatical hatred of priests. I find His religion was a revolution, and no large body of men has ever accepted it."

"Mr. Goode, we shall never agree. You distress me. I cannot doubt the faith of years. I have

seen my religion tested on the deathbed. I have seen the dying smile and praise God at the awful moment when the soul was passing away."

"You can see that any day in countries where Christianity is not taught. That joy is often the result of nervous derangement, or the reward of lifelong self-delusion. But a religion that will give the labourer his hire, that will not defraud or oppress the poor, that knows no caste, that *lives* out a brotherhood, is a far different thing. You cannot imagine Jesus driving to church in a brougham, and leaving an army of servants at home to prepare His dinner, whilst a vaster army toils all the week to keep up His banking account, and He lives in luxury, but they are exposed to all dangers in field and mines, till they die in their brutal ignorance. Yet the most prominent Christians in all the world do these things and *worship* Christ, according to the sentiment in which they were nursed. Could you picture Jesus hiring a footman?"

Fortunately, before Mrs. Cooke answered or lost her reason in the heaven of hysterics, Frank arrived and said the horses were waiting.

CHAPTER XII

GRANT to a young man good health and a good horse, and it must be a swift-flying care which overtakes him. At first neither Frank nor Mark were in that joyful state which should characterise all youth: Frank feared trouble at home, should his visits to Miss Keane be found out; Mark was brooding over the eternal question of religion, and suspecting that he had not made himself at all clear to Mrs. Cooke.

But the sunshine and the keen air, aided by the charming exercise, triumphed, and long before their return they were prepared to canter through life as free from care as their horses.

At luncheon Mrs. Jayne had much to tell of those whom she had visited. She used the religious dialect peculiar to her creed, and when she did not talk religion she talked sensibly enough. The young men had only to practise that doctrine

of universal assent which society takes for good breeding. And so the day passed in those amiable nothings which are nearly as pleasant as a delusion.

But next morning, a bolt from the blue fell into this well-ordered home. Mrs. Spratt, aided by the experience of a widow, had long suspected that young Doubleday-Cooke was interested in her governess. The housemaid had informed her that Miss Keane sometimes went and walked in the grounds after dark, and the widow could only think of Frank as the cause of this form of madness. So she watched. She satisfied herself of the fact of Frank's last visit. She revelled in the luxury of her discovery a whole day, and then sent an urgent note to Mrs. Cooke for an interview; and while the young men were enjoying the morning rabbiting with the keeper, she was telling Mrs. Cooke the appalling news of her son's entanglement with a governess. The mother was greatly distressed, and she did not leave till Mrs. Spratt had undertaken to dismiss her governess at once, Mrs. Cooke advancing half a year's salary to accomplish this and to do it handsomely. When it was settled that "the girl" should go

this evening, Mrs. Cooke returned home to face the real question with Frank. This was not the first trial of the kind; she had dismissed two housemaids because he found them attractive, and she could not imagine how a son of hers could be so bestial as to be attracted by women of lower social standing than himself. She had but two ways out of all the difficulties of life—gold and prayer. She had already brought the gold into play, and it promised great things; but gold would not avail with Frank, for he had his separate allowance of £800 a year, and was peculiarly careless about money. Evidently she must pray. She did. The carriage soon conveyed her home. She abandoned all thoughts of appearing at luncheon, and gave herself up to prayers and tears in search of a plan to win Frank away from this folly, and to be able to present him smiling when his father returned. By this step she lost a great advantage, for scarcely was luncheon over, when the butler took a note to Frank as follows:—

"DEAREST FRANK,—Your mother has been here

this morning. She knows now. I am dismissed, and I leave by the five train. I am packing as fast as my tears will let me. It is a very, very cruel fate. You will see me somewhere, darling, before five. I hope I have not brought you trouble.—Yours for ever, ETHEL."

For some seconds Frank was stunned, for some minutes he was mad. As soon as he could think, he sought his mother. These two had a great faculty for making each other miserable. As soon as she saw his pallid face, she trembled. He began somewhat harshly—

"Have you arranged with Mrs. Spratt to dismiss Ethel Keane?"

"Now, my dear Frank, do not be angry, but listen to reason. I have only done for the best."

"Then *you* have done it?"

"Well, Mrs. Spratt was most kind and considerate. You see, it is a great inconvenience to her"—

"Oh, damn Mrs. Spratt and her crew! If Ethel leaves, I leave!"

"My dear Frank, do be reasonable. Think

what a fury your father will be in, if this gets out and"—

"If Ethel leaves, I leave. Do you understand?"

"But you cannot be so cruel as to plunge me into distress over this girl, who is not anything in particular to you, nor can she ever be."

"She is very much to me, and if Ethel leaves, I leave. Are you getting this fact into your brain?"

"Oh, Frank, Frank, would you ruin every prospect you have in life by marrying some unknown, penniless girl?"

"Really, how worldly you are! Have you actually fallen from grace? I always told you it would be so, and that your religion would fail you in the end."

This rather cruel speech was too much. Hysterics terminated the dialogue. Of the many heart-breaking sights in this heart-breaking world, there are few so sad as to be compelled to stand helplessly by and see a kind heart bleeding from self-inflicted wounds. The whole of Mrs. Cooke's calamity might be summed up in the word, sentiment. She had nursed her own prejudice, she

had made her own world and lighted it with a halfpenny lamp of the most limited experience. She had wrapped a few inches of tape on a second-hand bobbin and thought she had measured the universe, and so now she suffered unspeakable anguish because her own son was not inside the bobbin. No language can describe, no thought can comprehend, the conduct of the average British matron on any question relating to sex. She would faint away if it could be shown her that *her* husband would never have married but for her fixed income, yet she will sell her own daughters for anything, except love, and she will urge her sons to sacrifice life's delight, so long as it is on a golden altar that sanctifies.

Her glaring inconsistency is equalled only by the complacency of her ignorance. So she goes through life an astounding miracle of self-created darkness, praying blindly and paying respectably, quite sure that she and God rule the universe.

Some day comes a shock, and then her misery is an affliction to behold. Such it was at the moment when Frank, maddened and despairing, fetched Miss Nettlewood to take charge of his mother.

CHAPTER XIII

FRANK went to the stables and ordered the groom to be ready to get out the dogcart at any moment. Next he sought Mark and told him everything, and apologised with unfeigned regret that such a rumpus should have happened during his first visit.

He knew the hysterics would soon pass off, and he was therefore in a great hurry. He sent a note to Ethel to ask her to stay, should such a plan be offered to her; if not, to wait in the first-class waiting-room at Waterloo till he arrived, and on no account to think of going farther than London. He had three portmanteaus packed, and then joined Mark in the smoking-room.

As he expected, soon Miss Nettlewood came to fetch him to talk with his mother, and she was surprised at his readiness to go. Mrs. Cooke received him with that injured, subdued, saintly air, which a

hysterical woman always assumes when she has wronged another, so she said softly—

"My dear Frank, I have forgiven you that cruel speech, and I have prayed God not to lay it to your charge. Now kiss me, dear, and do not let the subject recur again. You see *now* that I did for the best, don't you?"

Frank already knew too well how religious delusions and womanly pertinacity could fill a home with desolating tornadoes, but this smiling complacency, which could draw down the blind in mid-winter and say, "It is the heart of summer now, darling," fairly staggered him. At length he said firmly, "But, mother, you have forgotten where we left off. You have procured Ethel's dismissal, and, if Ethel leaves, I leave. Now, your only way out of this is to see that Mrs. Spratt retains Ethel for the present."

"You are most unreasonable, Frank. How can I ask Mrs. Spratt to alter her plans to please me?"

"She seems to have altered them pretty quickly this morning to please you."

"But I do not think she would keep such a girl. Would any mother entrust the souls of her

young children to the keeping of a girl who has fallen so low as to go out alone after dark? It is impossible!"

"You should add, 'especially with your son.' I know. But you see I love Ethel and she loves me, and we have foreseen this storm coming, and now it has come, we mean to brave it out. As for the 'impossible,' you are always doing the impossible: you pray to God, and He alters the weather to please you; now He must alter Mrs. Spratt. You believe He once managed a whale contrary to nature, so surely He will not be beaten with a Spratt."

Frank laughed boisterously. Mrs. Cooke wept, and threatened to telegraph for her husband, but this was the last thing in the world she would have wished anyone to do. Still she refused to appeal to Mrs. Spratt, and amidst the continued incoherency, Frank kept on repeating, "If Ethel leaves, I leave," and saying this he left her.

They all met at four o'clock tea, under that cloud of darkness which is social life without its make-believes. Mrs. Cooke longed to appeal to Mark, and had he been a "real Christian," she

might have done so, but somehow she dared not. Frank left suddenly "to write a letter."

He sent down the three portmanteaus; the dog-cart was out instantly, and by furious driving he reached the station as the five train steamed in. Just as it was moving out, he stepped into a compartment in which sat Ethel alone.

Ethel Keane was Frank's age within a few months; not very tall, but really beautiful and singularly bright and sweet. Her dark brown eyes, when kindled with the fire of hope, were indeed like "stars of the soul"; her hair was neither brown nor black, but under its dark mass there gleamed bronze tresses, when the slanting sun-rays fell upon them. Her ability was great, for though, as the eldest of six children in a curate's family, she had had few advantages, yet she had passed examinations as quickly as snobs pass "poor relations." Her character blended every virtue which one human being can possess, otherwise she would never have got a "situation" under the present keen competition. She had lost one "place" on account of her beauty, and for the same reason had been refused several when it

came to an interview, but as there was no husband at Mrs. Spratt's, this objection did not apply.

She knew only a grey world, where there was much toil and many masters. In her loneliness and heart-hunger, Frank's attentions had brought new life; and when he declared his ardent love, she returned it with idolatry; and now she had but one object in the world, and she was with him, alone; with an unknown future before her, but her absolute trust in him enabled her to defy the world.

Mr. Cooke had turned to home with a sigh of relief when he left business, for he had had a harassing day. They had invited a few friends to dinner, and he looked forward to driving dull care away. He reached home at six, and found that there was every reason to suppose Frank had left. However, he felt sure that soon he would return, and this storm would pass, as others had done.

He would rather it had been for any other cause, for his own experience with the opposite sex led him to look on Frank's action with alarm.

He himself had married early, feeling sure that

a most religious young woman would be absolutely devoted to him, and him alone. A rain of gold had fallen upon their path, and they were the envy of their small world. But after the birth of Frank, his wife was an invalid, requiring a doctor and nurse for six months; at the end of this time, she emerged with difficulty from her room; she had changed, and her old world had gone for ever. Religion had become a disease. She labelled a few prejudices the kingdom of heaven, and all else was of the earth earthy.

In course of time, Mr. Cooke had found other women attractive; and, as he was rich, he soon selected another to be his queen of youth and beauty. And whilst youth and beauty lasted, so she was, but for many years she had been a faded, drunken woman, and as she knew both his addresses, he had lived in abject terror, lest at any moment she should arrive at the Woodlands, and he would be hooted from the neighbourhood, in which he was the leader of respectability and religion. The misery of apprehension had well-nigh driven him mad! Was Frank going the same way to the same doom?

But we must smile through our dinners in spite of doom. Mr. and Mrs. Doubleday-Cooke received their guests in a charming manner, and referred to each other in terms of endearment; the cook had achieved success, and the wine-cellar at the Woodlands never failed, so the guests were well pleased. Only Mark Goode pitied the Cookes, and perhaps he alone had eyes to see the pathos of those grotesque figures which we all weave into the woof of life.

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning Mr. Cooke received the following note:—

"MY DEAR FATHER,—Ethel and I are staying here as man and wife. If you and mother would prefer to see us formally married, then she must invite Ethel for a few days to the Woodlands, and after that she will go home and tell her parents, and we will be married by licence. If mother refuses to do this, we remain as we are. We stay here a week till she makes up her mind, and then we go abroad.

"You have always been so kind to me in my scrapes, that I feel I ought to say, that if any one persuades you to interfere with the money you so kindly allow me, Ethel and I will immediately come and take lodgings in the village, till the present sum is doubled.

"I try to hope that greater wisdom will prevail.
—Your loving son, FRANK."

Fortunately Mrs. Cooke had not come down to breakfast, and as Miss Nettlewood had still some hope of bringing Mark to see the error of his ways, she was sweetly attentive.

Mr. Cooke was staggered by the letter. He had never realised that Frank loved Ethel and would be willing to marry her, and still less that he would set aside all the conventionalities of a lifetime and live with the girl *he loved*, without marriage. Had she been the daughter of one of his labourers, he would not have wondered so much at it, neither probably would he have censured it very severely; so profound is the moral code of society.

He admired the cleverness with which Frank had laid the trap for his mother, because he felt that his wife was largely to blame in forcing things to this issue, and perhaps he was not disappointed that the storm should come on account of Frank rather than on account of himself.

However, to avoid the first outbreak of the violence, he sent Miss Nettlewood with the letter to his wife, and Mark and he were soon enjoying excellent cigars strolling through the long row of greenhouses. Mark proposed leaving early. Mr. Cooke, however, said that he should not go himself till 12.30, and it was settled that they should both go together.

On returning to the house, husband and wife talked over their hopeless son. Mrs. Cooke was hysterical, and therefore unreasonable, and she was ready to die gladly rather than suffer Ethel to contaminate her household. Mr. Cooke talked palliatives, and suggested weighty reasons for a compromise with his son; though he was wofully disappointed, he clearly saw that Frank was able to array the whole of the Grundy-forces against them, and that, unless the affair were patched up and gilded over, there was an end to all his dreams of Frank's brilliant career; but Mrs. Cooke had long ago set aside reason, and he might as well have tried to make a Prime Minister understand the poor, as to bring her to reason. So he left her to consider it for a week.

