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THE NEW ABELARD

A Romance

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

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

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I.

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AND PARLIAMENT STREET

Dedication

TO MY DEAR FATHER

THE LATE ROBERT BUCHANAN

SOCIALIST LECTURER, REFORMER, AND POET

I INSCRIBE

'THE NEW ABELARD'

PREFATORY NOTE.

The leading character in this book is represented, dramatically, as resembling, both in his strength and weakness, the great Abelard of history. For this very reason he is described as failing miserably, where a stronger man might never have failed, in grasping the Higher Rationalism as a law for life. He is, in fact, not meant for an ideal hero, but for an ardent intellectual man, hopelessly biased against veracity both by temperament and hereditary superstition.

I make this explanation in order to be

beforehand with those who will possibly hasten to explain to my readers that my philosophy of life is at best retrograde, my modern thinker an impressionable spoony, and my religious outlook taken in the shadow of the Churches and reading no farther than the cloudy horizons of Ober-Ammergau.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

LONDON: *March* 12, 1884.

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

THE NEW ABELARD.

PROEM.

Shipwreck . . . What succour ?—
On the gnawing rocks
The ship grinds to and fro with thunder-shocks,
And thro' her riven sides with ceaseless rush
The foam-fleck'd waters gush :
Above, the soot-black sky; around, the roar
Of surges smiting on some unseen shore ;
Beneath, the burial-place of rolling waves—
Flowerless, for ever shifting, wind-dug graves !

A moment on the riven deck he stands,
Praying to Heaven with wild uplifted hands,
Then sees across the liquid wall afar
A glimmer like a star ;
The lighthouse gleam ! Upon the headland black
The beacon burns and fronts the stormy wrack—
Sole speck of light on gulfs of darkness, where
Thunder the sullen breakers of despair . . .

The ship is gone . . . Now in that gulf of death
He swims and struggles on with failing breath :
He grasps a plank—it sinks—too frail to upbear
His leaden load of care ;
Another and another—straws !—they are gone !
He cries aloud, stifles, and struggles on ;
For still thro' voids of gloom his straining sight
Sees the sad glimmer of a steadfast light !

He gains the rocks . . . What shining hands are these,
Reached out to pluck him from the cruel seas ?
What shape is this, that clad in raiment blest
Now draws him to its breast ? . . .
Ah, Blessèd One, still keeping, day and night,
The lamp well trimm'd, the heavenly beacon bright,
He knows Thee now !—he feels the sheltering gleam—
And lo ! the night of storm dissolves in dream !

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO.

Miriam. But whither goest thou?
Walter. On the highest peak,
Among the snows, there grows a pale blue flower—
The village maidens call it *Life-in-Death*,
The old men *Sleep-no-more*; I have sworn to pluck it;
Many have failed upon the same wild quest,
And left their bleaching bones among the crags.
If I should fail——
Miriam. Let me go with thee, Walter!
Let me not here i' the valley—let us find
The blessed flower together, dear, or die!
The Sorrowful Shepherdess.

On a windy night in the month of May, the full moon was flashing from cloud to cloud, each so small that it began to melt instantaneously beneath her hurried breath; and, in

the fulness of the troubled light that she was shedding, the bright tongues of the sea were creeping up closer and closer through the creeks of the surrounding land, till they quivered like quicksilver under the walls of Mossleigh Abbey, standing dark and lonely amongst the Fens.

It was a night when, even in that solitude, everything seemed mysteriously and troublously alive. The wind cried as with a living voice, and the croaks of herons answered from the sands. The light of the moon went and came as to a rhythmic respiration; and when it flashed, the bats were seen flitting with thin z-like cry high up over the waterside, and when it was dimmed the owl moaned from the ivied walls. At intervals, from the distant lagoons, came the faint 'quack, quack' of

flocks of ducks at feed. The night was still, but enchanted; subdued, yet quivering with sinister life. Over and above all was the heavy breath of the ocean, crawling nearer and nearer, eager yet fearful, with deep tremors, to the electric wand of that heavenly light.

Presently, from inland, came another sound—the quick tramp of a horse's feet coming along the narrow road which wound up to, and past, the abbey ruins. As it grew louder, it seemed that every other sound was hushed, and everything listened to its coming; till at last, out of the moonbeams and the shadows, flashed a tall white horse, ridden by a shape in black.

Arrived opposite the ruins, the horse paused, and its rider, a woman, looked eagerly up and

down the road, whereupon, as if at a signal, all the faint sounds of the night became audible again. The woman sat still, listening; and her face looked like marble. After pausing thus motionless for some minutes, she turned from the road, and walked her horse through the broken wall, across a stone-strewn field, and in through the gloomy arch of the silent abbey, till she reached the roofless space within, where the grass grew rank and deep, mingled with monstrous weeds, and running green and slimy over long neglected graves.

How dark and solemn it seemed between those crumbling walls, which only the dark ivy seemed to hold together with its clutching sinewy fingers! yet, through each of the broken windows, and through every archway, the moonlight beamed, making streaks of lumi-

nous whiteness on the grassy floor. The horse moved slowly, at his own will, picking his way carefully among fragments of fallen masonry, and stopping short at times to inspect curiously some object in his path. All was bright and luminous overhead; all dim and ominous there below. At last, reaching the centre of the place, the horse paused, and its rider again became motionless, looking upward.

The moonlight pouring through one of the arched windows suffused her face and form.

She was a fair woman, fair and tall, clad in a tight-fitting riding dress of black, with black hat and backward-drooping veil. Her hair was golden, almost a golden red, and smoothed down in waves over a low broad forehead. Her eyes were grey and very large, her

features exquisitely cut, her mouth alone being, perhaps, though beautifully moulded, a little too full and ripe; but let it be said in passing, this mouth was the soul of her face—large, mobile, warm, passionate, yet strangely firm and sweet. Looking into the grave eyes of this woman, you would have said she was some saint, some beautiful madonna; looking at her mouth and lips, you would have said it was the mouth of Cytherea, alive with the very fire of love.

She sat motionless, still gazing upward on the dim milky azure, flecked with the softest foam of clouds. Her face was bright and happy, patient yet expectant; and when the low sounds of the night were wafted to her ears, she sighed softly in unison, as if the sweetness of silence could be borne no longer.

Suddenly she started, listening, and at the same moment her horse, with dilated eyes and nostrils, trembled and pricked up his delicate ears. Clear and distinct, from the distance, came the sound of another horse's feet. It came nearer and nearer, then it ceased close to the abbey wall; and, almost simultaneously, the white steed threw forth his head and neighed aloud.

The woman smiled happily, and patted his neck with her gloved hand.

A minute passed. Then through the great archway slowly came another rider, a man. On seeing the first comer, he rose in the saddle and waved his hand; then leaping down, he threw his reins over an iron hook fixed in the wall, and came swiftly through the long grass.

A tall man of about thirty, wrapt in a dark riding cloak and wearing a broad-brimmed clerical hat. He was clean shaven, but his black hair fell about his shoulders. His eyes were black and piercing, his eyebrows thick and dark. The head, with its square firm jaw and fine aquiline features, was set firm upon a powerful neck and shoulders. His cloak, falling back from the throat, showed the white neckcloth worn by English clergymen.

The white horse did not stir as he approached, but, turning his head, surveyed him calmly with an air of recognition. He came up, took the rein and patted the horse's neck, while the woman, with a cry of welcome, leapt from her seat.

'Shall I fasten your horse with mine?' he asked, still holding the rein.

'No; let him ramble among the grass. He will come at my call.'

Released and riderless, the horse moved slowly through the grass, approaching the other in a leisurely way, with a view to a little equine conversation. Meantime the man and woman had sprung into each other's arms, and were kissing each other like lovers—as indeed they were.

'You are late, dearest,' said the woman presently, when the first delight of meeting was over. 'I thought perhaps you could not come to-night.'

Her voice was deep and musical—a soft contralto—with vibrations of infinite tenderness. As she stood with him, fixing her eyes fondly upon him, it almost seemed as if she, not he, were the masculine, the pre-

dominant spirit; he the feminine, the possessed. Strong and passionate as he seemed, he was weak and cold compared to her; and whenever they clung together and kissed, it seemed as if her kisses were given in the eagerness of mastery, his in the sweetness of self-surrender. This, seeing her delicate beauty, and the powerful determined face and form of the man, was strange enough.

'I could not come earlier,' he replied gently. 'I had a call to a dying man which detained me. I left his bedside and came straight hither.'

'That is why you look so sad,' she said, smiling and kissing him. 'Ah, yes—death is terrible!'

And she clung to him fondly, as if

fearful that the cold cruel shadow even then and there might come between them.

'Not always, Alma. The poor man whose eyes I have just closed—he was only a poor fenman—died with a faith so absolute, a peace so perfect, that all the terrors of his position departed, leaving only an infinite pathos. In the presence of such resignation I felt like an unholy intruder. He went away as calmly as if Our Lord came to him in the very flesh, holding out two loving hands—and, indeed, who knows? His eyes were fixed at last as if he *saw* something, and then . . . he smiled and passed away.'

They moved along side by side through the deep shadows. She held his hand in hers, drawing life and joy from the very touch.

'What a beautiful night!' he said at last, gazing upwards thoughtfully. 'Surely, surely, the old argument is true, and that sky refutes the cry of unbelief. And yet men perish, generations come and go, and still that patient light shines on. This very place is a tomb, and we walk on the graves of those who once lived and loved as we do now.'

'Their souls are with God,' she murmured; 'yes, with God, up yonder!'

'Amen to that. But when they lived, dearest, belief was so easy. They were not thrust into a time of doubt and change. It was enough to close the eyes and walk blindly on in assurance of a Saviour. Now we must stare with naked eyes at the Skeleton of what was a living Truth.'

'Do not say that. The truth lives, though its face has changed.'

'*Does* it live? God knows. Look at this deserted place, these ruined walls. Just as this is to habitable places, is our old faith to the modern world. Roofless, deserted, naked to heaven, stands the Church of Christ. Soon it must perish altogether, leaving not a trace behind; unless . . .'

'Unless? . . .'

'Unless, with God's aid, it can be *restored*,' he replied. 'Even then, perhaps, it would never be quite the same as it once was in the childhood of the world; but it would at least be a Temple, not a ruin.'

'That is always your dream, Ambrose.'

'It is my dream—and my belief. Meanwhile, I am still like a man adrift. O Alma,

if I could only *believe*, like that poor dying man!'

'You do believe,' she murmured; 'only your belief is not blind and foolish. Why should you reproach yourself because you have rejected so much of the old superstition?'

'Because I am a minister of the Church, round which, like that dark devouring ivy, the old superstitions still cling. Before you could make this place what it once was, a prosperous abbey, with happy creatures dwelling within it, you have to strip the old walls bare; and it is the same with our religion. I am not strong enough for such a task. The very falsehoods I would uproot have a certain fantastic holiness and beauty; when I lay my hands upon them,

as I have sometimes dared to do, I seem to hear a heavenly voice rebuking me. Then I say to myself that perhaps, after all, I am committing an act of desecration; and so—my life is wasted.'

She watched him earnestly during a long pause which followed. At last she said:—

'Is it not, perhaps, that you *think* of these things too much? Perhaps it was not meant that we should always fix our eyes on what is so mysterious. God hid himself away in the beginning, and it is not his will that we should comprehend him.'

The clergyman shook his head in deprecation of that gentle suggestion.

'Then why did He plant in our souls such a cruel longing? Why did He tempt our wild inquiry, with those shining

lights above us, with this wondrous world, with every picture that surrounds the soul of man? No, Alma, He does not hide himself away—it is we who turn our eyes from him to make idols of stone or flesh, and to worship these. Where, then, shall we find him? Not among the follies and superstitions of the ruined Church at the altar of which I have ministered to my shame!'

His words had become so reckless, his manner so agitated, that she was startled. Struck by a sudden thought, she cried—

'Something new has happened? O Ambrose, what is it?'

'Nothing,' he replied; 'that is, little or nothing. The Inquisition has begun, that is all.'

'What do you mean?'

He gave a curious laugh.

'The clodhoppers of Fensea have, in their small way, the instinct of Torquemada. The weasel is akin to the royal tiger. My Christian congregation wish to deliver me over to the moral stake and faggot; as a preliminary they have written to my Bishop.'

'Of what do they complain *now*?'

'That I am a heretic,' he answered with the same cold laugh. 'Conceive the ridiculousness of the situation! There was some dignity about heresy in the old days, when it meant short shift, a white shirt, and the *auto-da-fé*. But an inquisition composed of Summerhayes the grocer, Hayes the saddler, and Miss Rayleigh the schoolmistress; and, instead of Torquemada, the mild old Bishop of Darkdale and Dells!'

She laughed too, but somewhat anxiously. Then she said tenderly, with a certain worship—

'You are too good for such a place. They do not understand you.'

His manner became serious in a moment.

'I have flattered my pride with such a thought, but, after all, have they not right on their side? They at least have a definite belief; they at least are satisfied to worship *in a ruin*, and all they need is an automaton to lead their prayers. When they have stripped me bare, and driven me from the church——'

'O Ambrose, will they do that?'

'Certainly. It must come, sooner or later; perhaps the sooner the better. I am tired of my own hypocrisy—of frightening the poor

fools with half-truths when the whole of the truth of unbelief is in my heart.'

'But you *do* believe,' she pleaded; 'in God, and in our Saviour!'

'Not in the letter, dearest. In the spirit, certainly!'

'The spirit is everything. Can you not defend yourself?'

'I shall not try. To attempt to do so would be another hypocrisy. I shall resign.'

'And then? You will go away?'

'Yes.'

'But you will take *me* with you?'

He drew her gently to him; he kissed her on the forehead.

'Why should you share my degradation?' he said. 'A minister who rejects or is rejected by his Church is a broken man, broken

and despised. In these days martyrdom has no glory, no honour. You yourself would be the first to feel the ignominy of my situation, the wretchedness of a petty persecution. It would be better, perhaps, for us to part.'

But with a look of ineffable sweetness and devotion she crept closer to him, and laid her head upon his breast.

'We shall not part,' she said. 'Where you go I shall follow, as Rachel followed her beloved. Your country shall be my country, dearest, and—your God my God!'

All the troubled voices of the night responded to that loving murmur. The moon rose up luminous into the open heaven above the abbey ruins, and flashed upon the two clinging frames, in answer to the earth's incantation.

CHAPTER II.

OLD LETTERS.

What's an old letter but a rocket dark—
Once fired i' the air and left without a spark
Of that which once, a fiery life within it,
Shot up to heaven, and faded in a minute?
But by the powdery smell and stick corroded,
You guess—how noisily it once exploded!

Cupid's Postbag.

I.

To the Right Reverend the Bishop of Darkdale and Dells.

Right Reverend Sir,—We, the undersigned, churchwardens and parishioners of the Church of St. Mary Flagellant, in the parish of Fensea and diocese of Dells, feel it our duty

to call your lordship's attention to the conduct of the Rev. Ambrose Bradley, vicar of Fensea aforesaid. It is not without great hesitation that we have come to the conclusion that some sort of an inquiry is necessary. For many months past the parish pulpit has been scandalised by opinions which, coming from the pulpit of a Christian church, have caused the greatest astonishment and horror; but the affair reached its culmination last Ascension Day, when the Vicar actually expressed his scepticism as to many of the Christian miracles, and particularly as to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ *in the flesh*. It is also reported, we believe on good authority, that Mr. Bradley is the author of an obnoxious article in an infidel publication, calling in question such facts as the miraculous conversion of the Apostle Paul,

treating other portions of the gospel narrative as merely 'Symbolical,' and classing the Bible as only one of many Holy Books with equal pretensions to Divine inspiration. Privately we believe the Vicar of Fensea upholds opinions even more extraordinary than these. It is for your lordship to decide, therefore, whether he is a fit person to fill the sacred office of a Christian minister, especially in these times, when Antichrist is busy at work and the seeds of unbelief find such ready acceptance, especially in the bosom of the young. Personally, we have no complaint against the Vicar, who is well liked by many of his congregation, and is very zealous in works of charity and almsgiving. But the pride of carnal knowledge and the vanity of secular approbation have turned him from that narrow path which leads

to righteousness, into the howling wilderness of heterodoxy, wherein, having wandered too far, no man may again find his soul alive. We beseech your lordship to investigate this matter without delay; and, with the assurance of our deepest respect and reverence, we beg to subscribe ourselves, your lordship's humble and obedient servants,

HENRY SUMMERHAYES,
EZEKIEL MARVEL,
WALTER ROCHFORD,
SIMPSON PEPPERBACK,
JOHN DOVE,
TABITHA RAYLEIGH, *spinster*,
all of the parish of Fensea.

II.

From the Bishop of Darkdale and Dells to the Rev. Ambrose Bradley, Vicar of Fensea.

Darkdale, May 28.

Dear Mr. Bradley,—I have just received from some of the leading members of your congregation a communication of an extraordinary nature, calling in question, I regret to say, not merely your manner of conducting the sacred service in the church of Fensea, but your very personal orthodoxy in those matters which are the pillars of the Christian faith. I cannot but think that there is some mistake, for I know by early experience how ready churchgoers are, especially in the rural districts, to distort the significance of a preacher's verbal expressions on difficult points of doctrine.

When you were first promoted to the living of Fensea, you were named to me as a young man of unusual faith and zeal—perfervid, indeed, to a fault; and I need not say that I had heard of you otherwise as one from whom your university expected great things. That is only a few years ago. What then has occurred to cause this sad misconception (I take it for granted that it *is* a misconception) on the part of your parishioners? Perhaps, like many other young preachers of undoubted attainments but limited experience, you have been trying your oratorical wings too much in flights of a mystic philosophy and a poetical rhetoric; and in the course of these flights have, as rhetoricians will, alarmed your hearers unnecessarily. Assuming this for a moment, will you pardon me for saying that

there are two ways of preaching the gospel: one subtle and mystical, which appeals only to those spirits who have penetrated into the adytum of Christian theology; one cardinal and rational, which deals only with the simple truths of Christian teaching, and can be understood by the veriest child. Perhaps, indeed, of these two ways, the latter one most commends itself to God. 'For except a man be born again,' &c. Be that as it may, and certainly I have no wish to undervalue the subtleties of Christian philosophy, let me impress upon you that, where a congregation is childlike, unprepared, and as it were uninstructed, no teaching can be too direct and simple. Such a congregation asks for bread, not for precious stones of oratory; for kindly promise, not for mystical speculation. That

you have seriously questioned, even in your own mind, any of the Divine truths of our creed, as expressed in that Book which is a light and a law unto men, I will not for a moment believe; but I shall be glad to receive forthwith, over your own signature, an assurance that my surmise is a correct one, and that you will be careful in the future to give no further occasion for misconception.—I am, my dear Mr. Bradley, yours,

W. H. Darkdale and Dells.

III.

From the Rev. Ambrose Bradley to the Right Reverend the Bishop of Darkdale and Dells.

Vicarage, May 31, 1880.

My Dear Bishop,—I am obliged to you for your kind though categorical letter, to

which I hasten to give you a reply. That certain members of my congregation should have forwarded complaints concerning me does not surprise me, seeing that they have already taken me to task on many occasions and made my progress here difficult, if not disagreeable. But I think you will agree with me that there is only one light by which a Christian man, even a Christian clergyman, can consent to be directed—the light of his own conscience and intellect, Divinely implanted within him for his spiritual guidance.

I will be quite candid with you. You ask what has changed me since the day when, zealous, and, as you say, 'perfervid,' I was promoted to this ministry. The answer is simple. A deep and conscientious study of the wonderful truths of Science, an eager and

impassioned study of the beautiful truths of Art.

I seem to see you raise your hands in horror. But if you will bear with me a little while, perhaps I may convince you that what I have said is not so horrible after all—nay, that it expresses a conviction which exists at the present moment in the bosom of many Christian men.

The great question before the world just now, when the foundations of a particular faith are fatally shaken, when Science denies that Christ as we conceive Him ever was, and when Art bewails wildly that He should ever have been, is whether the Christian religion can continue to exist at all; whether, when a few more years have passed away, it will not present to a modern mind the spectacle that

paganism once presented to a mediæval mind. Now, of our leading Churchmen, not even you, my Lord Bishop, I feel sure, deny that the Church is in danger, both through attacks from without and through a kind of dry-rot within. Lyell and others have demolished and made ridiculous the Mosaic cosmogony Strauss and others have demolished, with more or less success, the Biblical and Christian miracles. No sane man now seriously believes that the sun ever stood still, or that an ass spoke in human speech, or that a multitude of people were ever fed with a few loaves and fishes, or that any solid human form ever walked on the liquid sea. With the old supernaturalism has gone the old asceticism or other-worldliness. It is now pretty well agreed that there are substantially beautiful things in this world which

have precedence over fancifully beautiful things in the other. The poets have taught us the loveliness of Nature, the painters have shown us the loveliness of Art. Meantime, what does the Church do? Instead of accepting the new knowledge and the new beauty, instead of building herself up anew on the débris of her shattered superstitions, she buries her face in her own ashes, and utters a senile wail of protestation. Instead of calling upon her children to face the storm, and to build up new bulwarks against the rising wave of secularism, she commands them to wail with her, or *to be silent.* Instead of perceiving that the priests of Baal and Antichrist might readily be overthrown with the weapons forged by their own hands, she cowers before them powerless, in all the paralysis

of superstition, in all the blind fatuity of prayer.

But let us look the facts in the face.

The teachers of the new knowledge have unroofed our Temple to the heavens, but have not destroyed its foundations; they have overthrown its brazen images, but have not touched its solid walls. Put the case in other and stronger words. The God who thundered upon Sinai has vanished into air and cloud, but the God of man's heavenly aspiration is wonderfully quickened and alive. The Bible of wrath and prophecy is cast contemptuously aside, but the Bible of eternal poetry is imperishable, its wild dreams and aspirations being crystallised in such literature as cannot die. The historic personality of the gentle Founder of Christianity becomes fainter and

fainter as the ages advance; but, on the other hand, brighter and fairer grows the Divine Ideal which rose from the ashes of that god-like man. Men reject the old miracles, but they at last accept a miracle of human idealism. In one word, though Christianity has perished as a dogmatic faith, it survives as the philosophic religion of the world.

This being so, how does it behove a Christian minister, eating the Church's bread, but fully alive to her mortal danger, to steer his course?

Shall he, as so many do, continue to act in the nineteenth century as he would have acted in the fifteenth, or indeed in any century up to the Revolution? Shall he base his teaching on the certainty of miracles, on the existence of supernaturalism, on the evil of the

human heart, the vanity of this world, and the certainty of rewards and punishments in another? Shall he brandish the old hell fire, or scatter the old heavenly manna?

I do not think so!

Knowing in his heart that these things are merely the cast-off epidermis of a living and growing creed, he may, in perfect consciousness of God's approval, put aside the miraculous as unproven if not irrelevant; warn the people against mere supernaturalism; proclaim with the apostles of the Renaissance the glory and loveliness of *this* world—its wondrous scenes, its marvellous story as written on the rocks and in the stars, its divine science, its literature, its poetry, and its art; and treading all the fire of Hell beneath his feet, and denouncing the threat of eternal wrath as a

chimera, base his hope of immortality on the moral aspirations that, irrespective of dogma, are common to all mankind.

This I think he may do, and must do, if the Church is to endure.

Let him do this, and let only a tithe of his brethren imitate him in so doing, and out of this nucleus of simple believers, as out of the little Galilean band, may be renewed a faith that will redeem the world. Questioned of such a faith, Science will reply—'I have measured the heavens and the earth, I have traced back the book of the universe page by page and letter by letter, but I have found neither here nor yonder any proof that God is *not*; nay, beyond and behind and within all phenomena, there abides one unknown quantity which you are quite free to call—God.'

Similarly questioned, Art will answer—'Since you have rejected what was so hideous, tested by the beauty of this world, and since you hold even my work necessary and holy, I too will confess with you that I hunger for something fairer and less perishable; and in token of that hunger, of that restless dream, I will be your Church's handmaid, and try to renew her Temple and make it fair.'

The keystone of the Church is Jesus Christ. Not the Jesus of the miracles, not Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary, but Jesus Christ, the Divine Ideal, the dream and glory of the human race. Not God who made himself a man, but man who, by God's inspiration, has been fashioned unto the likeness of a God.

And what, as we behold him now, is this Divine Ideal—this man made God?