Mrs. Cooke came down in time to see Mark; she received him with the utmost sweetness. After any violent outbreak, when she felt she had been wronged, and that she was suffering for God, she became angelic, and the poor, who saw her in these moods and listened to her superhuman resignation, went away with half a crown in their pockets, and told the neighbours that she was an angel. She apologised for the distressing cause which had curtailed Mark's visit, assured him of the warmest welcome whenever he would come and see them again, then said—

"But I am such a wreck, Mr. Goode, I can do but little to brighten your visits; still, should you desire at any time to talk about spiritual things, write to me or come. I know them. Had my boy been saved, he would not have rushed into this prodigality of coarse vice. It is hard for me, very hard; but 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' and I try to rejoice always in His love. Oh, Mr. Goode, if you would only consecrate your young life to God, you might be a blessing to hundreds, and you could then help me to pray

for Frank. I know God will bring him into the fold, in His own good time."

Mark did everything that was courteous, and left smiling. He felt that this was the last time they would meet at the Woodlands. He did not regret the visit, though most young men would have exhausted a rich vocabulary in describing its defects. He had seen a new order of life, and as he was oppressed with problems, he was ready to study mankind and their creeds and doings. He sought some way out of the ever-present struggle — the collision of interests, creeds, and thoughts. He had entered this house, redolent with pious aroma, where religion was not revered as an idol upon a shelf, but where everything was subservient to religion, and found its charm and usefulness only because it fostered religion. Yet he had not been taken captive by the form of religion dominating this household.

As soon as the men parted in London, Mark enjoyed a delightful sense of freedom, for a plan had been slowly forming in his mind. He had not heard anything of Rachel Burnett, and he longed to see her; he was not bound to return

to the Deanery at any particular time, so he resolved to leave his luggage and go to Whitechapel. Rachel had become so much to him, he had lived in such near and real communion with her, that he had but one dread, namely, lest he should frighten her into making a resolution against all love. He knew now something of her iron purpose and daring fanaticism, so with all the timidity of a real lover, especially when he is young and his love is half a religion, he shrank from risking a denial which would be to him a doom.

Still he went to Whitechapel. Nothing could seem more uncomfortable than the blackened houses and sloppy streets, but he felt no depression as he sought his way to John Street. If science would tell us clearly what is that strange physical power which raises man in an instant to such heights that no discomfort *can* be felt, we should then know the secret force which exalts the lover, inspires the instantaneously converted, and fills the red Indian, dying under torture, with beatific visions.

We have at last learned that it is one and the same force, and for this we are thankful.

As timid as a shy young girl, he stole down the street, and when he knocked on the front door, his heart seemed to keep time with its clatter.

An elderly woman "answered the door," the one he had seen before. "No, Miss Burnett was not in," was the answer. "Would she come back soon?" The woman could not say. "She had been away a great deal the last three or four days."

Clouds and thick darkness were rapidly descending upon Mark. He longed even for a glimpse of her room. So he foolishly asked if she had left a note for him. Then he offered to save the woman the trouble of going to see, which ended in their both going to Rachel's room. When they could not find the note, he asked if he might sit down a few minutes. The room was cold and cheerless, the fire had not been lighted that morning. It was as bare as ever, except for his New Year's card. This hung in a simple frame, glazed to keep it from the pollution of London soot. This trifle cheered him and threw a glamour of loveliness over the scene. Then he talked with

the woman to learn what Rachel had been doing, and it was not all cheering. She had been very ill all the week about the beginning of the new year: "she do work that hard, and she don't take much food nor rest, but she is better, and waiting on some sick woman." "Where?" No one knew. So he could only talk about her, and then he learned a little about this poor woman, and left his card for Miss Burnett, and half a sovereign to sharpen the old thing's memory.

It seemed an interminable distance to the station, and the surrounding misery was oppressive.

He brooded on fanaticism and failure and the misery of being alive, till he arrived at Crowland.

CHAPTER XV

IN a few days, term began at Oxford, and Mark was back at Squire's, and his days were as methodically filled as if he had lived there for seven years.

Of course, Cooke did not "come up," and as he wrote quite early in term to one of the set from abroad, Mark knew that his mother had remained inexorable, and that Ethel had not been allowed to visit the Woodlands.

Something leaked out from Cooke's own letter about the circumstances of his present life, and the men pestered Mark for details, as they knew he had paid a visit there during "the vac." It enlivened some conversations and gave rise to much wit of a certain kind in his set, to think that "old No-Night" or "the All-Day-Cooke" should have not only despised marriage and his college dons, but should have been so luxuriously aristocratic as to defy all the prejudices of religion and

conventionality at one stroke. These young wiseacres were positive that there was "good blood in old No-Night."

Mark was unable to satisfy them with details because he did not fully know the case, and from what he did know, he felt that it would require a special jury composed of judges to determine the proportion of blame attaching to Frank or his mother. He certainly was amazed at Miss Keane, but he was a young man, and he knew not that when a girl loves, she naturally lays aside all religion and morality, the moment they conflict with her love, by the most elementary rule of physics that the weakest goes to the wall.

He was so devoted to his "bones," as his branch of science was styled, and so preoccupied with great problems, that he was less sociable this term than usual.

He had received a note from Miss Burnett in answer to one of his inquiring after her health, and though it assured him on that point, yet she gently requested him not to call at her lodgings, as he lived in a world completely severed from hers, and it would only make her life there more

difficult. He had replied in warmer terms than he had before used. He told her his plans about his examination in summer, and that then he should be free, and he wished to select a profession, but that first of all he must come to some conclusion on the subject of religion, and before he could do this he *must* certainly learn much more of her methods, and therefore he must at least see her in June. Still, sometimes the longing to go to that little back street in Whitechapel was well-nigh insupportable, and the riot of luxury, amounting to waste, which he was daily compelled to see, only wrote on his heart in letters of gold the tale of agonising want at Whitechapel.

Meantime, Rachel Burnett was unflinchingly carrying out the mode of life which she had adopted. At one step she had gained a freedom which is priceless. She had reduced her wants to the smallest compass, so that with her own hands she could easily supply them day by day, and she need not look a single day ahead. She had to conform to the prejudices of no profession, she was bound neither by the bonds of creed nor the shackles of the almighty Grundy. She had

read the value of the world's wealth and friendship when she sat for weeks looking into her own broken heart. Her whole disposition was one of fervent trust, and a blinding horror submerged her when first she realised that, owing to one single accident of fortune, she was less to her friends than the last dog they owned, which had been hopelessly lamed in the street. She could no more comprehend it than one comprehends a sudden paralysis.

Such conduct is common, yet no one is prepared for it, no one has explained it. It is one of those relics of prehistoric animalism which defies all culture and every religion, and under its influence the noblest and the most holy will combine with the criminals and charlatans of any age to crucify the prophet who appears one day too soon, or to starve the orphan who should have been rich and is not. But Miss Burnett wasted no time in seeking for causes. The glorious light of evolution had not revealed to her the foundations of men and morals.

She knew clearly the world had failed her. She knew, less clearly, that Jesus was at war with the

world. He never sought its wealth or its power; she could see no order of recognised society in which Jesus could have stayed a week. In any home of fashion, its false sentiment, its greed of power, its idolatry of wealth, its mummery of worship, would have struck him as a sterile and cruel idolatry, and would have goaded Him to one of His terrific denunciations of woe, that would have landed Him in an English lunatic asylum within the week.

She never doubted Jesus.

So she took Him at His word, did as He did, and went to live amongst the only order of human beings who can ever comprehend His position, for they are outcasts, steeped in suffering and despised for their helplessness.

Rachel Burnett may have been wrong or fanatical, but let no one say that, seeing she believed in the Nazarene as the final and supreme revelation of the Divine, she was not more consistent than those who *say*, Lord, Lord, and are sure they are going to heaven because they do none of the things which He did and commanded. She at least carried out the Gospels' plainest state-

ments in the plainest way, than which no harder life can be chosen, and it never leads to emolument.

To Mark Goode there was no such simple solution of life. The theological account of creation by an Almighty Being, who lived somewhere outside of His own world, and altered it this way or that, according to the number of good people who asked Him to do so, reduced the universe to a toy in the hand of a giant-baby. When once evolution has drawn aside those curtains of fable with which early writers draped off the Infinite, as if it were an unpleasant wind, man catches glimpses of a beauty which illumines all his after life, and which lights up the darkest caverns of degradation and folly. For some years, Mark had accustomed himself to gaze down this vista of the measureless and murderous past, till his sight could penetrate its reeking horror, and see the advance of that unfolding splendour which we call life. From that moment he was a new being, and the universe had a new meaning. He walked in a large place; and though some fairy lights had gone out in his old world, he was much nearer the stars.

From familiarity with this added grandeur, his own life took deeper meanings, and those various crimes, by which the few defraud the many of their birthright, loomed in their own solitary blackness of darkness, which was hideous and terrible. Only those who know the value of life shudder panic-stricken at its waste, and only those to whom brotherhood is a reality feel the horror of our daily murders.

Much of this was not yet clear to him, but he was on the way thither. His own life had been so smooth and so carefully marked out, that, had he possessed less force of character, he would have daubed a little respectable whitewash on the tomb of mankind, and would have died in the sweet peace of delusion. But Rachel Burnett's history had saved him from this. He had learned at one glance that there is nothing more murderous than civilisation, and nothing more selfish than religion.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was no one in Oxford with whom Mark could talk over his difficulties. There were leaders of opposite schools, who said they had divine authority to teach absolute truth, but absolute truth requires higher credentials than the flat contradiction of another absolute truth. In position, these opposing leaders closely resembled those keepers of booths, who deafen the passer-by with their boisterous assurance that theirs is the finest show in the fair. The wise suspect a hoax in every case of such certainty.

He might have called upon his nominal tutor, the Rev. George Benn, but there was a great gulf fixed at Squire's between the dons and the undergraduates, for the latter were all supposed to be gentlemen, and Mr. Benn had the reputation of being a recluse, whose tailor no man knoweth unto this day. But about the middle of term, Mark

attended a lecture on "The place of Myth as a force in Civilisation," and he found himself sitting next to Mr. Benn. This was so striking that the untailormade recluse spoke to the rich young man, and, finding that they were interested in the same subject, from the same point of view, they walked back together discussing it.

The lecturer had laid special emphasis on the advantage of religious myths to the race in its earliest struggle with all nature, because they had brought solace to the miserable, given cohesion to tribes, and tended to idealise mankind by enlarging the faculty of wonder and the imagination generally. Of course, in so orthodox a home of myths as Oxford, he made no reference to any religion which is a respectable-going concern, but he spent his gibe or his jest on the dead.

"I thought he brought out very clearly the part that imagination played in all early religions," said the Rev. George Benn.

"Yes; but I should have been more interested had he told us the part imagination plays in all present religions," replied Mark.

"That would not have been either polite or safe."

"Why?"

"Because, in the first place, he does not know, and so might have been contradicted; and, further, his influence as professor would not be so great if he were to say all he knows."

"What humbug!" said Mark bitterly.

"He would hardly like to call it that," said Mr. Benn meekly.

"But what else can you call it? A man is selected out of the whole of England to lecture on a subject because he knows more of it than anyone else, and the University pays him £400 or £500 a year *not* to tell."

Mark laughed as he had not laughed that term. It was undoubtedly comic. Mr. Benn had a high respect for shadows, and therefore did not seem to relish the thought of exposing truth, as a naked babe, to the wind of criticism. But Mark continued—

"If you had the professor of astronomy to lecture on the value of his science to sailors, would you not laugh if he confined his remarks to the discoveries which were made before Newton's time?"

"Certainly; but astronomy has not so much to do with the emotions as religion; besides, very few

know anything of astronomy, but every fool knows all about religion. We must keep our religious inquiries to ourselves."

"Then we may inquire?" asked Mark.

"Certainly. I should not mind telling *you* anything about religion, but that is quite different from declaring it on the housetop."

"Well, then, please, tell me if you think all religions have the same origin?"

"I should certainly say they have. Everything has a common origin. Man had a religion thousands of years before the Jews existed, and the term, Mosaic Law, is a brilliant sacred pun, for it consists of several little bits taken from every race with whom the Jews came in contact."

"How, then, would you say that religion took its present form?"

"I think the first ruling element is fear something may happen to us; the next is selfishness—I must save myself from the unpleasant and harmful; then imagination decked the past and the future, custom sanctified ancient rites; and sooner or later came the priest, who crystallised the alarms of others into a fixed income for himself."

"Does it not, then, become the duty of you, who know, to undeceive those who do not?"

"It is the duty of no one to do the impossible. Every man's ancestors reappear in his visions and his religions, and to destroy them would be to destroy him. A man grows out of religion, but it is torn from him never. Think of the number of religions man has outgrown, and throughout all his history he has laid aside every religion when it has grown sufficiently unreasonable. There is quite enough comfort in that."

"What would you say was exactly the origin of all religions?"

"Ancestor worship. A man thought of his dead father, dreamed of him in the night, and thus seemed to see him and talk with him. The savage was not aware that he could dream, and therefore he mistook his dreams for reality. He thought he saw the ghost of the dead ancestor, as he knew the ancestor was buried. Then with fear and trembling he began to offer him food and sacrifices and worship.

"Of course, woven in with all this, more or less, he mistook the powers of nature for persons, and created gods and demons out of them.

"We do not yet know how largely astronomy has contributed to the present form of some religions. It is very striking to see representations of the goddess mother and child in many Egyptian temples, quite like the Madonna and Child of the Roman Church; but it is still more striking to learn that the temples are dedicated to stars, and that the mother and child are a symbol of the star Sirius and the rising sun. This mother and child were afterwards worshipped as the goddess Isis and her son Horus. Nothing could go beyond this in personifying natural objects."

"It seems a small beginning for a power which has spread through the world."

"Yes; but at that time the faculties and experience of man were small; as he grew, his religion grew, till it became bloody in its cruelty and decorated with delusions."

"I suppose, then, that several races began religion on their own account and in the same way?"

"Doubtless. But still, some races never began. It is a missionary fable which says that every race of man has a god, a religion, and a future life. There are races without any of these."

"How do you account for the wide area covered by the more powerful religions?"

"It is chiefly due to conquest. All through known history, we find that the conquering race has not only reduced the vanquished to slavery, but has also dethroned the gods of the vanquished, and either they have been forgotten or allowed to survive as devils."