He is simply, as I conceive, the accumulated testimony of human experience—of history, poetry, philosophy, science, and art—in favour of a rational religion, the religion of earthly peace and heavenly love. Built upon the groundwork of what, shorn of its miraculous pretensions, was a gentle and perfect life, the Divine Ideal, or Ideal Person, began. At first shadowy and almost sinister, then clearer and more beautiful; then, descending through the ages, acquiring at every step some new splendour of self-sacrifice, some new consecration of love or suffering, from every heart that suffered patiently, from every soul that fed the lamp of a celestial dream with the oil of sweet human love. And now, far removed as is man himself from the archetypal ape, is the Christ of modern Christendom, this spiritual

Saviour of the world, from the ghostly skeleton of the early martyrs, from the Crucified One of early Christian art. The life of generations has gone to fashion him—all our human experience has served to nourish him—gradually from age to age He has drunk in the blood of suffering and the milk of knowledge, till He stands supreme as we see him—not God, but man made God.

Does it matter so much, after all, whether we worship a person or an idea, since, as I suggest, the Idea has become a Person, with all the powers and privileges of divinity? Nay, who in this world is able, even with the help of philosophy, to distinguish what *is* from what seems—the phenomenal from the real? So long as Our Lord exists as a moral phenomenon, so long in other words as we can

apprehend him as an ideal of human life, Christ is not dead, and his resurrection is not a dream. He walks the world. He remembers Greece and Rome, as well as Galilee; He blesses the painter and the poet, as well as the preacher in the Temple. He rejects nothing; He reads the rocks and the stars, and He adds their gospel to his own; He cries to men of all creeds, as his prototype cried to his disciples of yore, 'Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and ye shall rest.'

Pardon me, my Lord Bishop, the desultory thoughts noted down in this long letter. They perhaps give you some clue as to the sentiments with which I pursue the Christian mission. You will doubtless think me somewhat heterodox, but I have at least the courage of my opinions; and on some such

heterodoxy as mine—though on one, I hope, much broader and wiser—it will soon be found necessary to reconstruct the Christian Church. I am, my Lord Bishop, yours,

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

IV.

From the Bishop of Darkdale and Dells to the Rev. Ambrose Bradley, Vicar of Fensea.

MY DEAR SIR,—I cannot express to you with what feelings of sorrow and amazement I have read your terrible letter! I must see you personally at once. My only hope now is that your communication represents a passing aberration, rather than the normal condition of your mind. I shall be at Darkdale on Saturday next, the 2nd. Will you make it

convenient to be in the town on that day, and to call upon me at about eleven in the forenoon? I am,

W. M. Darkdale and Dells.

CHAPTER III.

THE BISHOP.

A priest he was, not over-merry,
Who loved sound doctrine and good sherry;
Who wound his mind up every morning
At the sedate cathedral's warning,
And found it soberly keep time,
In 's pocket, to each hourly chime;
Who, church's clock-face dwelling under,
Knew 'twas impossible to blunder,
If Peter's self at 's door should knock,
And roundly ask him— *What 's o'clock?*

The Hermitage.

On the morning of June 2 the Rev. Ambrose Bradley left Fensea by the early market train, and arrived at Darkdale just in time for his interview with the Bishop of his diocese.

Seen in broad daylight, as he quickly made

his way through the narrow streets to the episcopal residence, Bradley looked pale and troubled, yet determined. He was plainly drest, in a dark cloth suit, with broad felt hat; and there was nothing in his attire, with the exception of his white clerical necktie, to show that he held a sacred office. His dress, indeed, was careless almost to slovenliness, and he carried a formidable walking-stick of common wood. With his erect and powerful frame and his closely shaven cheeks he resembled an athlete rather than a clergyman, for he had been one of the foremost rowers and swimmers of his time. He wore no gloves, and his hands, though small and well formed, were slightly reddened by the sun.

Arrived at his destination, an old-fashioned residence, surrounded by a large garden, he

rang the gate bell, and was shown by a footman into the house, where his card was taken by a solemn-looking person clerically attired. After waiting a few moments in the hall, he was ushered into a luxuriously furnished study, where he found the Bishop, with his nether limbs wrapt in rugs, seated close to a blazing fire.

Bishop —— was a little spare man of about sixty, with an aquiline nose, a slightly receding forehead, a mild blue eye, and very white hands. He was said to bear some facial likeness to Cardinal Newman, and he secretly prided himself upon the resemblance. He spoke slowly and with a certain precision, never hurrying himself in his utterance, and giving full force to the periods of what was generally considered a beautiful and silvery voice.

'Good morning, Mr. Bradley,' he said, without noticing the other's extended hand. 'You will excuse my rising? The rheumatism in my knees has been greatly increased by this wretched weather. Pray take a chair by the fire.'

Bradley, however, found a seat as far from the fire as possible; for the weather was far from cold, and the room itself was like a vapour bath.

There was a pause. The Bishop, shading his face with one white hand, on which sparkled a valuable diamond ring, was furtively inspecting his visitor.

'You sent for me?' said Bradley, somewhat awkwardly.

'Yes—about that letter. I cannot tell you how distressed I was when I received it;

indeed, if I may express myself frankly, I never was so shocked in my life. I had always thought you so different, so very different. But there! I trust you have come to tell me that the hope I expressed was right, and that it was under some temporary aberration that you expressed sentiments so extraordinary, so peculiarly perverted, and—hem!—unchristian.'

The clergyman's dark eye flashed, and his brow was knitted.

'Surely not unchristian,' he returned.

'Not merely that, sir, but positively atheistic!' cried the Bishop, wheeling round in his chair and looking his visitor full in the face.

'Then I expressed myself miserably. I am not an atheist; God forbid!'

'But as far as I can gather from your

expressions, you absolutely dare to question the sacred character of the Scriptures, and the Divine nature and miraculous life and death of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!'

'Not at all,' replied Bradley, quietly.

'Not at all!' echoed the Bishop.

'Permit me to explain. I expressed my humble opinion that there are many things in the Scriptures which are contradicted by modern evidence, so that the sacred writings must be accepted not as history but as poetry; and I said that, although the miraculous narrative of Christ's life and death might have to be revised, the beautiful Ideal it had set before us was sufficient for all our needs. In other words, whether Our Lord was a Divine personage or not, He had become a Divine Influence—which, after all, is the same thing.'

'It is *not* the same thing, sir!' exclaimed the Bishop, horrified. 'It is very far from being the same thing. Why, any Unitarian would admit as much as you do! — and pardon me for reminding you, you are not a Unitarian—you are a clergyman of the Church of England. You have subscribed the Articles —you—God bless my soul! what is the world coming to, when a Christian minister uses language worthy of the atheist Bradlaugh?'

'You remind me that I subscribed the Articles,' said Bradley, still preserving his calmness. 'I did so without thought, as so many do, when I was a very young man.'

'What are you now, sir? A young man, a very young man; and in the audacious spirit of youth and inexperience you touch on subjects which the wisest minds of the world

have been content to approach with reverence, with awe and trembling. I see your position clearly enough. The horrible infidelity which fills the air at the present day has penetrated your mind, and with the pride of intellectual impiety—that very pride for which Satan was cast from heaven—you profane the mysteries of your religion. After what you have said, I am almost prepared to hear you tell me that you actually *did* write that article on Miracles, which your parishioners impute to you, in the "Bi-monthly Review!"'

'It is quite true. I did write that article.'

'And you have contributed to other infidel publications; for instance, to the "Charing Cross Chronicle," which is edited by an infidel and written for infidels?'

'Excuse me; the "Chronicle" is not generally considered an infidel publication.'

'Have you contributed to it—yes or no, sir?'

'Not on religious subjects; on literary topics only.'

'But you have written for it; that is enough. All this being granted, I think I may safely gather whence you receive your inspirations. From that portion of the press which is attempting to destroy our most sacred institutions, and which is endeavouring, in one way or another, to undermine the whole foundations of the Christian Church.'

Bradley rose to his feet and stood on the hearthrug, facing his superior, who looked up at him with ill-concealed horror and amazement. By this time he was not a little agitated;

but he still preserved a certain outward composure, and his manner was full of the greatest humility and respect.

'Will you permit me to explain?' he said in a low voice. 'The hope and dream of my life is to upraise the Church, not to destroy it.'

'Humph! to upraise *a* church, perhaps, but not the Church of Christ.'

'The Church of Christ—a church wherein all men may worship, irrespective of points of dogma, which have been the curse of every religion, and of ours most of all. For such a communion only two articles of faith would be necessary—a belief in an all-loving and all-wise Creator, or First Unknown Cause, and a belief in a Divine Character, created and evolved we need not ask how, but bearing the name of the Founder of Christianity.'

'And the Bible, sir, the Bible!' cried the Bishop, impatiently. 'What would you do with that?'

'I would use it in its proper place as—literature.'

'Literature!' said the Bishop with uplifted hands. 'You would then class that Blessed Book, from which the world has drawn the milk of immortal life, in the same category as Homer's Iliad, the profane poems of Horace and Catullus, and—save the mark!—Lord Byron's poems, and the miserable novels of the period?'

'You do not quite understand me!'

'Sir, I understand you only too well.'

I do not call all printed matter literature; but I hold that all literature of the higher kind is, like the Bible, divinely inspired. Dante,

Milton, and Shakespeare were as assuredly sent by God as Moses and Elijah. Shall we call the Book of Job a divine piece of moral teaching, and deny that title to "Hamlet" and "King Lear"? Is not the "Faust" of Goethe as spiritual a product as the Song of Solomon? Ezekiel was a prophet; prophets also are Emerson and Thoreau. Spinoza has been called God-intoxicated; and it is true. There might be some question as to the mission of Byron (though I myself believe there is none); but surely no thinking person can reject the pretensions of that divine poet and martyred man who wrote the "Prometheus Unbound"!'

'Shelley!' ejaculated the other, as if a bomb had exploded under his feet. 'Are you actually speaking of *him*, sir?—the atheist Shelley?'

'He was no atheist. More than most men he believed in God—a god of love.'

This was too much. Quite forgetting his rheumatism, the Bishop threw off his rugs and rose tremulously to his feet.

'Mr. Bradley,' he said, 'let there be an end to this. I have heard you patiently and respectfully, thinking perhaps you might have something to say in your own defence; but every word you utter is an outrage—yes, sir, an outrage. Such opinions as you have expressed here to-day, and the other day in your letter, might be conceivable in a boy fresh from college; but coming from one who has been actually ordained, and has held more than one office in the Church, they savour of blasphemy. In any case, I shall have to take the matter into consideration, with a view to your

immediate suspension. But if you wish it I will give you time—a little time—to reflect. I would do anything to avoid a scandal.'

The clergyman lifted his hat and stick, with a slight involuntary shrug of the shoulder.

'It is, then, as I expected,' he said. 'I am to be denounced and unfrocked. The days of persecution are not yet quite over, I perceive.'

The Bishop flushed angrily.

'It is absurd to talk of persecution in such a case, Mr. Bradley. Do you yourself conceive it possible that you, bearing such opinions, can remain in the Church?'

'I do not conceive it possible. Shall I resign at once?'

'Permit me to think it over, and perhaps to consult with those who in such matters

are wiser than myself. I shall do nothing hasty, or harsher than the occasion warrants, be sure of that.'

'Thank you,' returned Bradley, with a peculiar smile.

'You shall hear from me. In the meantime, let me entreat you to be careful. Good morning.'

And with a cold bow the Bishop dismissed his visitor.

On leaving the episcopal residence Bradley went straight to the railway station, had a slight and hasty lunch at the buffet, and then took the midday express to London. Entering a second-class carriage, the only other occupants of which were a burly personage going up for a Cattle Show and a spruce

individual with 'bagman' written on every lineament of his countenance, he resigned himself to reflections on his peculiar position.

Throughout these reflections I have no intention of following him, but they seemed less gloomy and miserable than might be conceived possible under the circumstances. His eye was clear and determined, his mouth set firmly, and now and then he smiled sadly to himself—just as he had smiled in the presence of the Bishop.

The express reached London in about six hours, so that it was evening when Bradley arrived at King's Cross, carrying with him only a small hand-bag. Instead of hailing a cab, he walked right on along the streets—through Taviton Street to Russell Square, thence into Holborn, and thence, across Lin-

coln's Inn Fields, into the Strand. He then turned off towards the Temple, which he entered with the air of one who knew its quiet recesses well.

He was turning into Pump Court when he suddenly came face to face with a man of about thirty, elegantly dressed, with faultless gloves and boots, and carrying a light cane. He was very fresh and fair-complexioned, with sandy whiskers and moustaches; and to complete his rather dandified appearance he sported an eyeglass.