"But I thought the religion of Jesus differed from other religions in this point, that it was devoid of conquest by the sword."

"So it is; and for that reason it has never spread. No Church ever adopted the religion of Jesus, because it does not lend itself to the tricks of the priest or the politician. Every Church has made a mongrel monstrosity, and mocked it with the name of Christ, in order to hoodwink the poor and flatter the rich. Christianity has become a pagan show, or an emotional narcotic of the medicine-man."

"How then does it maintain its ground?"

"Chiefly because few, except hired professionals, really study the Gospels. If the Gospels were read and believed, our developed and gorgeous

Christianity would be 'as grass cut down, dried up and withered.' Of course, the change will come, and I often wonder how. It certainly would be interesting to see Christianity destroyed by faith in Christ!

"But one thing we do know, we need have no fear. In religion, as in all else, man will, in the end, choose what is best for him."

"Then you have no fear of terrible consequences if the masses should abandon their old faiths?"

"None whatever. It has already been tried on a large scale, with no alarming results. In our country districts, religion is dead, yet the men and women are peaceable, honest, thrifty, contented cattle, toiling away their lives to enrich those who have stolen the land."

CHAPTER XVII

AT the end of term, Mark found the attraction to Whitechapel irresistible. So this time he arranged beforehand to go and dine and stay all night in the Home, where devoted young men were making heroic efforts to "elevate the masses," with or without religion. He arrived at Whitechapel station as the workers were streaming home in those countless masses which throng Mile End Road and Commercial Road at that hour. As he would not trust himself to wander in the direction of Miss Burnett's lodgings, for she was expecting him the next morning, he secured one of the omnipresent arab-boys to show him the way, under the pretext of carrying a small bag. He was the guest of Pearson of Squire's, who was "eating his dinners," a solemn preparation for "the law." In this region, where poverty decivilises man, Mark failed to note that Pearson's

room was other than that which he had enjoyed at college. Pearson "dressed" for dinner, and Mark had to apologise because he had not expected this. The dining-hall was almost baronial, and over the fireplace hung a Madonna much better dressed and nurtured than anything Mary would have aspired to in her palmiest days. Most who dined, including the Principal and his wife, were in evening dress, and the guest of the evening was Mr. Carewe, the artist so widely famous for painting fish, who was to lecture in the hall that night on the elevating power of art, when it did not debase nature. The conversation at dinner was sufficiently polite to treat nothing in earnest. After dinner came the coffee and cigarettes in their several rooms, and at nine the lecture began. The hall was not crowded; some hundred and twenty of the better fed artisans and small trading class had come to listen to Mr. Carewe, and the lecture may have been new to most of them.

Mark sat up till midnight in Pearson's room, and they "discussed" excellent cigars, and remedies for the poor; but as Pearson was a political economist, "following the law," his remedies were chiefly

such as would have commended themselves to a committee of the Charity Organisation Society, presided over by the hangman. Mark might have found all this less wearisome on any other occasion, but he was going to see Miss Burnett in the morning, and all his destiny might hang on that interview.

The morning came, and after breakfast he saw all the various rooms for clubs, games, reading, etc., till the slow hours dragged to eleven nearly, then he shook off Pearson and almost ran till he gained the street. That electric wave which has carried measureless generations to delight or death, was sweeping him to his doom. No explanation of this has been given to the sons of men. It has never been accounted for, in any theory of the universe; this strange power which is everywhere and almighty, and which renews its youth in every generation. All that most can tell us is, it came, it conquered, and the happy add—it remained. Whence? Why? Uncalled, uncontrolled fire ecstasy! No marvel that blind homage reared its altars to a god of love! So men named this hidden force, which takes of all that is lovely

in dreams and holy in religion to give it an immortality of animal delight. No spectre riddle is this, though the feeble few, whose imaginations are not tinged with life, would fain evaporate passion into some spiritual ether, floating motionless between heaven and earth.

No spectre could transfigure Whitechapel as it was transfigured this morning to Mark Goode.

A shock awaited him on admission to Miss Burnett's room, for the three months had wrought a great change in her health, so that even Mark, inexperienced in all these things, felt she must be seriously ill.

As, with an expression of astonishment, he held her hand and looked into that sweet, pale face, he longed to take her in his arms and carry her away to some land of sunshine, where flowers perfume the air and waves flash back their blueness to the sky.

Miss Burnett may have felt conscious of this, for she urged him quickly to be seated, and to divert his attention from herself and her looks, she said—

"So you were at the Home last night? In that

you have beaten me; I have never even seen it. What did you find there?"

"I found some pleasant rooms and a large dining-hall, in which evening dress prevailed, and good cheer was abundant."

"How many of the East Enders dined with you?"

"None. The Home cannot give them dinner, but it offers them culture."

"Now, Mr. Goode, do you believe in that style of thing? Is it likely that a few well-fed people, in a ridiculously ancient form of dress, are going to touch the lives of those who welter in the lava of want for a few weeks and then die?"

"Well, I confess I was not greatly struck, but perhaps I was not in a right frame of mind. I do not wish, however, to misrepresent them. They have lectures on art and music, and a library, and all that sort of thing, and I am not sure they have not some form of religion."

"No doubt; most well-fed people have! Please do not be shocked, but I have been to one of my bad cases this morning, and the dying woman has been harassed by one well-fed man who insisted

upon her paying his rent, and by another who insisted upon her confessing her sins."

"And could she do neither?"

"No; she gave them both the same answer—she rolled her eyes as if in amazement at their inhumanity, then felt for my hand, and died! That is the way we answer most questions here."

Either Miss Burnett emphasised the *we*, or Mark had not recovered from the shock of seeing her so ill; at anyrate, in that connection it filled him with dread, and he said—

"You alarm me, Miss Burnett. What would you have the people at the Home do?"

"They should die rather than dine."

"But that seems exceedingly hard, and surely it would frustrate the very object of the Home?"

"I do not see how it can be hard for Christians to die. I have always remembered a clever saying I heard from your aunt. She had been a few weeks somewhere for her health—Bournemouth, I believe. At anyrate, they were all very good and pious; crowded churches, prayer-meetings, and all that, and your aunt said, 'They all long to go to heaven, but they have fled to Bournemouth for

fear the Lord should take them a week too soon.' Your aunt often says sharp things, does she not?"

"Often. Sometimes too sharp for me. But now, tell me more of this theory of dying. Is it very quickly brought to pass here?"

"Very."

"But surely you do not intend to stay here, merely to walk into death."

"Well, there is no immediate prospect of that, but in the end, of course, I have no other hope, and that end must come early."

"But, if you must work here, could you not go away a few weeks or months each year, and gain strength?"

"No. I have no money and I have no desire. None of my friends go away, and you have forgotten that I have selected *their* life. Help offered from the outside is *unchristian.* 'For your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich' (2 Cor. viii. 9). 'He laid down His life for us; and *we* ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 John iii. 16). Christianity is not something between this doctrine and the State Church—it is this or nothing. Please remember,

I know the hollow world, and the only thing more deadly hollow is the religion which adds a flavour of sweetness to the lives of the rich and the powerful."

Poor Mark felt he was losing. The young face was no longer pale, but flushed with enthusiasm and kindled with compassion, and the eyes shone with a living tenderness. How lovely she looked in the old faded black gown, with her fair hair neatly gathered from her white round brow! As he gazed in reverent silence, she thought perchance she had pained him, so she added softly—

"I do not say that I can interpret duty to others, but you see I am so certain about my duty."

"Yes, Miss Burnett; I do not wish to question your interpretation of Christ's life. You know better than I, and since I last saw you here I have thought much of it, and I assure you I am afraid you are right. Still, would you not be willing to make some abatement? Please do not misunderstand me, but if you had money to help all your friends"—

"Believe me, money *given* could never help these

people. Food and nursing are an important part, but they gain their importance because they are only a part of something of higher value to humanity. As for an official gift of soup, we might as well send soup to the angels. These people are defrauded of life, and it is life which they need."

"But if others depended upon your life, would you pursue this course?"

"I cannot say. I might be as foolishly weak as others who have family ties, but I am spared that trial: you see no one depends upon me—I am solitary."

"Miss Burnett, *I* depend upon you!"

It may be an odd declaration of love. It may not sound full of the music of romance; but his intensity of self-surrender, his despairing helplessness thrilled her, till it seemed her heart stood still. There was a pause—the very air seemed charged with expectancy, like the earliest moments of a summer dawn. Then he said, and his voice quivered—

"I absolutely depend upon you. There is no life for me without you. Should you despise me,

I must wander in these streets to gaze on you. Will you say that I may love you?"

Rachel was speechless from surging emotion. True, she had known him long, and his last visit had filled many an hour's memory with sunshine; but—her life was out of his world, she had long ago buried hope, and around the black rock of her doom there had rustled no wing of the angel love. She had crushed her young hopes into her heart till it broke, and broken-hearted she had dwelt on a ghastly Golgotha, where the broken-hearted struggle with each other for death. To be called from such gloom by the sweet-voiced one, and to find by her side love in all the might of his tenderness, deprived her of speech.

She bowed her head in reverent and amazed silence. No tongue can tell the visions which kissed hope to life and decked him with garlands in that instant. And when Mark softly asked for an answer, those changed eyes looked up to him through wet eyelashes, and she said—

"Do not ask me to choose between life and duty!"

"I say nothing of duty, nothing of the future,

I do not venture to ask if you can learn to love me, some day. I beg that you will let me tell you of my love, let me show it a little, let me call you Rachel—my Rachel."

His pleading was a cry of anguish.

She quivered as if in the agony of death—it was the resurrection of her buried youth.

. . . . . .

Thus far love prevailed.

She must stay for the present, and he must go to Oxford next term just as usual, and then they would meet again. And so these two young lives crept beneath the wings of hope. He had also succeeded in making her his banker for all the claims of her world, though he doubted whether she would use the money.

And when at parting he held that sweet face clasped in his two strong hands, he kissed her tenderly and fled to hide his welling tears.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR many hours Mark Goode lived in a delicious dream of ecstasy. Life had been awakened on its native mount of transfiguration. No life can be deemed absolutely dark or fruitless to which there has come in early youth such rapture and such hope. His joy bubbled over and flooded our commonest pursuits. The early spring sunshine and the festivities of Easter suited well his new-born happiness.

He did not tell his uncle and aunt of the cause. As nothing definite had been settled, he did not see that any good would be gained by so doing, and it might create difficulties. So in spite of the Carltons and others, who seemed to think that the vacations were given to foster idleness, he pursued his studies steadily, and there was much talk at the Deanery about his coming examination. Mrs. Drewe wished it well

over, for she thought the study of science a waste of energy, except for a doctor, and she was not sure that a young man of wealth and fashion ought to enter the common lists of competitive examinations, and risk being beaten by the schoolmaster's son, or some such "nobody." The Dean rejoiced to see such boyish glee, for he regarded it as a triumph of health and youth over the wearisome grind of "honour work."

Easter Day brought its usual brilliance of festive display, choice flowers, richest music, numerous and crowded services. The resident canon preached in the morning, but the festival did not inspire him with any triumphant joy; he dwelt upon the importance of this article of their creed, but it was in a dusty, dogmatic way, rather suited to one checking off a list of fossils than to the herald of the world's greatest hope. In the evening another preacher drew inferences from the incidents of the morning of the resurrection to show the importance of "*early* communion." These dry-as-dust details, in the the presence of the greatest fact or the most

splendid fiction of mankind, jarred upon Mark terribly.

He was happy in such an infinitude of joy, that he wanted more than one life, feeble as the shadow of a straw, in which to expand his delight. To him it seemed necessary to have æons of quivering light, whose brilliant centuries should only make the *dawn* of love's immortal day. But faith is more easily satisfied than love, hence, perchance, his disappointment. The preachers handled their theme as if they were not sure of it, or as if they had no one on the wide earth for whom they craved immortal youth.

So in the study that evening, Mark said, "I have been greatly disappointed to-day, uncle, in both the sermons."

"Why?"

"Because the preachers had the greatest theme ever put into the mind of man, and yet neither of them seemed to care much about it. There was no hearty jubilation. Now surely, if there is a future life for man, all else we talk of is merely dust in the balance compared with it."

"Certainly. But the resurrection no longer gives the assurance it used to. The apostles made so many mistakes about the nature of Christ's kingdom, and the time of its coming, that many look with suspicion upon the eager expectations of the early Church."

"I see. Then possibly neither of the preachers were quite sure of the resurrection or the future life. I wish I were sure!"

"So do thousands, my dear boy, but the longer they inquire, the more uncertain do they become. All the séances of performing spooks, the psychic diaries of galvanised media, and such like goblin-hunting, are either the tricks of imposture or a desire to get some modern to countersign the dreams of the ancients."

"I think the resurrection presents the greatest difficulty in Christianity."

"Do you mean to believe it literally is so difficult?"

"No, but that those who do believe it, act as if their faith were a bubble. Still, I used to believe it, so long as I held the Christmas-tree theory of the universe."

"I suppose we all did then, but, as you say, it made no difference. The first thing that made me doubtful about it was that nowhere in the Gospels is there any record of Christ's telling us anything about a future life which is clear and definite, or such as a man might not evolve by the aid of a fervid imagination; the next point was that the apostles seem all of them to have been deluded in their expectations; and finally, after grasping the evolution of the world, there remains no region in which those pure spirits can congregate."

"That, of course, strikes me very forcibly, and I am often amused at those who believe in evolution, and yet piously deck their little Christmas tree with all things delightful to the imagination. They forget that their own Bible tells them a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast, just because that is not a pleasant thing to believe. All religion seems to rest ultimately on the sugar-plum theory of a spoiled child."

"Often the wish is father to the creed, as well as 'to the thought.' We so soon learn to expect what we desire; and it is so easy to believe what

we both desire and expect; and when all these three meet in one, we call it absolute truth. It is terrible to think how easily we are gulled. Have you had time to think of Professor Winchley's theory of hypnotism?"

"I have pondered it daily. Could I see him? I mean, would he be willing to talk freely to me about it? His theory seems to offer the solution of some of the greatest difficulties connected with religion."