'Cholmondeley!' cried the clergyman, pronouncing it 'Chumley' according to the approven mode.

'Ambrose Bradley!' returned the other. 'Is it possible? Why, I thought you were hundreds of miles away.'

'I came up here by the express, and was just coming to see you.'

'Then come along with me and dine at the "Reform."'

They looked a strange contrast as they walked on side by side—the powerful, grave-looking man, shabbily attired in his semi-clerical dress, and the elegant exquisite attired in the height of London fashion, with his mild blue eye and his eyeglass in position. Yet John Cholmondeley was something more than the mere ornamental young person he appeared; and as for his mildness, who that had read his savage articles on foreign politics in the 'Bi-monthly Review' would have taken him for a harmless person? He was a Positivist of Positivists, an M.A. of Oxford, and the acting-editor of the 'Charing Cross Chronicle.'

His literary style was hysterical and almost feminine in its ferocity. Personally he was an elegant young man, with a taste for good wines and good cigars, and a tendency in external matters to follow the prevailing fashion.

They drove to the 'Reform' in a hansom, and dined together. At the table adjoining theirs on one side two Cabinet Ministers were seated in company with Jack Bustle, of the 'Chimes,' and Sir Topaz Cromwell, the young general just returned from South Africa; at the table on the other side an Under-Secretary of State was giving a little feast to Joseph Moody, the miners' agent and delegate, who had been a miner himself, and who was just then making some stir in political circles by his propaganda.

After dinner they adjourned to the smoking-room, which they found almost empty; and then, in a few eager sentences, Bradley explained his position and solicited his friend's advice. For that advice was well worth having, Cholmondeley being not only a clever thinker but a shrewd man of the world.

CHAPTER IV.

WORLDLY COUNSEL.

A pebble, not a pearl!—worn smooth and round
With lying in the currents of the world
Where they run swiftliest—polished if you please,
As such things may and must be, yet indeed
No shining agate and no precious stone;
Nay, pebble, merely pebble, one of many
Thrown in the busy shallows of the stream
To break its flow and make it garrulous.
The City Dame; or, a Match for Mammon.

'I AM not at all surprised at what you have told me,' said Cholmondeley, sipping his coffee and smoking his cigar. 'I knew that it *must* come sooner or later. Your position in the Church has always been an anomalous one, and, egad! if you have been going on as you

tell me, I don't wonder they want to get rid of you. Well, what do you intend to do?'

'That is just the point I came to consult you upon,' returned the clergyman.

'I know what I should do in your place. I should stand to my colours, and give them a last broadside. The 'Chronicle' is open to you, you know. The old ship of the Church is no longer seaworthy, and if you helped to sink it you would be doing a service to humanity.'

'God forbid!' cried Bradley, fervently. 'I would rather cut off my right hand than do anything to injure the Establishment. After all, it is the only refuge in times of doubt and fear.'

'It strikes me you are rather inconsistent,' said Cholmondeley with cool astonishment.

'Not at all. It is precisely because I love

the Church, because I believe in its spiritual mission, that I would wish to see it re-organised on a scientific and rational basis. When all is said and done, I am a Christian —that is, a believer in the Divine Idea of self-sacrifice and the enthusiasm of humanity. All that is beautiful and holy, all that may redeem man and lead him to an everlasting righteousness, is, in my opinion, summed up in the one word, Christianity.'

'But, my dear Bradley, you have rejected the *thing*! Why not dispense with the *name* as well?'

'I believe the name to be indispensable. I believe, moreover, that the world would waste away of its own carnality and atheism without a Christian priesthood. In the flesh or in the spirit Christ lives, to redeem the world.'

'Since you believe so much,' said Cholmondeley drily, 'it is a pity you don't believe a little more. For my own part, you know my opinion—which is, that Christ gets a great deal more credit for what is good in civilisation than He deserves. Science has done more in one hundred years to redeem the race than Christianity has done in eighteen hundred. *Verb. sap.*'

'Science is one of his handmaids,' returned Bradley, 'and Art is another; that is why I would admit both of these into the service of the Temple. But bereft of his influence, separated from the Divine Idea, and oblivious of the Divine Character, both Science and Art go stumbling in the dark—and blaspheme. When Science gives the lie to any deathless human instinct—when, for example, she nega-

tives the dream of personal immortality—she simply stultifies herself; for she knows nothing and can tell us nothing on that subject, whereas Christ, answering the impulse of the human heart, tells us *all.* When Art says that she labours for her own sake, and that the mere reproduction of beautiful earthly forms is soul-satisfying, she also is stultified; for there is no true art apart from the religious spirit. In one word, Science and Art, rightly read, are an integral part of the world's religion, which is Christianity.'

'I confess I don't follow you,' said the journalist, laughing; 'but there, you were always a dreamer. Frankly, I think this bolstering up of an old creed with the truths of the new is a little dishonest. Christianity is based upon certain miraculous events, which

have been proved to be untrue; man's foolish belief in their truth has led to an unlimited amount of misery; and having disposed of your creed's miraculous pretensions——'

'Are you quite sure you have disposed of them?' interrupted Bradley. 'In any case, is not the personal and posthumous influence of Our Saviour, as seen in the world's history, quite as miraculous as any of the events recorded of Him during His lifetime?'

'On the contrary! But upon my life, Bradley, I don't know where to have you! You seem to have taken a brief on both sides. Beware of indecision—it won't do in religion. You are stumbling between two stools.'

'Then I say with Mercutio, "a plague on both your houses!"' cried Bradley, laughing.

'But don't you see I want to reconcile them?'

'You won't do it. It's too old a feud—a vendetta, in fact. Remember what Mercutio himself got by trying to be a peacemaker. The world can understand your Tybalts and your Parises—that is to say, your fire-eating Voltaires and your determined Tom Paines—but it distrusts the men who, like Matt Arnold *et hoc genus omne*, believe simply nothing, and yet try to whitewash the old idols.'

There was a silence. The two men looked at each other in friendly antagonism, Cholmondeley puffing his cigar leisurely with the air of a man who had solved the great problem, and Bradley smoking with a certain suppressed excitement.

Presently the clergyman spoke again.

'I don't think we shall agree—so let us cease to argue. What I want you to understand is, that I do love the Church, and cannot part from her without deep pain—without, in fact, rupturing all my most cherished associations. But there is another complication which makes this affair unusually distressing to me. You know I am engaged to be married?'

'Ah, yes! I heard something about it. I begin to see your difficulty. You are afraid——'

He hesitated, as if not liking to complete the sentence.

'Afraid of what, pray?'

'Well, that, when you are pronounced heretical, she will throw you over!'

The clergyman smiled curiously and shook his head.

'If that were all,' he replied, 'I should be able very easily to resign myself to the consequences of my heresy; but, fortunately or unfortunately, the lady to whom I am engaged (our engagement, by the way, is only private) is not likely to throw me over, however much I may seem to deserve it.'

'Then why distress yourself?'

'Simply because I doubt my right to entail upon her the consequences of my heterodoxy. She herself is liberal-minded, but she does not perceive that any connection with a heretic must mean, for a sensitive woman, misery and martyrdom. When I leave the Church I shall be practically ruined—not exactly in pocket, for, as you know, I have some money of my own—but intellectually and socially. The Church never pardons, and seldom spares.'

'But there are other careers open to you—literature, for example! We all know your talents—you would soon win an eminence from which you might laugh at your persecutors.'

'Literature, my dear Cholmondeley, is simply empiricism—I see nothing in it to attract an earnest man.'

'You are complimentary!' cried Cholmondeley, with a laugh.

'Oh!—you are different! You carry into journalism an amount of secular conviction which I could never emulate; and, moreover, you are one of those who, like Harry the Smith, always fight "for your own hand." Now, I do not fight for my own hand; I repeat emphatically, all my care is for the Church. She may persecute me, she may despise me, but still I

love her and believe in her, and shall pray till my last breath for the time when she will become reorganised.'

'I see how all this will end,' said the journalist, half seriously. 'Some of these days you will go over to Rome!'

'Do you think so? Well, I might do worse even than *that*, for in Rome, now as ever, I should find excellent company. But no, I don't fancy that I shall go even halfway thither, unless—which is scarcely possible—I discover signs that the doting mother of Christianity accepts the new scientific miracle and puts Darwin out of the *Index*. Frankly, my difficulty is a social, or rather a personal, one. Ought I, a social outcast, to accept the devotion of one who would follow me, not merely out of the Church, but down into the

very Hell of atheism, if I gave her the requisite encouragement?'

Cholmondeley did not reply, but after reflecting quietly for some moments he said:—

'You have not told me the name of the lady.'

'Miss Alma Craik.'

'*Not* the heiress?'

'Yes, the heiress.'

'I know her cousin, George Craik—we were at school together. I thought they were engaged.'

'They were once, but she broke it off long ago.'

'And she has accepted *you*?'

'Unconditionally.' He added with strange fervour: 'She is the noblest, the sweetest, and most beautiful woman in the world.'

'Then why on earth do you hesitate?' asked Cholmondeley. 'You are a lucky fellow.'

'I hesitate for the reason I have told you. She had placed her love, her life, her fortune at my feet, devotedly and unreservedly. As a clergyman of the Church, as one who might have devoted his lifetime to the re-establishment of his religion and the regeneration of his order, one, moreover, whom the world would have honoured and approved as a good and faithful servant, I might have accepted the sacrifice; indeed, after some hesitation, I did accept it. But now it is altogether different. I cannot consent to her martyrdom, even though it would glorify mine.'

Although Bradley exercised the strongest control over his emotions, and endeavoured to

discuss the subject as dispassionately and calmly as possible, it was clear to his listener that he was deeply and strangely moved. Cholmondeley was touched, for he well knew the secret tenderness of his friend's nature. Under that coldly cut, almost stern face, with its firm eyebrows and finely chiselled lips—within that powerful frame which, so far at least as the torso was concerned, might have been used as a model for Hercules—there throbbed a heart of almost feminine sensitiveness and sweetness; of feminine passion too, if the truth must be told, for Bradley possessed the sensuousness of most powerful men. Bradley was turned thirty years of age, but he was as capable of a *grande passion* as a boy of twenty—as romantic, as high-flown, as full of the fervour of youth and the brightness of dream. With him, to love a woman was to love her with all his faith and

all his life; he was far too earnest to trifle for a moment with the most sacred of all human sentiments. Cholmondeley was aware of this, and gauged the situation accordingly.

'If my advice is worth anything,' he said, 'you will dismiss from your mind all ideas of martyrdom. You are really exaggerating the horrors of the situation; and, for the rest, where a woman loves a man as I am sure Miss Craik loves you, sacrifice of the kind you mention becomes easy, even delightful. Marry her, my dear Bradley, and from the very altar of pagan Hymen smile at the thunderbolts of the Church.'

Bradley seemed plunged in deep thought, and sat silent, leaning back and covering his face with one hand. At last he looked up, and exclaimed with unconcealed emotion—

'No, I am not worthy of her! Even if

my present record were clean, what could I say of my past? Such a woman should have a stainless husband! I have touched pitch, and been defiled.'

'Come, come!' said the journalist, not a little astonished. 'Of all the men I ever knew —and I have known many—you are about the most irreproachable.'

The clergyman bent over the table, and said in a low voice, 'Do you remember Mary Goodwin?'

'Of course,' replied the other with a laugh. 'What! is it possible that you are reproaching yourself on *that* account? Absurd! You acted by her like a man of honour; but little Mary was too knowing for you, that was all.'

'You knew I married her?'

'I suspected it, knowing your high-flown notions of duty. We all pitied you—we all——'

'Hush!' said the clergyman, still in the same low, agitated voice. 'Not a word against her. She is asleep and at peace; and if there was any sin I shared it—I who ought to have known better. Perhaps, had I been a better man, I might have made her truly happy; but she didn't love me—I did not deserve her love—and so, as you know, we parted.'

'I know she used you shamefully,' returned Cholmondeley, with some impatience. 'Come, I *must* speak! You picked her from the gutter, and made her what Mrs. Grundy calls an honest woman. How did she reward you? By bolting away with the first rascal who offered her the run of his purse and a flash set

of diamonds. By-the-by, I heard of her last in India, where she was a member of a strolling company. Did she die out there?'

'Yes,' answered the clergyman, very sadly. 'Nine years ago.'