"Which do you mean?"

"Well, it makes so little difference, really, what is the origin of religion; the great fact is that we have it, and that it did not originate in a pious fraud, but in a living necessity of the nature of man. It has grown with him as any other art or science has grown, and there must be a reasonable explanation of the similarity of all religions in this one point, that they all equally well satisfy their believers; each religion brings strength to the individual and is a centre of unity to the tribe. Then millions of people hold that each religion (*i.e.* their own) is of divine origin, and no doubt religion has been connected

by some natural law with the noblest lives of the period; then finally, when they change their religion, a nation merely alters the object of its worship and a bit of its ritual, turns its old gods into devils, and the new religion supplies exactly the same needs as the old. Now, if Professor Winchley can give me the key to these problems, I shall feel I am making headway."

"I think he can. I will write and ask him if he can spend a few days here this vacation, or see you in London as you go up."

"Do you remember how he explains the extraordinary difference between popery and puritanism; I mean on his theory of hypnotism?"

"Simply thus — in each case the believer is hypnotised or hypnotises himself; the Roman Catholics and all their school, in every Church, are most frequently in need of something external and visible; whereas the Puritans are more subjective, and can hypnotise themselves quite easily without any external object. It is merely a difference of method. But you must ask the Professor."

"I saw a little of the Puritan method at the Cookes'. I should like to study the same among the Roman Catholics."

"Well, come with me next week to Kearby, and you can see it. I am going to speak at a meeting there for the Vicar, Reverend Henry Graves. He is a ritualist, and the ritualists use exactly the same method as the Romans. I have escaped him for years, but he is so urgent that I cannot put him off this time without seeming rude. He is very rich, or rather, his wife is, and they would be greatly charmed if you would go with me. You might stay for the Sunday, and in the services of the Easter octave you would see something, I imagine."

"Yes, that will do. I shall be glad to go."

CHAPTER XIX

THE Reverend Henry Graves had lived at Kearby more than twenty years, and during that time had employed a staff of three curates. The population of Kearby was just over three thousand. The parish church was old, but well restored, for Mr. Graves had spent many thousands on the fabric. He had daily celebration of Holy Communion at eight, all the year round, evensong every week-day at five, litany at eleven on Wednesdays and Fridays, with special services on saints' days, and guilds and classes many. The very fine organ was the gift of Mrs. Graves, as were also the lovely vestments, which were the special pride and glory of young men from Oxford who went to be his curates. At first the pious few in Kearby thought Mr. Graves a Jesuit in disguise, and said so; they not only stayed away from church, but endeavoured to prevail upon

others to do the same. All this, however, soon died down, for Mr. Graves had a sweet professional smile, and his words were sweeter than butter; then he employed many workmen, and his very large establishment made it a matter of considerable interest to the tradespeople to secure his custom; the little choir boys were paid on their attendance, and had two treats a year, and as they knew no difference between the Devil and the Pope, they would have sung the chants of the Druids with no less reverence than the Psalms of David. So vested interests prevailed, and money bought admiration, till some of the pious-minded, as they watched the choir with their banners march in procession up the aisle, thought they had a foretaste of heaven.

Mr. Graves was eaten up with ambition. He possessed that vanity, selfishness, and hysteria, which usually make an ardent lover; but he had also that belief in some mysterious power, by virtue of which he felt he represented God to his fellow-men, and this belief always debases the ardent lover into a priest. Born poor, he

had early gone as a clerk into a money-lender's office. There he learned the power of gold, and became expert in all those refinements of fraud by which the money-lender becomes a legalised murderer, till he retires with a fortune, which brings him as much social glory as attaches to a renowned general. In fact, there is no virtue which can win the smile of society and the blessing of the Church so quickly as well-organised murder, having of course due respect to the form thereof.

In this office Mr. Graves developed instincts which were never afterwards suppressed; he also did a little business on his own account, and saved a few pounds. This might, with fair success have satisfied his vanity and selfishness, but it could not satisfy the hysteria, so on Sundays he taught in school and conducted a mission. In a self-complacent hour after one of his Sunday night orations, he felt "called" to the sacred office. He spent his hoarded pounds in going to a theological college, and he had been ordained about three years, when he saw the announcement of the sudden death of Samuel Blackson, Esq.,

his former chief. Now, Mr. Graves had a correct idea of the vast wealth Mr. Blackson had acquired, and he also knew that Miss Blackson, his only child, was exceedingly plain-looking, and no longer young. He had learned by bitter experience that to be a curate is not to be a potentate in this gilded nineteenth century; indeed, he had found that his social position was but a little higher than that of an angel. He still had to teach in Sunday school, and go to choir practices, with no more dignity and less power than the organ-blower. Therefore he suddenly remembered his great affection and admiration for the late Mr. Blackson, and wrote a religious letter to Miss Blackson, with such references to the fatherly protection of God, and such assurances of his own friendship, as might please a desolate young lady who revered the Church. Miss Blackson was charmed with the high sentiment and real friendship manifested by this letter. She wished she could say such sweet things of her father, and she tried to think she believed them, though it was a hard task, as Mr. Blackson had been so hardened by his professional work, that

the more amiable virtues had given place to other metal.

The Reverend Henry Graves pursued his quarry with the unerring instincts of a professional. There was gold, and the lust of gold possessed him. He found an excuse for going to see Miss Blackson; he listened to the tale of her worries, and led her on to tell him the chief desires of her heart. Then he made himself useful in some business matters, and took all her worries in pawn and gave her smiles in exchange; and finally, flattering in turn all the things he had heard her admire, he left her to marvel over his angelic sweetness, and to wish she had a brother. The business items required time, and it was necessary to see her at least once over each of them, so that in a fortnight Miss Blackson looked upon him as an old and intimate friend.

Meanwhile, he had increased her admiration for the Church, shown her the beauties of the architecture of Westminster Abbey, bought a new suit of clothes, and in this and other ways had duly impressed her with his marvellous knowledge, his imperturbable sweetness, and his

glorious future; then, fortified by two extra glasses of sherry at lunch with her, he made his declaration of a passion which was consuming his soul and darkening heaven. The heiress was dumb with amazement at first, but when he had bedewed her cuffs with his tears, and uttered the lavish protestations of the stage, with the reality of despair and death, she began to see the situation, and flattery completed the rest. They had four o'clock tea as an engaged couple, and each seemed to have found a new inward satisfaction. He knew he should be rich, and the rich parson takes possession of heaven and earth. She had found a husband—after all the years of waiting without hope, and being assured by every pretty girl of her acquaintance that it was impossible for all women to marry nowadays. It was a proud triumph to be able to announce her engagement to them; and, sweetest of all, it was a religious betrothal, and a clergyman loved her for her devotion to the Church, and they had knelt down over the same Bible, when they solemnly vowed eternal love to each other.

Love is sweet, but love and religion are far sweeter. No *man* can know the delight with which a religious woman takes love by the hand to her life's shrine and feels that God is happier in heaven for the knowledge of it.

The Reverend Henry returned to his lodgings a veritable giant refreshed with new wine. He had found the tonic of hope fulfilled and ideals realised. With the instincts of an expert he went over the whole situation, and most carefully examined every step, from that moment to the time when they would sign the marriage register in the vestry. There was neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, to interfere with her and cause her to change her mind, but—he shuddered with horror at the thought—but women were changeable! He had been to Somerset House and verified the will; he knew the value of his prize—absolute control of over a hundred thousand pounds. He thanked God with great ardour for this crowning mercy, and confided to his Maker that he did not deserve it. Then in humble calm he walked up and down his room, dreamed dreams, and impatiently waited

for the hour which should place Henry Graves in the proper rank among his fellow-men.

Next morning he ordered another suit of clothes, he borrowed thirty pounds, so that he might buy an elaborate engagement ring, and pay all travelling expenses, so that Miss Blackson might forget her wealth and remember only love.

Still, it was an anxious two months before the wedding. As they drove from church, he left fear behind and saw only gold. After a month abroad, they returned home, and their only care was to buy a living suitable to the dignity of their position, that is, to their wealth.

At last Kearby was "arranged," and the Reverend Henry took an oath before God and the Bishop that he had not bought it, and was properly instituted and inducted. Oaths go for so little in "the Church," that he never remembered even that he had taken it or broken it.

All else he had. As he never loved his wife, she never found it out. For on this one point, to love a woman's money is superior to

loving her, the lover can never be disappointed; and as all his lavish affection is a bit of acting, it is as easy to act after marriage as before, and the wife tells all her friends that love is unchangeable.

Miss Graves had left school nearly five years ago, and was now about twenty-three. She had a narrow mind, a plain face, a bright smile, a clever tongue, great faith in the Church, and spoke of people who were not well off as "the lower orders." She believed that the Church of England existed before the Church of Rome, for she took her Church history from her papa and the *Church Times*.

Mrs. Graves was a full-blown female ecclesiastic, and as that species can never be mistaken, she needs no further description.

Such was the home which the Dean and Mark Goode visited on the Thursday after Easter. It was a great event to have secured the Dean for the annual parochial gathering at the Church Institute; everything was carefully prepared, and a report had been written by Mr. Graves, for the secretary to read, the brilliance of which

might have dazzled the head waiter at a first-class hotel.

That the Dean should have taken his rich and clever nephew, with whom Miss Graves had once danced at the county ball, was esteemed a great distinction, and almost enough to provide a patent paradise. It offered such infinite possibilities. All the old professional instincts of the Reverend Henry were aroused. Great God! if he could only secure Mark for a son!

Everywhere was magnificence! The brougham and pair met them at the station; the skeletons had been locked up; the wreathed smiles of a new heaven were brought out; the curates were kept in a well-ordered background; one was invited to dine, that his presence might complete the array of dependants; and the banquet would have roused the dying Vitellius by a mere recital of its delights.

CHAPTER XX

THE meeting was one of those occasions, known in every well-regulated parish, when solemnity no longer veils worldliness, when bad jokes are applauded to the echo, and when the whole parish meets as a mutual congratulation society. The Dean was one of those many men who can talk well in his own study, and say little on a platform. Still, he was venerable in appearance, amiable in manner, and he found some things in the report worthy of praise, and, above all, he was the Dean.

So all went well.

It was easily arranged that Mark should remain a day or two under some pretext; but as the Rev. Henry Graves never accepted the reason given as the real reason, he spent some hours each week in seeking for the hidden motives of his friends; in this case it was a simple matter,

for the presence of his daughter offered the obvious explanation.

Mark had already, quite unconsciously, leapt into favour, for he rose in time to go to the eight o'clock celebration. There were seven people there, *including* the Vicar, the curate, and the verger, but only four communicated; Mark was one of the three who did not. Now, it was counted for special righteousness at the Vicarage to go to communion and not communicate. It was, of course, a great thing to go to early communion, but only the innermost circle of the faithful knew how to extract a greater blessing by *not* communicating, than those feebler souls obtained by actually partaking of the communion.

Now, had Mark been an astute politician rehearsing lies for a general election, he could not have done anything so charming as this accident. All the family of Graves took him into their inner brotherhood, and talked freely of those Popish mysteries which characterise a Protestant Church. It was doubly gratifying to the Vicar, because it showed that the Dean was with them "in his heart of hearts," otherwise his nephew

would not have thus avowed his belief in the old Catholic faith.

After the Dean had left, Mr. Graves showed Mark over the church and schools, and told him of various triumphs of the church.

"When I came, there were three chapels, and Sunday meetings in a cottage. We have shut up one chapel entirely, and the cottage meetings have long been discontinued, and the schisms in the other two chapels are dying a lingering death. It is amazing what the Catholic faith can do, when presented in its fulness."

"Do you co-operate in any way with the chapel folk?" asked Mark.

"No! I have no ill-feeling towards them; but it is impossible to fraternise with them publicly. They are so fanatical and self-willed. At one time we tried to do temperance work with them; but when a young fellow refused to take the blessed chalice at the Holy Eucharist, because he had been a Band of Hope boy and could not taste alcohol, I abjured the temperance movement. I could not sleep for weeks. I felt I had been guilty of the sin of heresy in encouraging a

fad that came in collision with the Catholic faith."

"But I thought there was some difference of opinion among commentators, as to whether fermented wine was used at the original 'institution.' Of course you know better than I do; but I remember hearing it discussed at the Deanery."

"Commentators may differ; but the Catholic Church has never had any doubts on the point. When scholars interfere with doctrine, they only put forth an 'arm of flesh' to profane the ark of God, and if they could fall dead, as did Uzzah (2 Sam. vi. 7), our dear country would not be polluted by the striving sects, as it is now. It makes me shudder to walk past this chapel. Here, once every three months, does some man, who perhaps a year or two ago was a tailor or shoemaker, go through the solemn mockery of distributing the bread and wine. O my God! It does but prove Thy infinite mercy, that they are not cut off in the act!"

"Then you are quite clear that a duly ordained ministry is a necessity for a valid sacrament, are you, Mr. Graves?"

"Without a doubt. Our blessed Lord appointed His own channels of grace, and there is no promise that that grace can be obtained through any other channels. That the Church is right, is proved by her enormous power throughout the world, and by the blessings granted to individuals in thousands of cases. After a mission here, this was shown in a remarkable manner. At a five a.m. communion for working men, one of them was so overpowered by the divine presence, that it required two men to hold him up at the communion rail. His case produced a marvellous impression on the dissenters. Then, shortly after I came, I had a wonderful instance of the power of Catholic teaching. A carter had met with a serious accident, and the dissenters went and got hold of him. I called a few days after, and I could hear him shouting, 'Glory, glory!' before I entered the house. When I went upstairs, he shouted, 'Glory! I am ready to die. I am going to heaven.' I sat down, and I solemnly took a Bible out of my pocket, and I said, 'Tom, do you think you are going to heaven because you say so, or because you do what God tells you to do?' He was

silent. I took him slowly through the Ten Commandments; I showed him that he had broken every one of them, and that he was a guilty sinner before God, and that his only hope was to repent and receive absolution. I sobered him. I took all the glory nonsense out of him."

"What said the dissenters to that?"