'You were only a boy,' continued Cholmondeley, with an air of infinite age and experience, 'and Mr. Verdant Green was nothing to you. You thought all women angels, at an age when most youngsters know them to be devils. Well, that's all over, and you have nothing to reproach yourself with. I wish *I* could show as clean a book, old fellow.'

'I do reproach myself, nevertheless,' was the reply. 'That boyish episode has left its taint on my whole life; yes, it is like the mark of a brand burned into the very flesh. I had

no right to woo another woman; yet I have done so, to my shame, and now Heaven is about to punish me by stripping me bare in her sight and making me a social outlaw. I have deserved it all.'

The two remained together for some time longer, but Bradley, though he listened gently to his friend's remonstrances, could not be persuaded to take a less gloomy view of the situation. He was relieved unconsciously, nevertheless, by the other's cheery and worldly counsel. It was something, at least, to have eased his heart, to have poured the secret of his sorrow and fear into a sympathetic bosom.

They had dined very early, and when they rose to separate it was only half-past eight o'clock.

'Will you go on to my chambers?' asked

Cholmondeley. 'I can give you a bed, and I will join you after I have done my duties at the office.'

'No; I shall sleep at Morley's Hotel, and take the early morning express down home.'

They strolled together along Pall Mall and across Leicester Square, where they separated, Cholmondeley sauntering airily, with that sense of superhuman insight which sits so lightly on the daily journalist, towards the newspaper office in Cumberland Street, and the clergyman turning into Morley's, where he was well known, to arrange for his room.

As it was still so early, however, Bradley did not stay in the hotel, but lighted his pipe and strolled thoughtfully along the busy Strand.

At a little after nine o'clock he found him-

self close to the Parthenon Theatre, where 'Hamlet' was then being performed for over the hundredth night. He had always been a lover of the theatre, and he now remembered that Mr. Aram's performance of the Danish prince was the talk of London. Glad to discover any means of distracting his dreary thoughts, he paid his two shillings, and found a place at the back of the pit.

The third act was just beginning as he entered, and it was not until its conclusion that he began to look around the crowded house. The assemblage was a fashionable one, and every box as well as every stall was occupied. Many of the intelligent spectators held in their hands books of the play, with which they might be supposed to be acquainting themselves for the first time; and all wore upon

their faces more or less of that bored expression characteristic of audiences which take their pleasures sadly, not to say stupidly. In all the broad earth there is nothing which can quite equal the sedate unintelligence of an English theatrical audience.

Suddenly, as he gazed, his eyes became attracted by a face in one of the private boxes —he started, went pale, and looked again—as he did so, the head was turned away towards the back of the box. Trembling like one that had seen an apparition, he waited for it to incline again his way—and when it did so he watched it in positive horror. As if to convince himself of its identity, he borrowed an opera-glass from a respectable-looking man seated near him, and fixed it on the face in the box.

The face of a woman, splendidly attired,

with diamonds sparkling on her naked throat and arms, and other diamonds in her hair. The hair was jet-black, and worn very low down on the forehead, almost reaching to the thick black eyebrows, beneath which shone a pair of eyes as black and bold as those of Circe herself. Her complexion had the olive clearness of a perfect brunette, and her mouth, which was ripe and full, was crimson red as some poisonous flower—not with blood, but paint. She was certainly very handsome, though somewhat *petite* and over-plump. Her only visible companion was a plainly dressed elderly woman, with whom she seldom exchanged a word, and a little boy of seven, elegantly dressed.

Bradley looked again and again, and the more he looked the more his wonder and

horror grew. During all the rest of the performance he scarcely withdrew his eyes, but just before the curtain fell he slipped out of the pit, and passed round to the portico in front of the theatre.

There he waited, in the shadow of one of the pillars, till the throng began to flow forth, and the linkmen began summoning the carriages and cabs to take up their elegant burthens. The vestibule of the theatre was full of gentlemen in full dress and ladies in opera-cloaks, laughing and chatting over the evening's performance. He drew close to the glass doors and looked in, pale as death.

At last he saw the lady he sought, standing with the woman and the child, and talking gaily with an elderly gentleman who sported an eyeglass. How bold and beautiful she

looked! He watched her in fascination, always taking care to keep out of the range of her vision.

At last she shook hands with the gentleman, and moved towards the door. He drew back into the shadow.

She stood on the threshold, looking out into the night, and the linkman ran up to her, touching his cap.

'Mrs. Montmorency's carriage,' she said in a clear silvery voice; and the man ran off to seek the vehicle.

Presently a smart brougham came up, and, accompanied by her elderly companion and the child, she stepped in. Almost simultaneously, Bradley crossed the pavement and leapt into a hansom.

'Keep that carriage in view,' he said to the

driver, pointing to the brougham, 'and I will give you a sovereign.'

The man laughed and nodded, and immediately the pursuit began.

CHAPTER V.

'MRS. MONTMORENCY.'

> Ay me, I sowed a seed in youth,
> Nor knew that 'twas a dragon's tooth,
> Whereof has sprung to bring me shame
> Legions of woe without a name.—*Fausticulus.*

The brougham passed rapidly up Wellington Street into Long Acre, thence into Oxford Street, passing westward till it came to Regent Circus, then it was driven up Portland Place to the gates of Regent's Park. It entered, and the hansom followed about fifty yards behind. Passing to the left around the park, it reached Cranwell Terrace, and drew up before one of the large houses fronting the artificial water.

The hansom paused too, but Bradley kept his seat until he saw the lady and her companion alight, knock at the door, and enter in; while the brougham drove round to the stables at the rear. Then he sprang out, paid the man his sovereign, and prepared to follow.

For a moment he hesitated on the steps of the house, as if undecided whether to knock or fly; but recovering his determination he knocked loudly. The sound had scarcely died away when the door was opened by the same elderly woman he had noticed at the theatre.

'Mrs. Montmorency?' he said, for he had got the name by heart.

The woman looked at him in surprise, and answered with a strong French accent.

'Madame has only just come in, and you cannot see her to-night.'

'I *must* see her,' returned the clergyman, entering the hall. 'It is a matter of very important business.'

'But it is so late. To-morrow, monsieur?'

'To-morrow I am leaving London. I must see her at once.'

Seeing his persistence, and observing that he had the manners of a gentleman, the woman yielded.

'If you will step this way, I will tell madame, but I am afraid she will not see you.'

So saying she led the way into a room on the ground floor, furnished splendidly as a kind of study, and communicating with a small dining room, which in its turn led to a large conservatory.

'Your name, monsieur, if you please?' said the woman.

'My name is of no consequence—perhaps your mistress would not remember it. Tell her simply that a gentleman wishes to see her on very important business.'

With another look of wonder, the woman withdrew.

Still dreadfully pale and agitated, Bradley surveyed the apartment. It was furnished oddly, but with a perfect disregard of expense. A gorgeous Turkey carpet covered the floor; the curtains were of black-and-gold tapestry, the chairs of gold and crimson. In a recess, close to the window, was an elegant ormolu writing-desk, surmounted by a small marble statue, representing a young maid just emerging from the bath. Copies of well-known pictures covered the walls, but one picture was a genuine Etty, representing Diana and her

virgins surprised by Actæon. Over the mantelpiece, which was strewn with golden and silver ornaments, and several photographs in frames, was a copy of Titian's Venus, very admirably coloured.

To the inexperienced mind of the clergyman, ill acquainted with a certain phase of society, the pictures seemed sinister, almost diabolic. The room, moreover, was full of a certain sickly scent like *patchouli*, as if some perfumed creature had just passed through it leaving the scent behind.

He drew near the mantelpiece and looked at the photographs. Several of them he failed to recognise, though they represented women well known in the theatrical world; but in one he recognised the elderly gentleman with the eyeglass whom he had seen at the theatre, in

another the little boy, and in two the mistress of the house herself. In one of the two last she was represented semi-nude, in the spangled trunks, flesh-coloured tights, and high-heeled boots of some fairy prince.

He was gazing at this photograph in horror, when he heard the rustle of a dress behind him. Turning quickly, he found himself face to face with the woman he sought.

The moment their eyes met, she uttered a sharp cry and went even more pale than usual, if that were possible. As she recoiled before him, he thought she did so in fear, but he was mistaken. All she did was to move to the door, peep out into the lobby, then, closing the door rapidly, she faced him again.

The expression of her face was curious to behold. It was a strange mixture of devilry

and effrontery. She wore the dress she had worn in the theatre—her arms, neck, and bosom were still naked and covered with diamonds; and her eyes flashed with a beautiful but forbidding light.

'So it is *you!*' she said in a low voice. 'At last!'

He stood before her like a man of marble, livid, ghastly, unable to speak, but surveying her with eyes of infinite despair. The sickly scent he had noticed in the room clung about her, and filled the air he was breathing.

There was a long silence. At last, unable any longer to bear his steadfast gaze, she laughed sharply, and, tripping across the room, threw herself in a chair.

'Well?' she said, looking up at him with a wicked smile.

His predominant thought then found a broken utterance.

'It is true, then!—and I believed you *dead!*'

'No doubt,' she answered, showing her white teeth maliciously, 'and you are doubtless very sorry to find yourself mistaken. No, I am very much alive, as you see. I would gladly have died to oblige you, but it was impossible, *mon cher*. But won't you take a seat? We can talk as well sitting as standing, and I am very tired.'

Almost involuntarily, he obeyed her, and taking a chair sat down, still with his wild eyes fixed upon her face.

'My God!' he murmured. 'And you are still the same, after all these years.'

She leant back in her chair, surveying him

critically. It was obvious that her light manner concealed a certain dread of him ; for her bare bosom rose and fell quickly, and her breath came in short sharp pants.

'And you, my dear Ambrose, are not much changed—a little older, of course, for you were only a foolish boy then, but still very much the same. I suppose, by your clerical necktie, that you have gone into the Church? Have you got on well? I am sure I hope so, with all my heart; and I always said you were cut out for that kind of life.'

He listened to her like one listening to some evil spirit in a dream. It was difficult for him to believe the evidence of his own senses. He had been so certain that the woman was dead and buried past recall!

'How did you find me out?' she asked.

'I saw you at the theatre, and followed you home.'

'*Eh bien!*' she exclaimed, with a very doubtful French pronunciation. 'What do you want with me?'

'Want with you?' he repeated. 'My God! Nothing!'

She laughed again, flashing her teeth and eyes. Then springing up, she approached a small table, and took up a large box of cigarettes. Her white hand trembled violently.

'Can I offer you a cigarette?' she said, glancing at him over her naked shoulder.

'No, no!'

'With your permission I will light one myself!' she said, striking a wax match and suiting the action to the word. Then holding

the cigarette daintily between her white teeth, she again sat down facing him. 'Well, I am glad you have not come to make a scene. It is too late for that. We agreed to part long ago, and it was all for the best.'

'You *left* me,' he answered in a hollow voice.

'Just so,' she replied, watching the thin cloud of smoke as it wreathed from her lips. 'I left you because I saw we could never get along together. It was a stupid thing of us to marry, but it would have been a still stupider thing to remain tied together like two galley-slaves. I was not the little innocent fool you supposed me, and you were not the swell I at first imagined; so we were both taken in. I went to India with young St. Clare, and after he left me I was very ill, and a report, which I

did not contradict, got into the papers that I had died. I went on the stage out there under an assumed name, and some years ago returned to England.'

'And now,' he asked with more decision than he had yet shown, 'how are you living?'

She smiled maliciously.

'Why do you want to know?'

He rose and stood frowning over her, and despite her assumed *sang-froid* she looked a little alarmed.

'Because, when all is said and done, I am your *husband!* Whatever you now call yourself, you are the same Mary Goodwin whom I married at Oxford ten years ago, and the tie which links us together has never been legally broken. Yet I find you here, living in luxury,

and I suppose in infamy. Who pays for it all? Who is your present victim?'

With an impatient gesture and a flash of her white teeth she threw her cigarette into the fire, and rose up before him trembling, with fear, or anger.

'So you have found your tongue at last!' she said. 'Do you think I am afraid of you? No, I defy you! This is my house, and if you are not civil I will have you turned out of it. Bah! it is like you to come threatening me, at the eleventh hour.'

Her petulant rage did not deceive him; it was only a mask hastily assumed to conceal her growing alarm.

'Answer my question, Mary!—how are you living?'

'Sit down quietly, and I will tell you.'

He obeyed her, covering his eyes with his hand. She watched him for a moment; then, reassured by his subdued manner, she proceeded.

'I am not sure that I ought to tell you, but I dare say you would find out. Lord Ombermere——'

'Lord Ombermere!' echoed the clergyman. 'Why, to my knowledge, he has a wife—and children.'

She shrugged her white shoulders, with a little grimace.

'That is his affair, not mine,' she said. 'For the rest, I know the fact, and never trouble myself about it. He is very good to me, and awfully rich. I have all I want. He sent me to France and had me taught French and music; and he has settled a competence

upon our boy. That is how the matter stands. I do pretty much as I like, but if Eustace knew I had a husband actually living he would make a scene, and perhaps we should have to part.'

'Is it possible? — and — and are you happy?'

'Perfectly,' was the cool reply.

Bradley paced up and down the chamber in agitation.

'Such a life is an infamy,' he at last exclaimed. 'It is an offence against man and God.'

'I know all that cant, and I suppose you speak as a clergyman; but I do my duty by the man who keeps me, and never—like some I could name—have intrigues with other men. It wouldn't be fair, and it wouldn't pay. I hope,' she added, as if struck suddenly by the

thought, 'you have not come here to-night imagining I shall return to *you?*'

He recoiled as if from a blow.

'Return to me? God forbid!'

'So say *I*, though you might put it a little more politely. By the way, I forgot to ask you,—but perhaps you yourself have married again?'

The question came suddenly like a stab. Bradley started in fresh horror, holding his hand upon his heart. She exclaimed:—

'You might have done so, you know, thinking me food for worms, and if such were the case you may be sure I should never have betrayed you. No; "live and let live" is my motto. I am not such a fool as to suppose you have never looked at another woman; and if you had consoled yourself, taking some nice,

pretty, quiet, homely creature, fit to be a clergyman's wife, to mend his stockings, and to visit the sick with rolls of flannel and bottles of beef-tea, I should have thought you had acted like a sensible man.'

It was too horrible. He felt stifled, asphyxiated. He had never before encountered such a woman, though their name is legion in all the Babylons, and he could not understand her. With a deep frown he rose to his feet.

'Are you going?' she cried. 'Pray don't, till we understand each other!'

He turned and fixed his eyes despairingly upon her, looking so worn, so miserable, that even her hard heart was touched.

'Try to think I am really dead,' she said, 'and it will be all right. I have changed both my life and my name, and no one of my old

friends knows me. I don't act. Eustace wanted to take a theatre for me, but, after all, I prefer idleness to work, and I am not likely to reappear. I have no acquaintances out of theatrical circles, where I am known only as Mrs. Montmorency. So you see there is no danger, *mon cher*. Let me alone, and I shall let you alone. You can marry again whenever you like.'

Again she touched that cruel chord, and again he seemed like a man stabbed.

'Marry?' he echoed. 'But I am not free! You are still my wife.'

'I deny it,' was the answer. 'We are divorced; I divorced myself. It is just the same as if we had gone before the judge: a course you will surely never adopt, for it would disgrace you terribly and ruin *me*, perhaps.

Eustace is horribly proud, and if it should all come out about his keeping me, he would never forgive me. No, no, you'll never be such a fool!'

Yet she watched him eagerly, as if anxious for some assurance that he would not draw her into the open daylight of a legal prosecution.

He answered her, as if following her own wild thoughts—

'Why should I spare you? Why should I drag on my lifetime, tied by the law to a shameless woman? Why should I keep your secret and countenance your infamy? Do you take me for one of those men who have no souls, no consciences, no honour? Do you think that I will bear the horror of a guilty secret, now I know that you live, and that God

has not been merciful enough to rid me of such a curse? '

It was the first time he had seemed really violent. In his pain he almost touched her with his clenched hand.

'You had better not strike me!' she said viciously.

At this moment the door opened, and a little boy (the same Bradley had seen at the theatre) ran eagerly in. He was dressed in a suit of black velvet, with bows of coloured ribbon, and, though he was pale and evidently delicate, he looked charmingly innocent and pretty.

'*Maman! maman!*' he cried in French.

She returned angrily, answering him in the same tongue—

'*Que cherchez-vous, Bébé? Allez-vous en!*'

'*Maman, je viens vous souhaiter la bonne nuit.*'

'*Allez, allez,*' she replied impatiently, '*je viendrai vous baiser quand vous serez couché.*'

With a wondering look at the stranger the child ran from the room.

The interruption seemed to have calmed them both. There was a brief silence, during which Bradley gazed drearily at the door through which the child had vanished, and his companion seemed lost in thought.

The time has perhaps come to explain that, if this worldly and sin-stained woman had one redeeming virtue, it was love for her little boy. True, she showed it strangely, being subject to curious aberrations of mood. The child was secretly afraid of her. Sometimes she would turn upon him, for some trivial fault, with

violent passion; the next moment she would cover him with kisses and load him with toys. In her heart she adored him; indeed, he was the only thing in the world that she felt to be her own. She knew how terribly his birth, when he grew up, would tell against his chances in life, and she had so managed matters that Lord Ombermere had settled a large sum of money unconditionally upon the child; which money was already invested for him, in his mother's name, in substantial Government securities. Her own relation with Ombermere, I may remark in passing, was a curious one. Whenever he was in London, his lordship dropped in every afternoon at about four, as 'Mr. Montmorency'; he took a cup of tea in company with mother and child; at a quarter to six precisely he looked at his watch

and rose to go; and at seven he was dining in Bentinck Square, surrounded by his legal children, and faced by his lady. Personally, he was a mild, pale man, without intelligence or conversational powers of any kind, and 'Mrs. Montmorency' found his company exceedingly tedious and tame.

'You see my position,' said Mrs. Montmorency at last. 'If you have no consideration for me, perhaps you will have some for my boy.'

The clergyman sighed, and looked at her as if dazed.

'I must think it over,' he said. 'All this has come as a terrible shock upon me.'

'Shall I see you again?'

'God knows!'

'If you should call, never do so between

four and six; those are Eustace's hours. I am generally in during the evening, unless I go to the theatre. Good night!'

And with the ghost of a smile she extended her hand. He took it vacantly, and held it limply for a moment. Then he dropped it with another sigh, and went to the door, which he opened. Turning on the threshold, he saw her standing in the centre of the room, pale, beautiful, and baleful. She smiled again, flashing her eyes and showing her white teeth. With a shudder that went through all his frame, he passed out into the silent street.

It was now very late, and the Park lay still and sleeping under the dim light of the moon. From time to time a carriage passed by, but the pavement was quite deserted. Full of what he had seen, with the eyes of his soul

turned inward to the horrible reflection, he wandered slowly along, his footfalls sounding hollow and ominous on the footpath, as he went.

Instinctively, but almost unreflectingly, he took the direction of his hotel; passed out of the park and into Harley Street, thence across Cavendish Square to Regent Circus.

It seemed now to him as if his fate was sealed. God, in indignation at his revolt, meant to deal him full measure. Attacked on one side by the thunders of the Church, and tormented on the other by the ghost of his own youthful folly, where was he to find firm foothold for his feet? His one comfort in the strenuousness of his intellectual strife had been the sympathy and devotion of a woman who was now surely lost to him for ever; a woman

who, compared to this frightful apparition of a dead past, was a very spirit of heaven. Yes, he loved an angel—an angel who would have redeemed him; and lo! in the very hour of his hope, his life was to be possessed by an incarnate devil.

His thoughts travelled back to the past.

He thought of the time when he had first known Mary Goodwin. He was a youth at Oxford, and she was the daughter of a small tradesman. She was very pretty and modest-looking in those days; though she knew the world well, and the worst side of it, she seemed to know it very little. His boy's heart went out to her beauty, and he became entangled in an amour which he thought a seduction; she played her part prettily, with no lack of tears, so that, although he already knew that

his first wild fancy was not love, he married her.

Afterwards his eyes were opened. The tender-looking, mildspoken, black-eyed little beauty showed that she had been only acting a part. As their marriage was a secret one, and they could not live together, she resided in the town, and was left a good deal to herself. Once or twice whispers came to his ears that he did not like, and he remonstrated with her; she answered violently, in such terms as opened his eyes still wider to her character. She was exorbitant in her demands for money, and she dressed gorgeously, in execrable taste. When his supplies fell short, as was inevitable, she was still well provided; and he accepted her statement that the supplementary sums came from her father. Once, coming upon her one

evening unexpectedly, he found her hysterical and much the worse for liquor: empty champagne bottles and glasses were lying on the table, and the room was full of the scent of tobacco smoke. He discovered that two men of his own college had been calling upon her. A scene ensued, which was only one of many. I have no intention, however, of going into all the wretched details of what is a very common story; but it is sufficient to say that Bradley discovered himself tied miserably to a creature without honour, without education, without virtue, sometimes without decency. Nevertheless he did not cast her off or expose her, but during the Vacation took her with him to London, trying hard to reclaim her. It was while they were stopping there that she relieved him of all further suspense by walking off one

day with all his ready cash, and joining an officer whose acquaintance she had made by accident in the open street. Bradley searched for her everywhere without success. It was not for many weeks afterwards that he received a line from her, addressed from Gibraltar, telling him that she was *en route* for India, and that she had no wish either to see him or to hear from him again.

So she disappeared from his life, and when the report of her death reached him he was touched, but secretly relieved. Few even of his own personal friends knew much of this chapter of his experience: he had been wise enough to keep his actual marriage to the woman as dark as possible. So he entered the Church a free man, and purer than most men in having only one unfortunate record, through-

out which he had acted honourably, on his conscience.

And now, after all those years, she had arisen from the grave! At the very moment when he was most threatened with other perils, of body and of soul, and when his place in the world of work and duty was most insecure, she had appeared, to drive him to despair! He had been so certain that she had passed away, with all her sins, that she had become in time almost a sad sweet memory, of one more sinned against than sinning. And all the time she had been roaming up and down the earth, painted and dissolute, cruel and predatory—no longer a reckless girl, but a cold, calculating woman, with all the audacity of her experience.

But she was worse, he thought; she, in her

splendour of wealth and mature beauty, was infinitely fouler. How calmly she wore her infamy! how lightly she trafficked with him for his silence, for his complicity! Unconscious of her own monstrosity, she dared to bargain with *him*—her husband—a priest of Christ!

Let those who sympathise with Bradley in his despair beware of sharing his revengeful thoughts. In simple fact, the woman was rising, not falling; her life, bad as it was from certain points of view, was still a certain advance upon what it once had been—was certainly a purer and an honester life than that of many men; than that, for example, of the honoured member of the aristocracy who paid her bills. She was faithful to this man, and her one dream was to secure comfort and

security for her child. She had never loved Bradley, and had never pretended to love him. She did not wish to bring him any unhappiness. She had, as she expressed it, divorced herself, and, according to her conceptions of morality, she owed him no obligation.

But the more he thought of her and of the fatality of her resurrection, the more his whole soul arose in hate against her.

Of course there was one way which led to liberty, the one which she had implored him not to take. The law could doubtless at once grant him a formal divorce from the woman; but this could not be done without publicity, from which his soul shrank in horror. He pictured to himself how his adversaries would exult on seeing his name dragged through the

mud! No; come what might, he would never think of that!

I cannot follow either his spiritual or his bodily wanderings any further at present. He walked the night away, not returning to his hotel until early dawn, when, pale, dishevelled, and wild, like a man after a night's dissipation (as, indeed, he seemed to the waiter, whose experience of clergymen on town visits was not small), he called for his hand-bag, had a hasty wash, and crept away to take the morning train.

CHAPTER VI.

ALMA.

Blue-buskin'd, with the softest turquoise blue,
Faint, as the speedwell's azure dim with dew;
As far away in hue
As heaven the dainty shade is,
From the dark ultra-blue
Of literary ladies.—*The Mask.*

On the morning that the Rev. Ambrose Bradley, Vicar of Fensea, had his memorable interview with the Bishop of Darkdale and Dells, Miss Alma Craik, of the Larches, walked on the home farm in the immediate neighbourhood of her dwelling, accompanied by her dear friend and companion Agatha Combe, and attended by half a dozen dogs of

all sizes, from a melancholy old St. Bernard to a frivolous Dandie Dinmont.