"They were outrageously angry. They shouted after me in the street. They called me a Jesuit, Antichrist, a wolf in sheep's clothing, the devil in disguise. But that did not hurt me. I had effectually counteracted their ignorant blasphemy, and they could get no more power to charm Tom, for it was only a charm, a kind of mesmerism. For weeks I went every day to see Tom; I got him to make a full confession, and in the name of the Holy Church and the dying Redeemer I absolved him. I never saw such penitence—I never saw such peace. He was an ignorant ruffian, and became as a little child. I prepared him for his first communion, and his face lighted up with such a beaming grace that it reminded me of the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost. As he grew weaker, I had only to show him a picture

of the Crucified, or offer him this little crucifix to kiss, and the same holy peace, the same unearthly light always came, till he departed to paradise, saying, 'Lord, have mercy upon me.' There, again, the dissenters were beaten on their own ground; and but for their prejudice, which blinds the eyes like spiritual pride, they must have come over to Mother Church in a body."

CHAPTER XXI

As they walked through the sleepy old town, Mark heard much of the history of the last twenty years, and quietly noted that the chief successes of the Vicar began in a sort of rivalry with another religious order, and ended in substituting one hypnotic form for the other. It could not be denied that there was a great deal of work being done in the parish: schools and clubs seemed to make provision for young and old; the sick were visited and the dying comforted, by all means, from soup to a crucifix; a year ago it would have struck Mark as more praiseworthy than it now appeared. There was such a luxuriance of creeds, such a pomp of worship, and such an almightiness of power, that they banished all thought of the outcast Nazarene Reformer, except by contrast; that Jesus the Carpenter should be enthroned by the adulation of a hierarchy of priests,

seemed no more possible than that a cathedral should be built of the sawdust which fell from His bench in the Galilean workshop. The elements of the two were not only unlike, but contradictory, and their combination seemed to be earth's greatest impossibility. The life of a Pauper has been made the source of a religion that pays! The name of the Outcast has become a card of introduction to society!

No miracle recorded in the life of Jesus is half so difficult for a reflecting mind to believe, as the daily miracle wrought by His worshippers, who have substituted a delicate floating incense of adulation for the bloody sweat of travail. They cast lots to find who shall deftly filch away the seamless robe of His universal anarchism, and then, having arrayed Him in other-world purple and decked Him with a crown of dogmas, they place a withered reed of worldly power in His hand, and cry to their own bedizened handiwork, "Hail, King of the Church!" This figure of gorgeous tinsel our consecrated image-makers offer to the world's toilers as a substitute for a brother. But the toiler dies his death, and recks not that

the Church has entombed his hope in a "new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid."

Such thoughts were Mark's in these surroundings. To hear everything enforced by reference to the Catholic Church, primitive usage, or the Fathers, seemed like measuring a golden summer day by last winter's clouds. He felt choked in this Church atmosphere. So he remained in his room till the gong sounded for luncheon, and brooded over the fair image of Rachel Burnett, who was to him the angel of interpretation, opening the seals of mystery which the revolutionary Galilean bequeathed to His followers.

After luncheon a drive was arranged to the ruins of an old abbey. They rejoiced in the fresh air and the spring sunshine, which had been old with a fathomless antiquity, before man trod the earth, and which will be still young when his last religion has mouldered into a meaningless relic in some museum.

The Rev. Henry Graves always brought his guests to see these ruins. They offered him a text for many profound moralisings, as he walked around with Mrs. Graves leaning upon his arm,

listening in rapt admiration to his wisdom. He had mastered the architecture and history of this abbey, so that he could discourse upon it fluently, but above all it pleased him to identify the remains of a Saxon church, and dilate upon the glory of a religion which had used the same prayers and psalms for centuries, long before the Pope was the recognised leader of bloodshed and rapine, or Henry VIII. had founded a new aristocracy on the brutality of lust and the spoliation of the Church. It is the glory of the Ritualist that his religion is free from the impurities of both the three-crowned despot and brute Harry, though others are unable to see how he could have come into existence without either.

However, Mark raised no discussion, he was there to see, not to argue, and the venerable somnolence of the place was soothing. The ruins stood on a slight elevation and a river wound round its base, adding a sparkling beauty to the spring day.

After much talk on many subjects, and some real enjoyment of the scene, they drove back to be refreshed by afternoon tea. Mark began to

regret having stayed, as he thought of all the long hours before it would be bed-time, but after tea he wrote to Rachel in his own room, and under pretext of posting, he was able to enjoy a cigar, then he returned to dream by his own fire till the dressing-bell rang. The Vicar made his sermon on Fridays, so the guest had been left to the care of the ladies, and they were horrified to think how little they had seen of him. But he was unusually brilliant, and all went well. The dinner was shorn of some splendour because it was Friday, and fish was the orthodox diet. Mark wondered whether this was a pre-historic survival of the time when the Accadian religion originated in the river colony of Eridu. Music and gossip followed. Miss Graves played and sang well. She had her own day-dreams, and the faintest possible touch of hysterical impatience began to lend a pathos to her songs, which greatly improved them.

On Saturday morning Mark was wiser and did not lengthen his day by rising so early. They all met at nine for breakfast, and a drive occupied the morning. In the afternoon Mark

was asked by Miss Graves to go and see the church decorated. It was her usual Saturday afternoon's work, but this was a special day, as they were still in the octave of Easter.

The verger showed Mark the wonders of the church, its windows and sculpture, and ancient vestry with its oak panels, many of which were covered with the coats of arms of all the vicars. The arms of the Reverend Henry Graves were no less resplendent, though perhaps they were more original than the rest. Mark smiled at this outburst of Church-Grundyism, and in thoughtless fun asked the old verger where were the arms of Jesus Christ. The old man, in genuine astonishment, said "Lor' bless you, sir, He never had none, at least as I make it out, for they do always say as He was very poor. I can't rightly understand that, for nowadays nobody is poor as can help it. It seems very funny, sir!"

"Very," said Mark; "but there are strange things in religion."

Fortunately Miss Graves came in at that moment, and so Mark did not corrupt the verger's faith. The church was gorgeously

decked as a rich bride. The senior curate sat, robed, in a side chapel, and was receiving the confessions of sundry young ladies, who found a hypnotic satisfaction in telling a bedecked bachelor of their sins and other whims. This public game of playing the Lord Almighty, following the exhibition of Church-Grundyism, which with coats of arms had bedizened the humble ministers of the Nazarene, nearly convulsed Mark with laughter.

CHAPTER XXII

MARK abandoned his musing, and was almost hilarious at afternoon tea, and Miss Graves confessed to her mother, with some warmth, that she had had a most enjoyable afternoon. The Vicar had finished his sermon, the dinner was sumptuous, and no shadow of a care could be seen. They were sipping coffee in the drawing-room and criticising the pictures of various illustrated magazines, when the Reverend George Morrison, the senior curate, arrived. He had been a curate fourteen years in the diocese, six of which he had spent at Kearby, so that he was allowed the privilege of calling without formality. He was only waiting for a decent "living" to be presented to him, then he intended seeking the hand of Miss Graves, though she had treated curates as small fry hitherto. Mr. Morrison had scarcely taken the cup of coffee in his hand, when he began with

some vehemence, "Have you seen the *Church Times*, Vicar? Our Bishop has filled up the living of Cranfold."

"Really! Who has been appointed? It is worth having."

"Yes, the Bishop knew that, for he has given it to Jack Smalley."

"Who is Smalley? I don't seem to know him."

"He is the curate who married the youngest niece of the Bishop. Do you not remember, Mrs. Graves, his lordship's sister was a widow, and on her death-bed she got him to promise to look after her three daughters. So he took them to live with him, and they all married curates; that is why the Palace was called the head office of the Curates' Aid Society. But the Bishop kept his word, he has looked after them, for he has given each of them a fat living. There are only a few livings in the whole diocese worth having, and I think it is beastly unfair to bring a man down from London."

"It does not seem quite considerate," said Mrs. Graves timidly, for she was not sure whether she was not talking heresy, if she criticised a bishop.

"I think it is quite unkind," said Miss Graves sympathetically.

"It is a very difficult question, this Church patronage," said Mr. Graves solemnly.

"But, hang it all," said Mr. Morrison, "the old rascal promised"—

"Mr. Morrison!"

"No, not that!"

"I really can't allow you, Morrison, in my house!"

These three ejaculations were uttered in one storm by the whole family of Graves.

"I beg your pardon most sincerely, but his lordship distinctly promised me, if I would stay here, I should be offered the next vacancy, and then he gives it away to a man who was only two years in the diocese, and who is ten years my junior. So please forgive me, I think I have a little cause to feel irritated."

"I quite allow that," said Mrs. Graves. "Won't you take some cake?"

"Yes, do," warmly added Miss Graves; "you have to celebrate at noon to-morrow, and it is such a long time to go without food."

"Oh, thank you, I shall be all right. I am going to have a good steak at half-past eleven to-night, and I shall not get up till half-past ten to-morrow, so it never hurts me."

This struck Mark as a sensible way of preparing for "fasting communion," or rather feasting communion.

At length the irate curate left; Miss Graves played classical music; and Mark dreamed dreams till the day ended.

Next morning at eight the Vicar celebrated, the service was choral, the odour of flowers and incense filled the air, devout worshippers prostrated themselves to the floor and crept on their knees all along the chancel to the communion rail, and those of the inner circle of the faithful refused to take the wafer into their hands lest they should disturb its hallowed sanctity, so they put out their tongues, and the priest reverently placed the wafer on each protruding tongue, greatly pleased to see such utter abasement of the body.

It was sanctity set to music, and faith degraded to an art.

At breakfast the Vicar was radiant: the emotions

had been attuned; as a sacrificing priest he claimed descent from Melchizedek, and clad in his vestments, glittering with jewels, he felt that he wielded a sacred power older than the mummies of the Pharaohs. He explained to Mark, "When I came, they had evening communion here and not fifty communicants in the parish, and they had never heard of fasting communion. Now they would as soon think of breaking one of the Ten Commandments, as of going to evening communion. On Easter Day we had over two hundred communicants, and only eight of them at the noon service."

It occurred to Mark that there was as much to be said for evening communion as for any other, but it all seemed such trifling, that he made no reply, but helped Miss Graves to a poached egg and inquired after her Sunday school.

Matins were at 10.30: the Vicar preached on the value of fasting communion, and showed it was scarcely possible, on any other condition, to obtain the full blessing of the Holy Eucharist. If anything required proving, he referred to "the eternal glory of the triune God," "the overshadowing

Paraclete," or the "unbroken testimony of the Catholic Church."

At 11.30 came full choral celebration of the most gorgeous dimensions and of the fewest communicants.

The banners, the colours, the candles; the general incense and the special incense, the incensing the priests, the people, the books; the bowings, the marchings, the prostrations; all these required the drill of a guardsman before they could be undertaken, and the notion given to the outsider was something between the rehearsal of a pantomime and the realisation of the maudlin heaven of "the Revelation."

There were five communicants.

On their way from church, Mark asked Miss Graves, "Is it not a very expensive form of worship when it is so elaborate?"

"Very. We spend pounds on candles and flowers alone, and every Easter I am positively frightened at the bills for music and surplice-washing, for though they are in the churchwardens' account, we always have a good deal to make up."

"Then what about the beef-steaks? How do

you know how many to provide on Saturday night?"

"Oh, I see you are making fun of Mr. Morrison. That is only his way; papa always has soup and sherry last thing on Saturday night, and we send hot cocoa to the vestry to be ready the instant he is out of the service."

"No. I am not making fun of Mr. Morrison. I thought it very sensible. But I noticed they were poor old people who communicated, and as they have to come fasting, I felt sure you would feed them well overnight."

Miss Graves was not sure whether Mark was making fun of the custom or not, so she maintained a discreet silence and was puzzled. Had Mark arrived from some distant world to spend this day in the Vicarage, he would have justly concluded that the only object in life was to attend services in church. Still, the day passed in affluent ease, and there seemed to be no problems in religion or life, save only in the evening. Soon after tea, Miss Graves said, "I have just been reading this book of travels in China. Is it not a most awful thing that they should bind up the feet of

young children till they cannot walk. It makes me shudder to think of it."

"It is dreadful indeed, but fortunately it is not universal in China."

"I thought it was done to all the little girls."

"No, only, as a rule, to those who wish to be thought superior. It is one of the ways of making an aristocracy. If they can live without using their feet, clearly they can live without work, and so they prove they are superior to the working classes. It is as foolish as it is cruel, but something like it is attempted in all countries. To most people in this country, the word gentleman stands for a man who does not know any trade, and who has money without earning it."

"You are quite severe, Mr. Goode. If papa heard you talk in that way, he would think you were a Radical, but, of course, I know you are not. Still I do not see that we are so cruel as the Chinese; we do not bind up the limbs, which God has given us, so that we cannot use them."

"No; but we do what is infinitely worse, we bind up their brains."

"I do not understand. How?"

"By refusing to allow people to think. Very few dare think, and of those few, not one in ten dare say what he thinks."

"Surely, Mr. Goode, everybody is free to think what he likes."

"Pardon me, Miss Graves, far from it. If one of your servants should think about religion, which I suppose they never do, and should conclude that Mohammedanism or Popery were true, that servant would soon have to leave."

"One in the house, yes—well—I suppose so. At the Vicarage we must have only one religion."

"But why, Miss Graves, should you feel pity for a Chinese woman who has been prevented from walking, and not feel more pity for an English-woman who is equally prevented from thinking."

"But the girl's foot is crushed—hopelessly crushed—by main force. She has no choice."

"Pardon me, there is really no difference. No organ loses its power so soon as the brain, but if you tell a girl that she will be sent away if she dares to think, in a few years you take away both the desire and the power to think; you might as well have flattened in her forehead when she was

three days old. I still think ours is a worse cruelty than that of the Chinese."

"I am sorry you should. It does not seem so to me. Our girls are all very happy, and papa often says that it is all nonsense to suppose the poor can think, or form any opinion about politics or religion. You have no idea how troublesome people are who do think, or I am sure you would not side with them. It makes dissenters of them and all sorts of things."

"There you prove my point. Why should they not be dissenters if they wish?"

"Oh, Mr. Goode, how can you? What would the Dean say if he heard you?"

At this point the Vicar looked in. His scandalised daughter told him that Mr. Goode said a man might be a dissenter if he wished. The Vicar thought this was probably the aristocratic way of beginning a declaration of love, so he smilingly said that Mark was only teasing her, and no protests of Mark's could make him say anything else. But Miss Graves thought he was in earnest, and she pitied him and prayed for him in church that night.

CHAPTER XXIII

EARLY on Monday morning Mark left. He had received much kindness, and he was grateful, but the visit had not done so much for him as he had hoped. Feeling under the restraint of a guest, and wishing only to observe, he had been compelled to allow many utterances and usages to pass unchallenged, which he would have preferred to have discussed thoroughly.

On reaching the Deanery, he learned from his uncle that Professor Winchley was coming to spend next Sunday with them. As Mark had thought constantly upon the Professor's theory of religious hypnotism, he was greatly pleased at the prospect of the visit.

Meantime he turned eagerly to his Oxford studies; he longed to have the examination over; he dreamed daily of his freedom, when he hoped

to induce Rachel to leave Whitechapel, at least for a while.

As the Professor had come only for the Sunday, there was no time to lose, so after dinner on Saturday night, the Dean said, "My nephew is greatly interested in your explanation of religion as a hypnotic force, Dr. Winchley, and would be very glad to hear more about it. I only had notes of our conversation to read to him. By the way, why do you not bring your book out?"

"Many things, Mr. Dean, have prevented that book from seeing the light. My professional work has pressed heavily upon me; then the whole subject of religion and hypnotism and magnetism and nerves requires to be so much more carefully worked out, before I could offer scientific proof of my theory. And I am afraid one grows more cowardly as one grows older. I have children growing up, and you remember your enthusiastic cousin threatened me with ruin years ago, and that made me more cautious. So my volumes of notes lie unheeded, but I will gladly tell Mr. Goode any of the things

which led to my conclusion, if he will ask me questions."

"These are the notes my uncle gave me, and I should like to know if you have modified your conclusions at all, Dr. Winchley, since you held that mission," said Mark.

"Not in the least, except that I am more firmly convinced than ever that the origin of religion and the power it exerts are chiefly due to nerves, imagination, and magnetism. But though I think I have enough facts to support my conviction, they may utterly fail to satisfy another. We are not yet allowed to discuss religion as a thing of human growth, and consequently whole fields of knowledge on comparative religions are barely explored, and the specialist dare not utter his conclusions aloud.

"We are learning something about nerves, but even now some religious people speak of deranged nerves as demoniacal possession. As to the marvels of the imagination under the disturbance of hysteria, they require an array of experts even to catalogue them.

"Electricity as an applied force for the service

of man, or to the diseases of man, is a branch of science in its merest infancy, and it is only as yesterday, when all the medical profession derided mesmerism or hypnotism, so that we know very little more of it than children.

"Now you see it requires a number of experts in several departments to take up this question, but the time is not ripe and the men are not forthcoming."

"It is indeed a vast subject, and you make me despair of grasping it, though I am one of many thousands who are seeking a natural history of religion. I cannot imagine how you got the central idea that active religion is applied electricity."

"Well, let me say, I hardly use that term. The terms are to make yet, but facts are everywhere to hand. As you know, I had a long and intimate experience of all the religious phenomena which belong to the order known as Low Church or Methodistic. I knew the facts of that order of life, as neither you nor the Dean could know them, if you were to devote years to their study. I knew them from within. To my enthusiastic

faith they had been *absolute truth.* I was always religious, as I am still. But as I grew up, and studied medicine, one by one my cherished beliefs disappeared. I knew as absolute truth that they were wrong. Their special creation, only about six thousand years ago, the fall, an angry God, a hell, a good man put to death to set it all right—these things have no foundation in fact. Then I was in this difficulty—these people, by a faith that was all wrong, often formed characters which were lovely, side by side with extravagances which were ludicrous, but the extravagances were a fruit of the faith, as much as the loveliness of character.

"It flashed upon me, one day, as you know, that the force and the method were the same as those now used by experts in hypnotism. This helped me over many difficulties. It brought the whole question out of the mystery of the supernatural into the light of natural law!

"I give no name to the force because a better term may yet be invented, but when I turned to medical hypnotists, I found they verified my supposition at every step.

"Throughout the whole human family 'there is a proneness in men to allow themselves to be influenced by others through their ideas; and a psychological or physiological effect tends to appear in a man if he is expecting it.'

"In these two fundamental laws you have the beginnings of all hypnotism, whether medical or religious or sexual.

"The power of expectation is shown in the number of cases where people have been cured without medicine because they expected to be cured; or the cases where the sleepless have slept because they thought they had taken a sleeping draught and so expected to sleep; or, more marvellous still, in the cases of hysterical paralysis, the patients are often cured at the *exact moment* they expect to be cured. This used to be taken for prophecy. The fact is, the hysterical patient predicts a time, and is cured at that particular time because he expects to be. Countless mysterious effects can be thus explained. It has caused men to smell odours which were not there, and feel hands that were not present, and so forth. Aided by the

imagination, deranged by disease or fear, it can create and people a world of its own, than which nothing can be more real to the victim.

"Whether a man dies as an Indian warrior, a Buddhist devotee, a Mohammedan fanatic, or an English martyr, he dies feeling the same exultation in God, and rejoices in the same certainty of hope; and they all derive it from the same source."

"Have you any opinion of the earliest form of religion?"

"No. That is a question for the ethnologist. But I understand that every student of comparative religions brings to light some confirmation of their oneness. Of course one has been more ascetic, another more sacrificial, another more oracular, another more gorgeous in its worship, but these are mere accidental colourings. It is very remarkable that as man has grown more imaginative, or magnetic, or neurotic, his religions have become less gross."

"To what do you attribute the fact that in people of low culture, the religious are often more attractive in character than the non-religious?"

"There is, first, the imagination, the influence of which as an ennobling or elevating power is seen in poets. Next, the emotions are stronger by nature and more fully developed, which makes the religious warmer in their friendships and more enthusiastic in their pursuits. These two combined have done much to elevate the race—the imaginative man has given the world higher ideals, the emotional man has striven after them with amazing energy. When the two are combined in the same man, they produce the religious ascetic, or the saint, or the ardent lover, or the patriotic hero, or the revolutionary criminal."

"Are you of opinion that the forces which impel the lover and the saint are closely connected?"

"Very closely. Either one may kill the other by diverting all the force into one channel, but an ardent religionist was never a cold lover, or *vice versa.* What I may call the electric connection is everywhere. One day last summer, I was visiting a child suffering from serious nervous disorder, and I was delayed there by a violent

thunderstorm. As I talked with the mother, who is one of the noblest, most magnetic, and religious of women, beads of lightning were visible in her black hair, during the storm.

"Only last week, I was asked to see a great ritualistic mission preacher; he had come from a week's mission, utterly exhausted and with nerves deranged. He was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room, and, growing excited at some remark his wife made, he rose into the air at least two feet from the sofa and retained his horizontal position. I have seen this kind of thing in revivals, when, of course, it was attributed to the Holy Spirit."

"Then one question more, Dr. Winchley. Do you think that man is likely to lose his religion?"

"It is difficult to conjecture. As he becomes more developed and complex, that is, has a finer nervous organisation, his religion will be of a more idealised type, but he may still retain it. One cannot say. Mankind have lost their tails, and they are losing their hair and teeth, and the day may come when they lose all forms of religion."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE conversation was prolonged and became more general, and they retired at a late hour.

Dr. Winchley attended the Cathedral services next day, with great reverence and manifest enjoyment.

In the afternoon he and Mark took a walk; and as they passed a chapel, the Doctor stopped and remarked, "That is one of Wesley's best hymns. What a hypnotist he was! People used to go mad who heard his preaching, and refused to be converted, or, in other words, refused to co-operate with him. I was greatly interested a short time ago in reading of a mission clergyman, who had done a wonderful work by meetings in a cottage, but when he moved into another cottage, about half a mile farther, he got no result. Another time he was preaching out of doors, and in *one direction* all the people 'fell down on their knees

and cried for mercy,' and it looked just as if a pathway had been made through the crowd. That was a clear case of something like an electric wave, was it not?"

"Very. I do wish you could work out this theory, and give it to the world. It seems to offer a much more reasonable view of religion, than either to deride it or to be superstitious about it."

"To deride religion is as sensible as to deride our eyesight. We have acquired them both, and we have found both useful. What we have to do is to adapt both to our needs, and amend them where necessary. Listening to this hymn, with a thousand associations, hypnotises me by its mere sound, and I see visions of hopes that are buried now, and I dream of hopes that will never be realised in my time. Now, if I were to enter this chapel and give way to an old welling emotion, *you* would think I had gone mad, *they* would say I was saved; and I know that you would all be wrong. It is a nervous exaltation, which many can produce almost at will, and it is contagious. By this means the will is weakened, and the man is open to suggestion. And the marvel is, that by

the power of suggestion, character or disease can be permanently altered. The fact is, they are both physical. Let us go, the hymn is finished."

"There I think your view would be so helpful, because it substitutes a known force acting upon a known object, instead of an unknown power acting upon an equally unknown spirit."

"Certainly. It would clear up many mysteries. It would do away with the dark superstition of dividing man into compartments of body, soul, and spirit. How any reflecting man could allot our emotions to the soul, and yet deny a soul to the other animals, which have the same emotions, is jest enough to kill one with laughter. Still we must ever remember man did the best he could when he made the invention, and it is so much easier to believe than to prove."

"But how are we to make it known? I feel guilty in withholding any scientific discovery from my fellow-men. Can we do nothing?"

"Nothing—Yes, perhaps, we can help inquiring individuals. But we can do nothing by attempting to correct religions. That is where I admire the wisdom of the Dean; he does not seek to

amend, or destroy, or deny. He knows the truth, but he respects mankind, even in the weakness of their superstition. You might as well strive to prevent men from having their first set of teeth, which seems a great waste of energy, as try to prevent them from having the superstitions of the childhood of the race. The teeth and the superstitions are there by the same law, only it has become general to shed the early teeth, but it has not yet become general to cast off the early superstitions. There are, however, not lacking indications that in some future age man will have religion as he now has measles."

"I do not know whether that is altogether comforting."

"It is comforting to me in this way. Man can never escape the history of his own growth, and he can never make a brand-new history. Even the boldest in spirit and the most daring in speculation are like caged wild animals—we are all encaged in the past, or, to speak more accurately, we are all grafted upon the past, and to some extent its life becomes our life; new buds and even fruit may grow, but the old trunk and its sap remain."

"I suppcse that accounts for many of the contradictions we most of us feel within us; at one time we are following one ancestor, at another time another."

"Yes; it is not possible to follow all our ancestors at once. This leads to much contradiction in conduct. Then we must always say to ourselves, My ancestors were emotional animals measureless ages before they acquired reason, and somewhere in those measureless ages they began to fashion a religion, so that here also we have the cause of one of life's struggles, viz. the conflict between emotion and reason. When we add to these, that we consecrate the morality of one age to make it the *immorality* of the next, and seek to give this blend a divine sanction—no wonder we are torn asunder, and that villains prosper."

"Have you arrived at any conclusion as to the origin of the religious appetite?"

"That is really a difficult point, and requires further elucidation. Every week seems to give some new proof that religion originated in ancestor worship, or the deification of natural powers, but there is the emotional element which needs

clearing up. Religion often fills men with a holy peace and physical joy, or they are so happy that people think they are drunk, as on the day of Pentecost.

"I cannot help thinking that electricity plays a large part in all this. Electric or magnetic conditions are probably the chief factors in the origin of life in all its forms. This would help us to understood why a microscopic germ can convey the features of body and mind to offspring. It also helps us to understand the mystery of falling in love; it is the same sort of magnetic affinity, which is often unreasonable and sometimes irresistible. I am confident there is some common cause of sex attraction, and of religious enthusiasm. You are quite right; there is such a thing as religious appetite, but all men have not acquired it."

"Will you give me some instances of the similarity between sex attraction and religious force?"

"In the case of the sexes, everybody recognises that there is some force which one can exercise on another of the opposite sex, quite

unconsciously. To take extreme cases first: many women annually become mentally deranged from the force of sex, and are placed in asylums. It is a painful lesson on one of the mysteries of life, to see the intense excitement produced in these subjects by the mere approach of one of the opposite sex, though he may not be seen by them.

"To go to another extreme. A woman may be talking to some uninteresting, absent-minded girl, and the woman thinks her little better than an idiot; but if some young man arrives and addresses himself to the girl, her whole manner, mind, and feelings undergo a complete change. The woman sneers at her as a flirt, and knows no more of the truth of the case, than a bishop knows of the *origin* of the Ten Commandments.

"The fact is, we have to do with a natural force, which is often outside of individual control.

"Now, see how this works in religion. No one can conduct a Bible-class among railway navvies or policemen so well as a woman. Often the only person in a parish who can manage the big rough lads in Sunday school is a lady.

"In missions or revivals, the women convert the men and the men the women, far more easily than the same sex can do it. Some have sneered at this as a subtle form of immorality. It is nothing of the kind.

"I remember when Dr. Temple was made Bishop of Exeter, he practically killed the revivals in Cornwall, because he insisted upon 'the men converting the men and the women converting the women.' He little thought that he was demonstrating to the public that the numerous conversions and holy lives of those mysterious people had not been caused by the Holy Spirit, but by some natural force, which required opposite sexes (*i.e.* opposite magnetisms) for its full development.

"Another fact which points in the same direction is, that opposite theological schools cannot hypnotise each other. For instance: if Low Church missioners were sent to a parish used to High Church teaching, the people would laugh at them; and, on the other hand, if High Church missioners were sent to a Low Church parish, the people would hoot them; and yet both these classes claim the gift and power of the Holy

Ghost, which cannot be true in either case, for by altering a single condition there is no effect, and no sane man could suppose that the work of the Spirit depended on bringing together only two sets of people of the same school."