The two ladies, strolling along side by side, presented a curious contrast, which was heightened not a little by their peculiarities of costume. Miss Craik, bright as Eos, and tall and graceful as a willow-wand, was clad in a pink morning dress, with pink plush hat to match, and carried a parasol of the same colour. She walked lightly, with a carriage which her detractors called proud, but which her admirers thought infinitely easy and charming; conveying to the most casual observer that she was a young lady with a will of her own, perfectly mistress of herself, and at home among her possessions. Miss Combe, on the other hand, was very short, scant of breath, and dressed in a costume which looked

like widow's weeds, but which was nothing of the sort, for at five-and-fifty she was still a virgin. Her face was round and sunny, her eyes were bright and cheerful, and few could have recognised, in so homely and kindly looking a person, the champion of Woman's Rights, the leader-writer of the 'Morning News,' and the champion Agnostic of the controversial reviews.

Yet Miss Combe, though mild enough as a woman, was terribly fierce as a writer. She had inherited her style and opinions from her father, a friend and playfellow (if such an expression may be applied to persons who *never* played) of John Mill. She had been crammed very early with Greek, Latin, moral science, and philosophy; and she would certainly have developed into a female of the

genus Griffin, had it not been for a pious aunt who invited her once a year into the country, and there managed to fill her lungs with fresh air and her mind with a certain kind of natural religion. When Agnosticism was first invented she clutched at the word, and enrolled herself as an amazon militant under the banner of the creed. She hated two things about equally—Materialism and dogmatic Christianity. She was, in fact, a busy little woman, with a kind heart, and a brain not quite big enough to grasp all the issues she was so fond of discussing.

Miss Craik had met her in London, and had taken to her immediately—chiefly, if the truth must be told, on account of her opinions; for though Miss Craik herself was nominally a Christian, she was already a sufficiently lax

one to enjoy all forms of heterodoxy. They had come together first on one great *quæstio vexata*, that of vivisection, for they both adored dogs, and Miss Combe was their most uncompromising champion against the users of the scalpel. So it happened in the course of time that they spent a part of the year together. The Larches was Miss Combe's house whenever she chose to come to it, which was very often, and she became, in a certain sense, the companion of her rich young friend.

Their way lay along green uplands with a distant sight of the sea, and they followed the footpath which led from field to field.

Presently Miss Combe, somewhat out of breath, seated herself on the foot-rest of a stile.

'Won't you take a rest, dear?' she said; 'there's room for two.'

The young lady shook her head. As she fixed her eyes upon her companion, one peculiarity of hers became manifest. She was rather short-sighted, and, whenever examining anything or anybody, slightly closed her eyelashes.

'If I were as rich as you,' continued Miss Combe after a pause, 'I know what I should do with my money.'

'Indeed! pray tell me.'

'I should build a church to the New Faith!'

'Are you serious?' said Alma merrily. 'Unfortunately, I don't know what the new faith is.'

'The faith of Humanity; not Comte's,

which is Frenchified rubbish, but the beautiful faith in human perfection and the divine future of the race. Just think what a Church it would make! In the centre an altar "to the Unknown God"; painted windows all round, with the figures of all the great teachers, from Socrates to Herbert Spencer, and signs of the zodiac and figures of the planets, if you like, on the celestial roof.'

'I don't quite see, Agatha, in what respect the new Church would be an improvement on the old one,' returned Alma; and as she spoke her eyes travelled over the still landscape, and saw far away, between her and the sea, the glittering spire of the church of Fensea.

'It would be different in every particular,' said Miss Combe good-humouredly. 'In the first place, the architecture would be, of course,

pure Greek, and there would be none of the paraphernalia of superstition.'

'And Jesus Christ?—would He have any place there at all? or would you banish Him with the rest of the gods?'

'Heaven forbid! He should be pictured in the very central window, over the altar—not bleeding, horrible, and crucified, but as the happy painters represented Him in the early centuries, a beautiful young Shepherd—yes, beautiful as Apollo—carrying under His arm a stray lamb.'

Alma sighed, and shook her head again. She was amused with her friend's opinions, and they never seemed to shock her, but her own attitude of mind with regard to Christianity was very different.

'I don't think we have got so far as that

yet,' she said, still watching the distant spire. 'If you abolish Christ crucified you abolish Christ the Saviour altogether; for sorrow, suffering, and death were the signs of His heavenly mission. Besides, I am of Mr. Bradley's opinion, and think we have too many churches already.'

'Does *he* think so?' exclaimed Miss Combe with some surprise.

'Yes, I have often heard him say that God's temple is the best — the open fields for a floor and the vaulted heavens for a roof.'

Miss Combe rose, and they strolled on together.

'Is he as heterodox as ever?' asked Miss Combe.

'Mr. Bradley? I don't know what you

mean by heterodox, but he has his own opinions on the articles of his religion.'

'Just so. He doesn't believe in the miracles, for example.'

'Have you heard him say so?'

'Not explicitly, but I have heard——'

'You mustn't believe all the nonsense you hear,' cried Alma eagerly. 'He is too intellectual for the people, and they don't understand him. You shall go to church next Sunday, and hear him preach.'

'But I'm not a church-goer,' said the elder lady, smiling. 'On Sundays I always read Herbert Spencer. Sermons are always so stupid.'

'Not always. Wait till you hear Mr. Bradley. When I listen to him, I always think of the great Abelard, whom they called

" the angel of bright discourse." He says such wonderful things, and his voice is so beautiful. As he speaks, the church seems indeed a narrow place—too small for such words, for such a speaker; and you long to hear him on some mountain top, preaching to a multitude under the open sky.'

Miss Combe did not answer, but peeping sideways at her companion she saw that her face was warmly flushed, and her eyes were strangely bright and sparkling. She knew something, but not much, of Alma's relations with the vicar, and she hoped with all her heart that they would never lead to matrimony. Alma was too wise a vestal, too precious to the cause of causes, to be thrown away on a mere country clergyman. In fact, Miss Combe had an errant brother of her own who, though an

objectionable person, was a freethinker, and in her eyes just the sort of husband for her friend. He was rather poor, not particularly handsome, and somewhat averse to soap and water; but he had held his own in platform argument with divers clergymen, and was generally accounted a ticklish subject for the Christians. So she presently remarked:—

'The finest speaker I ever heard is my brother Tom. I wish you could hear *him*.'

Alma had never done so, and, indeed, had never encountered the worthy in question.

'Is he a clergyman?' she asked innocently.

'Heaven forbid!' cried Miss Combe. 'No; he speaks at the Hall of Science.'

'Oh!'

'We don't quite agree philosophically, for he is too thick with Bradlaugh's party, but I

know he's coming round to Agnosticism. Poor Tom! He is so clever, and has been so unfortunate. He married miserably, you know.'

'Indeed,' said Alma, not much interested.

'There was a black-eyed sibyl of a woman who admired one of the Socialist lecturers, and when he died actually went to his lodgings, cut off his head, and carried it home under her cloak in the omnibus.'

'Horrible!' said Alma with a shudder. 'But what for?'

'To *boil*, my dear, so that she might keep the skull as a sacred relic! When Tom was introduced to her she had it under a glass case on her mantelpiece. Well, she was a very intellectual creature, wonderfully "advanced," as they call it, and Tom was infatuated enough to make her his wife. They lived together for

a year or so; after which she took to Spiritualism, and finally died in a madhouse. So poor Tom's free, and I hope when he marries again he'll be more lucky.'

Of course Miss Combe did not for a moment believe that her brother would have ever had any attraction in the eyes of her rich friend; for Tom Combe was the reverse of winsome, even to humbler maidens—few of whom felt drawn to a man who never brushed his hair, had a beard like a Communist refugee, and smelt strongly of beer and tobacco. But blood is thicker than water, and Miss Combe could not forbear putting in a word in season.

The word made little or no impression. The stately beauty walked silently on full of her own thoughts and dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

A SIDE CURRENT.

That bore of bores—a tedious male cousin !—*Old Play.*

Loitering slowly onward from stile to stile, from field to field, and from pasture to pasture, the two ladies at last reached a country road leading right through the heart of the parish, and commanding from time to time a view of the distant sea. They found Fensea, as usual, fast asleep, basking in the midst of its own breath; the red-tiled houses dormant, the population invisible, save in the square or market-place opposite the tavern, where a drowsy cart-horse was blinking into a water

trough, and a somnambulistic ostler was vacantly looking on. Even in the open shops such as Radford the linendraper's and Summerhayes the grocer's, nothing seemed doing. But just as they left the village behind them, and saw in front of them the spire of the village church peeping through the trees, they suddenly came face to face with a human being who was walking towards them in great haste and with some indications of ill-temper.

'Ah, here you are!' ejaculated this individual. 'I have been hunting for you up and down.'

He was a man under thirty, and looking very little over twenty, though his face showed little of the brightness and candour of early manhood. His hair was cropped close and he was clean-shaven; his eyes were yellowish and

large, of an expression so fixed and peculiar as to have been compared by irreverent friends to 'hard-boiled eggs'; his forehead was low, his jaw coarse and determined. With regard to his dress, it was of the description known as horsey; short coat and tight-fitting trousers of light tweed, a low-crowned hat of the same material, white neckcloth fastened by a horse-shoe pin.

This was George Craik, son of Sir George Craik, Bart., of Craik Castle, in the neighbourhood, and Alma's cousin on her father's side.

Alma greeted him with a nod, while he shook hands with her companion.

'Did you ride over, George?' she inquired.

'Yes; I put my nag up at the George, and walked up to the Larches. Not finding you at home, I strolled down to the vicarage,

thinking to find you *there*. But old Bradley is not at home; so I suppose there was no attraction to take you.'

The young lady's cheek flushed, and she looked at her relation, not too amicably.

'Old Bradley, as you call him (though he is about your own age, I suppose), is away in London. Did you want to see him?'

George shrugged his shoulders, and struck at his boots irritably with his riding-whip.

'I wanted to see *you*, as I told you. By the way, though, what's this they're telling me about Bradley and the Bishop? He's come to the length of his tether at last, I suppose? Well, I always said he was no better than an atheist, and a confounded radical into the bargain.'

'An atheist, I presume,' returned the

young lady superciliously, 'is a person who does not believe in a Supreme Being. When you describe Mr. Bradley as one, you forget he is a minister of the Church of Christ.'

George Craik scowled, and then laughed contemptuously.

'Of course *you* defend him!' he cried. 'You will tell me next, I dare say, that you share his opinions.'

'When you explain to me what they are, I will inform you,' responded Alma, moving slowly on, while George lounged after her, and Miss Combe listened in amused amazement.

'It's a scandal,' proceeded the young man, 'that a fellow like that should retain a living in the Church. Cripps tells me that his sermon last Sunday went slap in the face of the Bible. I myself have heard him say that some German

fellow had proved the Gospels to be a tissue of falsehoods.'

Without directly answering this invective, Alma looked coldly round at her cousin over her shoulder. Her expression was not encouraging, and her manner showed a very natural irritation.

'How amiable we are this morning!' she exclaimed. 'Pray, do you come all the way from Craik to give me a discussion on the whole duty of a Christian clergyman? Really, George, such attempts at edification have a curious effect, coming from *you*.'

The young man flushed scarlet, and winced nervously under his cousin's too ardent contempt.

'I don't pretend to be a saint,' he said, 'but I know what I'm talking about. I call

Bradley a renegade! It's a mean thing, in my opinion, to take money for preaching opinions in which a man does not believe.'

'Only just now you said that he preached heresy—or atheism—whatever you like to call it.'

'Yes; and is paid for preaching the very reverse.'

Alma could no longer conceal her irritation.

'Why should we discuss a topic you do not understand? Mr. Bradley is a gentleman whose aims are too high for the ordinary comprehension, that is all.'

'Of course you think me a fool, and are polite enough to say so!' persisted George. 'Well, I should not mind so much if Bradley had not succeeded in infecting *you* with his

pernicious opinions. He *has* done so, though you may deny it! Since he came to the neighbourhood, you have not been like the same girl. The fellow ought to be horse-whipped if he had his deserts.'

Alma stopped short, and looked the speaker in the face.

'Be good enough to leave me,—and come back when you are in a better temper.'

George gave a disagreeable laugh.

'No; I'm coming to lunch with you.'

'That you shall not, unless you promise to conduct yourself like a gentleman.'

'Well, hang the parson,—since you can't bear him to be discussed. I didn't come over to quarrel.'

'You generally succeed in doing so, however.'

'No fault of mine; you snap a fellow's head off, when he wants to give you a bit of good advice. There, there,' he added, laughing again, but not cordially, 'let us drop the subject. I want something to eat.'

Alma echoed the laugh, with about an equal amount of cordiality.

'Now you are talking of what you do understand. Lunch will be served at two.'