"That is really striking. How do you account for that?"

"Chiefly by the fact that religious feeling is a matter of nerves, and the force of religion consists mainly in saying the same things, in the same way, to the same people, so when you bring an opposite class of teachers the nerves will not respond."

"Have you, then, no doubt that a man may hypnotise himself; in other words, may produce these effects *unaided* by any object or force outside of him?"

"I have no doubt whatever. Take two cases. Most intelligent men no longer believe there is a devil; yet some people, who do believe there is, assure you they can feel when the devil is present. Again, if two lovers have to be away from each other, and they agree to be alone and think of each other at ten every night, any girl will

assure us that she feels the response of her lover, and she feels it just as much, if he has forgotten all about it, and is flirting at that hour with a barmaid—she warms her emotions on nothing. Thousands of the most religious people in the world do this without any responding object; but there are also thousands who require an object, and this is one great secret of the pleasure and fascination of the Roman religion; they leave the intellect undisturbed, they always stroke the nerves the same way, and they always furnish an object to help to hypnotise the victim."

CHAPTER XXV

THE Professor's visit had been a great help to Mark. He had asked him many questions, and, better still, he had seen a noble, reverent, learned, imaginative man, who had left off religion like a worn-out garment, but who had no word of bitterness to utter against another man, who might find that very garment a treasure because he had none so good. To Dr. Winchley the world had grown more lovely as science had drawn away that veil of double darkness, hiding the origin and the end of man. To him the voice of love, the call of duty, and the thrill of brotherhood were not less strong because some ancient superstitions no longer shrieked their maxims in a nightmare.

The sight of the man was an inspiration to Mark, for he was a triumph of knowledge and sanity, and Mark had heard often enough in the

pulpit that all men who doubted religion were devils in this world and damned in the next. Manifestly this cheap slander was not true.

He longed to tell all this to Rachel, but would it terrify her? How far her present life represented a girlish dream, a devotee's fanaticism, or a deep conviction, he could not say. He wished it were past. It seemed to him a truer religion than organ-blowing and candle-lighting, and if the life of Jesus is the supreme and final standard of all action, he saw clearly that she was realising the divine ideal more fully than anyone he had seen, since he parted from her in the rosy dawn of love. But what if cardinals, bishops, and priests knew better than Rachel? What then? A dogma may be true, even though the whole Church believes it. In that case the poverty, the suffering, the total sacrifice of the individual on the altar of brotherhood are as nothing to the followers of Jesus. They are merely the dark background to show forth the divine splendour of apotheosis, just as the blank misery of Cinderella causes children to rejoice more fully at the arrival of the prince with the glass shoe.

Was it wrong to inquire? Was it a blasphemy to try and understand it? Was the Man of Sorrows—the Son of Man—left lying with the napkin in the sepulchre of stone, and did only a dream survive to pass into the clouds, a mere memory, mingled with mystery, to mock the mournful doom of man?

To Mark, young, rich, robust, formed to revel in high delights, every interest said, "Believe the Church; pray with the majority; accept wealth, luxury, social honour, as a fitting reward to one who believes and follows a triumphant King who will some day come with more than pagan pomp or Christian splendour to surfeit His own with a debauch of glory, which shall sink His paralysed foes into a hell from which there is no escape!"

It was well for Mark that Christian self-interest had such a catalogue of honours to offer, because its very fulness advertised its fraud. Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, might not be divine; but Christ, the conquering King, taking possession of the world in a chariot of glory, with a contented smile for the damned, was so atrociously false

that it did not require the stamp of a State Church to prove it a lie.

Mark was torn asunder, as every man must be who ventures to turn back the shroud which hides and decorates his creed. Beneath that shroud lies a corpse already marked with decay, and, standing in the light of reason, a man may decline to kiss the dead form, though once it was to him warm and radiant with the tenderness of life.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHILST Mark Goode is torn asunder by trying to understand which is the true Christ, or brooding in grief over Rachel's life of want, when he sees but luxury, we may peep in upon the life of the slum.

What has love done for the brave, fair young girl, who gathered up the world's finery and the world's creeds and burned them to ashes on the altar of despair and devotion? Though she did a well-nigh superhuman thing, she is still human. When Mark left her on that March morning, she sat like one paralysed with bliss. Only by slow degrees could she revivify the past, with its blank woe, its melancholy hopelessness, its reckless striving after a solitary ideal. The fiery scorn of the wealthy had burned up her idols and their altars; as she gazed on the smouldering ashes, she saw her own blank doom. The fair landscape of

childhood had been buried beneath a sudden outburst of lava. In this solitude of gloom, faint rays of the after-life fell upon her, and she searched for the divine. Slowly she had found an ideal, which led her at once into conflict with the shams of a gilded civilisation and a perfumed religion.

The day she stood alone in Whitechapel, able to earn her own living, she was free. With freedom came the consciousness of new powers, and for the use of these she found many openings. She expected nothing, and could not be disappointed. She had ventured all without hope of any return—in this life.

Still, fortunately for the race, youth is usually human. The dehumanised middle-aged misanthrope may jeer at their inconsistencies—but inconsistency usually arises from too much of human vigour rather than from too little. So that if Rachel Burnett should allow her first ideal to take other forms, because of her love for Mark, she may possibly be no worse for that.

It was many days after Mark's visit before she could really take her new joy and fit it into the

daily round of work. At times it seemed a refreshing dream, or a sweet refrain which haunts the memory, though we cannot recall its notes distinctly. But when his letters came breathing sweetness and devotion, her joy did not grow less, but it walked on solid earth, or up creaking stairs, in fact with her wherever she went.

This line wrote the history of all her days—joy wherever she went. It swung like a pendulum of music keeping time in her new world.

As this sacred joy became fully realised, she longed to add joy to all the dark, dull lives around her. Hitherto she had been one with them, now she belonged to another order, and a sense of this was her only disquietude. She knew their sorrows, their starvations not from lack of bread alone,—for this they toiled and struggled; but that other food—sympathy, hope, joy—no struggle could obtain, no toil could bring. Few, who have joy in their lives, for one moment understand the meaning of wearisome years, devoid of hope, the blank misery of benumbed existence without joy. It is strange that the highest boon of life should so demoralise us, and that men are seldom so

brutally selfish as when they are happy and prosperous.

But Rachel Burnett had shared *all* with the outcast, and no stains, no failures, no crimes could make her pause for a moment in bestowing her best upon any one of the human family. So now her life of new love filled her with new energy to bless, and as she dared not cast away her joy to be like them, she redoubled her efforts to lift these slaves of circumstance into the birthright of life. She longed to take that black world in her arms and carry it into the light; then came the sweetest thought of her lover, for who could say how much they both might do!

CHAPTER XXVII

MARK had returned to Oxford for his last term. He was full of hope. Health, youth, the spring sunshine, the songs of birds, and the visions of a coming paradise with Rachel transfigured his common days into a festival of the gods.

He had prevailed upon her to spend more of his money upon her friends, in the hope of relieving her intolerable strain. He also was urging her to come to Oxford early in June, just for two or three days' holiday. Like all true lovers, he longed to show her his life, his pursuits, his rooms; he wished her to know his favourite walks, and drives, and rides; to see the loveliest bits of river, to roam through College gardens or libraries. Was she not his whole life, and how could even his life's commonest object be complete till she knew it! The absence or presence of this love-hunger for the beloved to share all

things, is perhaps the surest test of the comprehensiveness and the nobleness of the love itself.

It was a bright May morning, when Mark, returning from the museum, found a telegram from some unknown doctor, informing him that Miss Burnett was seriously ill. He went to see his tutor for leave of absence, but the tutor was out. So he wrote a note of explanation and apology, and rushed for the first train to London. The brilliance of the May day had faded before he reached John Street. They had received his telegram announcing his arrival, and the poor old woman who let him in rejoiced exceedingly, and begged him not to allow Miss Burnett to go to the workhouse infirmary.

It was a marvellous meeting in that dim twilight of May, as Mark stooped over the bed and kissed her wan cheeks, and neither of them spoke. Love throws a deeper solemnity over life than all else.

He sat down and tenderly took her hand, and, looking into her bright eyes, asked, "Have you any pain, darling?"

"None, dearest, but I am so weak. I am sorry to bring you from your work, but I am not so brave as I was. I could not go to the infirmary this time, without letting you know."

The young man quivered with anguish at the word infirmary, and sobbed, rather than said, "Oh, darling, darling, do not name that! You allowed me to call you mine, and you can never go to the infirmary again. Never! You will let me nurse you, and soon you will go where the sun shines on the sea, and stay till you are strong."

He received a gentle pressure from the feeble hand, and a woman's devotion illumined the pale face.

Dr. James arrived almost immediately, and as soon as he saw Mark, he understood the situation; they met in the room downstairs, and Mark said, "Now, Dr. James, will you be to me a brother in this case? Tell me the worst, and tell me what to do."

"The worst, Mr. Goode, is the extreme weakness. When I was here this morning, Miss Burnett fainted, and it almost seemed as if all were over. That is why I sent you a telegram.

She needs rest, nursing, support; all turns on these. If she can gain strength, so as to be removed, all may come right, but I will not deceive you, the crisis is extremely grave."

"Thank you," said Mark slowly, solemnly, as if dazed with dread, then added, "If you will be good enough to provide everything that can be of service, you will place me under the deepest obligation. Will you arrange for a consultation, to-morrow morning early, with the one doctor in all London whom you would summon if Miss Burnett were your own daughter, and will you send a trained nurse here to-night, and tell her exactly what to get and what to do? You do not anticipate any immediate danger, do you, Dr. James?" And the young man's voice quivered as he asked the appalling question.

"Ordinarily, I should say I do not, but we have to fight dreadful odds. Miss Burnett is exhausted; some great shock has told upon a system not robust at the best; she has been living for months on her heroism. But do not despair; you have to cheer and soothe her. I will see that everything is done that London can do."

Dr. James saw Rachel a few minutes. He could discern no change since morning—the pulse was exceedingly faint. He hurried off to send a nurse.

Mark, ignorant of sickness and nursing, felt terribly helpless. By the aid of the old woman he made her room a little brighter. Then he arranged with her for the use of the adjoining front room.

Soon the nurse arrived, quiet, skilful, gentle, armed with necessaries for the patient from Dr. James, who, seeing there was not a moment to lose, had provided everything for her needs.

Within an hour, Mark and the nurse had transformed the room, as far as it could be transformed without distressing the patient; a bright fire, a shaded lamp, two screens, flowers, had given some appearance of comfort to the bare apartment. And armed with medicines, jellies, and extracts, the nurse began her determined and systematic fight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE nurse soon discovered that her patient was in danger of perishing for lack of nourishment, so little could she take, but there was one point of greater importance even than this, sleep. Here a new difficulty arose about Mark. Did his presence help or hinder?

For some time she allowed him to sit there and gently tell Rachel of Easter and the Cathedral and various old friends whose names occurred. Still the patient with her flushed face and bright eyes seemed no nearer slumber.

At length it was arranged that Mark should retire to his room, and be quite ready to be called should she need him. By degrees the roar of London died down into a drowsy hum, and at last became almost silent. The patient had tossed in search of sleep and more than once had dozed, but it was not a night to give encouragement to

the watcher. The nurse was deeply moved by the pathos of the situation. She too had had her dawn of love and her night of despair.

About eleven next morning, Dr. James brought the illustrious specialist, Dr. Brunell. He had told the specialist what he knew of Rachel's history, so they proceeded at once to her room. Then the specialist saw Mark and asked for more information; he likewise saw the old landlady and the nurse, then both doctors again met at the bedside.

They made a most careful examination, and Dr. Brunell was exceedingly grave. His one reply to all questions was "She must have sleep." He made many suggestions, he left strict orders. Mark paid the fee, and as he ushered them to the door, with an anxious face, old Dr. Brunell gazed upon the youth with an unspeakable pity.

In such a street it is impossible to obtain quiet. At the back an uneasy cur worried the nurse beyond endurance, till Mark went and bought it; but it was not possible to buy the scores of ragged children who yelled their defiance to all the powers of destruction which even London can array against them. But school hour brought a little

respite, and Mark hoped that then Rachel might sleep, so he sat in silence.

He heard some one inquire for "the young woman who was ill," and, fearing any disturbance, he stole downstairs. At the foot of the stairs he met a little sharp-featured woman, of middle age, and in sombre attire. The woman gazed in surprise upon the fashionably dressed young man, and then, as if she understood all about it, she said, "I am Mrs. White; my husband is the vicar of this parish, and I felt it was my duty to come and see this girl who is ill."

"Thank you very much, but she is so weak that you cannot see her at present."

"Who are you to stop me on my duty? I suppose you are the young man who keeps her in her sin. She is an atheist, and she has drawn more than one girl from my Bible class, but I should be sorry for her to die in her sin."

"Mrs. White, you will not get nearer Christ by dragging religion in the mud. No human being should call another an atheist, unless she knows that human being as completely as God knows him."

"Do not talk profanity. Your hour is not yet come, young man. Let me do my duty."

She took a step as if to go upstairs. Mark stood in the way, and, stooping down, almost whispered, "If you attempt to go upstairs, I will take you in my arms and carry you through the streets to the vicarage door."

In one moment of astonishment, Mrs. White paused, then she turned and fled.

Mark returned, and, anticipating her inquiring look, he said, "Someone wished to see you, but the doctor says you must be quiet, so I could not let her."

"I have many friends, and they are so kind; you do not know how poor miserable people love one another. Do you intend to be a clergyman, Mark?"

"I think not, dearest. Why do you ask?"

"I would rather you were not. It seems a little unfair for rich men to take orders, for they get the plums, and the poor clergy round here have such a hard life that they deserve everything the Church can do for them. Besides, I am selfish, and I want you to help me. If you help me, we

could get hundreds of these people away into the green fields. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, darling, I will take ever so many if you will go with them."

"Must I go too, dear?"

"I think so; they would need you there, as well as here. And you could do more by living there than—dying here."

"But, oh, Mark, they die here! That never alters. Still I shall be where you are," and she stretched her thin hand towards him, and gave him a look of infinite trust.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN Dr. James came in the afternoon, he had to confess that they were losing ground. The absence of sleep, and the fact that Rachel took so little support, baffled all their efforts. The news filled Mark with woe.

The nurse went to secure some rest, and Mark sat down by the bedside, heart-broken, yet showing only tender solicitude for her to take rest. By the clock it was the early twilight of a May evening, but to him it was youth's Gethesemane. Yet, yet there were gleams of hope, she was so bright and sweetly cheerful, she beguiled him from the darkness, and they talked as two children might, at the dawn of a summer day. She told him of the poetry she loved, which she had heard him read or recite, and he repeated snatches of songs she used to

sing, and they built fairy castles in which she would sing them all to him again, when she was well. Then as the twilight deepened, she turned to him in tender anxiety and almost whispered, "Darling, you remember, when you gathered those flowers at the picnic, and showed their orders, you said, 'I wonder if we all die as the flowers die,' and I laughed, and said, it could not matter so much after all, if our lives were right, but you were very solemn. But now, Mark, it does seem to matter so much. If I were to die and by death lose you altogether! It seems terrible now."

For answer he kissed her tenderly and often, and no eye saw, in the deepening twilight, the features of his young face agonised with fear.

An awe of silence and wonder fell upon them, and thus they remained, till the nurse entered. She seemed a little anxious, and it was arranged that Mark would not go to bed, but be ready to come at any moment, whilst the nurse would try and induce sleep.

In the first hush of London's roar, between

one and two, the nurse called Mark. Rachel seemed to have fainted. He watched horror-stricken for a few seconds, which seemed hours, and was just going for the doctor when she showed some signs of recovery. She soon regained consciousness, but was utterly prostrate.

They watched in silence, and they thought she slumbered. When the first light of dawn stole into the room, she smiled and said she felt better, but her weakness was extreme. About seven the nurse signalled that Mark should go to hasten the doctor.

Even in Whitechapel there was the fresh calm of a May morning, and the gathering life had not yet become the bustle of the city. On his return, Mark bought some beautiful lilies of the valley and arums, and hurried with his bouquet as if he would storm the citadel of death with life and beauty.

She greeted him with a smile of devotion, that should have been the herald of immortality. She said gently, "Lift me up, dearest, that I may see them, I am so weak."

Then she fell forward upon the lilies.

A few minutes later the doctor entered, tc find her dead in the arms of her lover, and the strong young man was unconscious, in the anguish of his first grief.

CHAPTER XXX

LATE in the morning Mark told the doctor and the nurse his wishes, and they undertook all.

The news of Rachel's death darkened the light of that day to more than one bed-ridden old woman, and to many a starving mother. The street seemed hushed as the news spread, and in the evening anxious young girls, with white faces, came to ask if it were true, and looked upon her form, and wept in despair.

. . . . . .

When the plain coffin was brought, Mark reverently helped to place her in it, and pillowed her head on the broken lilies. He sat beside her for hours; he kissed her good-night every evening; he brought her flowers in the earliest dawn. When her sweet face was to be hidden from sight for ever, he knelt at his shrine, and the tears of immortal love rained upon her fair

form. In that maddening, fathomless anguish, man, and earth, and the universe itself vanished as a scroll.

Before the hearse could leave the street, a small crowd had gathered, and out of the crowd stepped some "flower-girls," and placed an exquisite wreath of immortelles on the coffin of her who had loved them.

. . . . . .

Mark left Woking that afternoon with a small golden urn, in which were the ashes of Rachel Burnett.

His absence without leave had made no small sensation in College, and when they had communicated with the Dean and found he knew nothing of it, authority felt outraged. But it was known now that he had been to see a dying friend, and as, robed in black, he entered the College gate, all who saw him grew silent, for the brand of grief was on his face.

One man who met him grasped his hand in speechless sympathy, and ran away.

The Dean, perplexed and uneasy, had arrived a few hours before, and as he had learned from Mark's tutor that his nephew would arrive that

evening, he had gone to visit his old College, feeling sure that now all would be right. The scout had informed the tutor of Mark's arrival, and that gentleman, full of indignation, set out to see Mark and tell him that the authorities had decided that he must "go down" at once, for it would never do for him to dine in hall that night, after such a breach of discipline. The Dean and the tutor met on the staircase leading to Mark's rooms, and so entered together.

They found Mark collapsed in anguish, and the golden urn on the table beside him. It was not until he saw his uncle that it occurred to him that his absence could have caused either serious offence or alarm. He staggered to his feet, and, as his uncle read unspeakable misery in his haggard look, he said tenderly, "My dear boy, what is the matter?"

With an effort of supreme control, he said, "Let me tell you all, uncle." Then slowly, with tremulous voice and choking words, he told the story of his dead love and the golden urn, and, folding his arms round his only treasure, he sank upon the table and buried his face.

The indescribable pathos transfixed the two men. The tutor said, "Good God!" and rushed downstairs, drying his eyes as he went.

The Dean tottered across the room to his nephew, and, gently touching him, kissed his brow and said, "My poor, dear boy."

In the pathos of those few words, the Dean's buried youth rose from an unknown grave, in which it too had been entombed with his earliest sorrow.

Then he continued tenderly, "My dear boy, they want you to leave the College, so come away. We can get home to-night, so leave all the rest."

CHAPTER XXXI

THEIR late arrival at Crowland offered one advantage; Mrs. Drewe had gone to bed, and Mark was able to go straight to his room.

The Dean told his wife the whole story, and it was no small shock to her notions of worldly prudence. When, however, Mark was pronounced to be suffering from "brain fever," and his life was despaired of, all else was forgotten.

When he recovered, after weeks of utter weariness, the summer weather had come. He seemed no longer young, for in these weeks he had buried years; and sorrow had made the Dean old too.

One crash had scattered their speculations, their hopes, and their plans. At length, after innumerable suggestions and discussions, they all went to Trenton and took a house with a large garden,

at the bottom of which rolled the sea, and on the other side rose the mountains. Here, by communion with nature, Mark was to be restored, as far as restoration was possible. His first real interest was to turn again to his favourite study of man's antiquity and growth. In the summer mornings, as he paced in the old garden, and listened to the soft lapping of the waves, he saw visions of that past, when his ancestors, in rude savagery, ran over the plains, on which now the sea waves chased each other, apparently in aimless wandering, just as one savage tribe hunts another off the face of the earth. No surer foundation has yet been laid for understanding man and his world than a familiar knowledge of the brute past, which is the latest gift of science. A being with such an ancestry, whether he knows it or not, is a link in the chain of conquest. It adds a glory to the pursuits of time, and a dignity to the small deeds of man, when we gaze steadily upon that infinite, on which all our present rests.

Then, again, when the night came, he had still more lovely visions, something added, something

shrouded, like the tramp of armies, whose tread is muffled by the distance.

Few things in nature can surpass the calm grandeur of a summer night. As it advances it clothes the landscape with majesty. When the sun sets, the hills seem to sink in sleep, and the stars come to view as heralds of some dawning mystery, while the climbing moon adds altitude to the heavens. Such a scene arouses that vast antiquity which slumbers in man; he remembers forgotten dreams of mouldering forests; he sees the flashing waves of oceans which have long since ceased to roll; he thrills with the primæval fears of ancestral superstition, when savage men acquired imagination by inventing still more savage gods; there throbs within him the yearning for victory and glory, born of the strife of battlefields and sea-fights in the dark past of mad murder; he hears the lullaby of infinite generations of mothers who soothed the savage into man, ere the dawn of the oldest civilisation; and, finally, throwing over all a veil of loveliness, woven of a finer starlight, blended of voiceless longings, golden dreams, and untold

passion, there stands love, the bride of the world.

The glory and the message of such summer nights no man hath weighed or valued or comprehended. When every moment the shadows grow more deadly fascinating and the depth of their beauty is to be measured by the miles of the moon's soaring, whilst their messages are counted only by him who hath counted the stars. The dreaming flowers pour a floating incense on the star-decked silence. Every grain of matter in man seems to thrill its greeting to the vaster world, but no man hath told the story. Those who have felt the glories of a summer night, have bowed in a dumb ecstasy to listen to the chorus of universe upon universe, chanting the dreams of youth and the doom of the race. That chorus no man hath learned, and but for summer nights, its music, sad as the requiem of an only love, would never reach our floating speck.

Were it possible for man to decipher that message, he would know his origin; as he listened to the breeze of that moaning melan-

choly, which sweeps the level graves of buried ages, he would walk with smiling face, hand in hand with the fever-stricken present, and he would no longer prostrate himself in a palsy of alarm before the inevitable future.

CHAPTER XXXII

TIME wrought some healing, as it ever does, but it seemed so little, that the Dean was often anxious about the stricken boy.

For years the Dean had not used a penny of his official income for his personal wants; he had retained his position as the easiest way of doing such good as he most desired, namely, to alleviate poverty, and spread education. He had often wished to resign, and now Mrs. Drew was induced to assent to this, on the condition that she had her new home in the West End. So the Dean resigned, and gave himself up to devising some life-work for Mark.

Perhaps never were two men beset with such complex difficulties. They agreed in their outlook upon life and creeds, they longed to make known the truth, as they understood it, but how?

Free in thought and action, with clear views of many of the woes and wrongs of man, yet it was not easy to bring help to the suffering and the needy. Masses of men carry with them, apparently of necessity, the frustration of the simplest laws of justice. Either they cannot think, or they revere some superstition, which prevents them from obeying their own organised intelligence. Had these two rich men wished to give away blankets, or found a club, or establish a mission, all would have been easy, but as none of these go to the root of the matter, they were not discussed.

With a profound reverence for the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, they spent many days in examining the Gospel records, and nothing could seem more thorough in principle than the communistic anarchism of that foremost of Reformers. He ignored those barbaric survivals of rulers and priests, unless forced into collision with them, then He denounced them in the unmistakable terms of truth, and with the energy of Jewish fanaticism, till He paid the penalty which every individual must pay who

resists organised authority: He went to failure, ruin, death. Still His principles live. The first Church carried out those principles, and by some mistake the record has been preserved in the Acts of the Apostles, to foster the ideals of succeeding ages, and, notwithstanding the gorgeous mausoleum which the Church has erected to His memory, and the fine gold with which the State has decorated it, a community, realising the life and teaching of Jesus, may yet take possession of the world.

So far the Dean and Mark agreed, but they neither of them were satisfied with any practical plan upon which to begin work. Mark was under the spell of Rachel's work and death, and he could never look at life free from this tragedy.

No less certain was he that her interpretation of Jesus was truer than that of all the altars of Christendom. But the religion of Jesus had failed, and Rachel was dead. So that clearly, for the lasting good of the race, some more comprehensive method must be adopted. This reflection led him to examine carefully the causes which

have promoted man's growth from almost isolated savagery to organised societies. It is true that man is superior to all other animals in reason, cunning, selfishness, and brutality; still these alone would not account for his great advance beyond other animals. But allied with these was always a stronger instinct of fellowship, marking him off as strikingly gregarious. In their absence of experience and a developed reason, early man indulged his gregarious faculty by finding a chief to protect him from animals, and a priest to protect him from demons. Further experience, coupled with the insight of genius, enabled Jesus to see that both were no longer necessary; so that, to expand and hallow this gregarious instinct, He established a society of brotherhood, and told His followers neither to be called rabbi nor masters (Matt. xxiii. 7, 10). This precept was enforced by the early apostles in their various epistles, and the patent fact that every Christian Church has despised this general principle is ample proof that they have proudly set aside the guidance of Jesus.

Mark, therefore, under these influences, and

brooding always on Rachel's dying dream to take the sufferers of the slums into the country, determined to give his great wealth to a co-operative body, in such a way that no member of it could become a landowner or a capitalist.

After many months of inquiry and deliberation, he bought an estate of ten thousand acres. The soil was of varying qualities, much of it entirely wild, covered with trees, and set apart for the holy purpose of sheltering game. The mansion upon it was in fair preservation, for the old and original castle stood in ruins beside it. In this was still to be seen the dungeons, the bear-pit, the whipping-post, and other witnesses of feudal brutality.

On a glorious spring morning Mark rode for the first time, after purchase, through the meadows, fallow fields, and woods. The poor rustics gazed upon him with some reverence and much awe, little suspecting that he had come to give them and their children a perpetual inheritance, if they wished, in the soil on which they and their ancestors had toiled as serfs.

Everywhere was manifest the power of spring;

birds, and buds, and flowers told of that restless energy which has clothed joy and gladness in robes of beauty for measureless ages unknown to man. It was the anniversary of Rachel's death, and as he rode through the thickets, decked in their new green, the loveliness of life thrilled him, and his heart was oppressed with the sweetness of sorrow and the pain of joy.

• • • • • • •

Soon new villages sprang up; all trades from Whitechapel contributed representatives. Prosperous homes and farms and shops were everywhere. Each trade sent one man and one woman to represent it on the common Council, and these were elected by all the community over twenty-five years of age. The Council elected an executive of five, men or women, each of whom was president in turn for a month. Two of the executive retired every three years, and could not be re-elected on that occasion. No child could leave school before the age of sixteen; it was taught some trade till it was twenty, and then had to say whether it elected to live in the

community and obey its rules. Ordinary crimes were dealt with by the laws of the land, and drones were hunted out with relentless vigour.

At first it seemed that it would be a task beyond human powers, but theoretical difficulties largely disappeared in practical life, and when men knew that they were free, that they had a fixed possession and a birthright, of which no greed, no power could defraud them, they became new creatures, and the ruinous waste of energy and substance, caused by competition, gave place to a calm intelligence and a noble integrity, till the villages were known as the Community of Plenty. Mark had no more power in the community than any other adult of twenty-five, except that hundreds of grateful men and women would have laid down their lives for him. He taught in one of the schools. He lived in one of the new cottages, and on the plain mantelshelf stood a small golden urn, so that around the ashes of Rachel Burnett were the health and gladness of a community, called by her name, and there were no slums such as disgrace our large towns, and no "picturesque" cottages such