As she spoke they were passing by the church gate, and saw, across the churchyard, with its long rank grass and tombstones stained with mossy slime, the old parish church of Fensea:—a quaint timeworn structure, with an arched and gargoyled entrance, Gothic windows, and a belfry of strange device. High up in the belfry, and on the boughs of the great ash-trees surrounding the burial acre,

jackdaws were gathered, sleepily discussing the weather and their family affairs. A footpath, much overgrown with grass, crossed from the church porch to a door in the weather-beaten wall communicating with the adjacent vicarage—a large, dismal, old-fashioned residence, buried in gloomy foliage.

Miss Combe glanced at church and churchyard with the air of superior enlightenment which a Christian missionary might assume on approaching some temple of Buddha or Brahma. George, glancing over the wall, uttered an exclamation.

'What's the matter now?' demanded Alma.

'Brown's blind mare grazing among the graves,' said young Craik with righteous indignation. He was about to enlarge further

on the delinquencies of the vicar, and the shameful condition of the parish, of which he had just discovered a fresh illustration, but, remembering his recent experience, he controlled himself and contented himself with throwing a stone at the animal, which was leisurely cropping the grass surrounding an ancient headstone. They walked on, and passed the front of the vicarage, which looked out through sombre ash-trees on the road. The place seemed dreary and desolate enough, despite a few flower-beds and a green lawn. The windows were mantled in dark ivy, which drooped in heavy clusters over the gloomy door.

Leaving the vicarage behind them, the three followed the country road for about a mile, when, passing through the gate of a pretty

lodge, they entered an avenue of larch-trees leading up to the mansion to which they gave their name. Here all was bright and well kept, the grass swards cleanly swept and variegated with flower-beds, and leading on to shrubberies full of flowering trees. The house itself, an elegant modern structure, stood upon a slight eminence, and was reached by two marble terraces commanding a sunny view of the open fields and distant sea.

It may be well to explain here that the Larches, with a large extent of the surrounding property, belonged to Miss Alma Craik in her own right, the lady being an orphan and an only child. Her father, a rich railway contractor, had bought the property and built the house just before she was born. During her infancy her mother had died, and before

she was of age her father too had joined the great majority; so that she found herself, at a very early age, the heiress to a large property, and with no relations in the world save her uncle, Sir George Craik, and his son. Sir George, who had been knighted on the completion of a great railway bridge considered a triumph of engineering skill, had bought an adjacent property at about the time when his brother purchased the lands of Fensea.

The same contrast which was noticeable between the cousins had existed between the brothers, Thomas and George Craik. They were both Scotchmen, and had begun life as common working engineers, but there the resemblance ceased. Thomas had been a comparative recluse, thoughtful, melancholy, of advanced opinions, fond of books and

abstruse speculation; and his daughter's liberal education had been the consequence of his culture, and in a measure of his radicalism. George was a man of the world, quick, fond of money, a Conservative in politics, and a courtier by disposition, whose ambition was to found a 'family,' and who disapproved of all social changes unconnected with the spread of the railway system and the success of his own commercial speculations. Young George was his only son, and had acquired, at a very early age, all the instincts (not to speak of many of the vices) of the born aristocrat. He was particularly sensitive on the score of his lowly origin, and his great grudge against society was that it had not provided him with an old-fashioned ancestry. Failing the fact, he assumed all the fiction, of an hereditary heir

of the soil, but would have given half his heirloom to any one who could have produced for him an authentic 'family tree,' and convinced him that, despite his father's beginnings, his blood had in it a dash of 'blue.'

George Craik lunched with his cousin and her companion in a spacious chamber, communicating with the terrace by French windows opening to the ground. He was not a conversationalist, and the meal passed in comparative silence. Alma could not fail to perceive that the young man was unusually preoccupied and taciturn.

At last he rose without ceremony, strolled out on the terrace, and lit a cigar. He paced up and down for some minutes, then, with the air of one whose mind is made up, he looked in and beckoned to his cousin.

'Come out here,' he said. 'Never mind your hat—there is no sun to speak of.'

After a moment's hesitation, she stepped out and joined him.

'Do you want me?' she asked carelessly. 'I would rather leave you to your smoke, and go to the library with Miss Combe. We're studying Herbert Spencer's "First Principles" together, and she reads a portion aloud every afternoon.'

She knew that something was coming by the fixed gaze with which he regarded her, and the peculiar expression in his eyes. His manner was far less like that of a lover than that of a somewhat sulky and tyrannical elder brother,—and indeed they had been so much together from childhood upward that she felt the relation between them to be quite a

fraternal one. Nevertheless, his mind just then was occupied with a warmer sentiment—the one, indeed, which often leads the way to wedlock.

He began abruptly enough.

'I say, Alma, how long is this to last?' he demanded not without asperity.

'What, pray?'

'Our perpetual misunderstandings. I declare if I did not know what a queer girl you are, I should think you detested me!'

'I like you well enough, George,—when you are agreeable, which is not so often as I could wish.'

Thus she answered, with a somewhat weary laugh.

'But you know I like *you* better than any-

thing in the world!' he cried eagerly. 'You know I have set my heart on making you my wife.'

'Don't talk nonsense, George!' replied Alma. 'Love between cousins is an absurdity.'

She would have added an 'enormity,' having during her vagrant studies imbibed strong views on the subject of consanguinity, but, advanced as she was, she was not quite advanced enough to discuss a physiological and social problem with the man who wanted to marry her. In simple truth, she had the strongest personal objection to her cousin, in his present character of lover.

'I don't see the absurdity of it,' answered the young man, 'nor does my father. His heart is set upon this match, as you know;

and besides, he does not at all approve of your living the life you do—alone, without a protector, and all that sort of thing.'

By this time Alma had quite recovered herself, and was able to reassume the air of sweet superiority which is at once so bewitching in a pretty woman, or so irritating. It did not bewitch George Craik; it irritated him beyond measure. A not inconsiderable experience of vulgar amours in the country, not to speak of the business known as 'sowing wild oats' in Paris and London, had familiarised him with a different type of woman. In his cousin's presence he felt, not abashed, but at a disadvantage. She had a manner, too, of talking down to him, as to a younger brother, which he disliked exceedingly; and more than once, when he had talked to her in the

language of love, he had smarted under her ridicule.

So now, instead of taking the matter too seriously, she smiled frankly in his face, and quietly took his arm.

'You must not talk like that, George,' she said, walking up and down with him. 'When you do, I feel as if you were a very little boy, and I quite an old woman. Even if I cared for you in that way—and I don't, and never shall—we are not at all suited to each other. Our thoughts and aims in life are altogether different. I like you very much as a cousin, of course, and that is just the reason why I can never think of you as a husband. Don't talk of it again, please!—and forgive me for being quite frank—I should not like you to have any misconception on the subject.'

'I know what it is,' he cried angrily. 'It is that clergyman fellow! He has come between us.'

'Nothing of the sort,' answered Alma with heightened colour. 'If there was not another man in the world, it would be all the same so far as you and I are concerned.'

'I don't believe a word of it. Bradley is your choice. A pretty choice! A fellow who is almost a beggar, and in a very short time will be kicked out of the Church as a heretic.'

She released his arm, and drew away from him in deep exasperation; but her feeling towards him was still that of an elder sister annoyed at the *gaucherie* of a privileged brother.

'If you continue to talk like that of Mr.

Bradley, we shall quarrel, George. I think you had better go home now, and think it over. In any case, you will do no good by abusing an innocent man who is vastly your superior.'

All the bad blood of George Craik's heart now mounted to his face, and his frame shook with rage.

'Bradley will have to reckon with me,' he exclaimed furiously. 'What right has he to raise his eyes towards you? Until he came down here, we were the best of friends; but he has poisoned your heart against me, and against all your friends. Never mind! I'll have it out with him, before many days are done!'

Without deigning to reply, Alma walked from him into the house.

An hour later, George Craik mounted his horse at the inn, and rode furiously homeward. An observer of human nature, noticing the expression of his countenance, and taking count of his square-set jaw and savage mouth, would have concluded perhaps that Alma estimated his opposition, and perhaps his whole character, somewhat too lightly. He had a bull-dog's tenacity, when he had once made up his mind to a course of action.

But when he was gone, the high-spirited lady of his affections dismissed him completely from her thoughts. She joined Miss Combe in the library, and was soon busy with the problem of the Unknowable, as presented in the pages of the clearest-headed philosopher of our time.

CHAPTER VIII.

MYSTIFICATIONS.

'What God hath joined, no man shall put asunder,'
Even so I heard the preacher cry—and blunder!
Alas, the sweet old text applied could be
Only in Eden, or in Arcady.
This text, methinks, is apter, more in season—
'What man joins, God shall sunder—when there's reason!'
Mayfair: a Satire.

AMBROSE BRADLEY came back from London a miserable man. Alighting late in the evening at the nearest railway station, nearly ten miles distant, he left his bag to be sent on by the carrier, and walked home through the darkness on foot. It was late when he knocked at the vicarage door, and was admitted by his housekeeper, a melancholy village woman,

whose husband combined the offices of gardener and sexton. The house was dark and desolate, like his thoughts. He shut himself up in his study, and at once occupied himself in writing his sermon for the next day, which was Sunday. This task occupied him until the early summer dawn crept coldly into the room.

The Sunday came, dull and rainy; and Bradley went forth to face his congregation with a deepening sense of guilt and shame. A glance showed him that Alma occupied her usual place, close under the pulpit, but he was careful not to meet her eyes. Not far from her sat Sir George Craik and his son, both looking the very reverse of pious-minded.

It was a very old church, with low Gothic arches and narrow painted windows, through

which little sunlight ever came. In the centre of the nave was the tomb of the old knight of Fensea, who had once owned the surrounding lands, but whose race had been extinct for nearly a century; he was depicted, life-size, in crusader's costume, with long two-handed sword by his side, and hands crossed lying on his breast. On the time-stained walls around were other tombstones, with quaint Latin inscriptions, some almost illegible; but one of brand-new marble recorded the virtues of Thomas Craik, deceased, the civil engineer.

Alma noticed in a moment that Bradley was ghastly pale, and that he faced his congregation with scarcely a remnant of his old assurance, or rather enthusiasm. His voice, however, was clear and resonant as ever, and under perfect command.

He preached a dreary sermon, orthodox enough to please the most exacting, and on an old familiar text referring to those sins which are said, sooner or later, to 'find us out.' All those members of the flock who had signed the letter to the Bishop were there in force, eager to detect new heresy, or confirmation of the old backsliding. They were disappointed, and exchanged puzzled looks with one another. Sir George Craik, who had been warned by his son to expect something scandalous, listened with a puzzled scowl.

The service over, Alma lingered in the graveyard, expecting the clergyman to come and seek her, as he was accustomed to do. He did not appear; but in his stead came her uncle and cousin, the former

affectionately effusive, the latter with an air of respectful injury. They went home with her and spent the afternoon. When they had driven away, she announced her intention, in spite of showery weather and slushy roads, of going to evening service. Miss Combe expressed her desire of accompanying her, but meeting with no encouragement, decided to remain at home.

There were very few people at the church that evening, and the service was very short. Again Alma noticed the vicar's death-pale face and always averted eyes, and she instinctively felt that something terrible had wrought a change in him. When the service was done, she waited for him, but he did not come.

Half an hour afterwards, when it was

quite dark, she knocked at the vicarage door. It was answered by the melancholy housekeeper.

'Is Mr. Bradley at home? I wish to speak to him.'

The woman looked confused and uncomfortable.

'He be in, miss, but I think he be gone to bed wi' a headache. He said he were not to be disturbed, unless it were a sick call.'

Utterly amazed and deeply troubled, Alma turned from the door.

'Tell him that I asked for him,' she said coldly.

'I will, miss,' was the reply; and the door was closed.

With a heavy heart, Alma walked away Had she yielded to her first impulse, she

would have returned and insisted on an interview; but she was too ashamed. Knowing as she did the closeness of the relationship between them, knowing that the man was her accepted lover, she was utterly at a loss to account for his extraordinary conduct. Could anything have turned his heart against her, or have aroused his displeasure? ' He had always been so different; so eager to meet her gaze and to seek her company. *Now*, it was clear, he was completely changed, and had carefully avoided her; nay, she had no doubt whatever, from the housekeeper's manner, that he had instructed her to deny him.

She walked on, half pained, half indignant. The night was dark, the road desolate.

All at once she heard footsteps behind

her, as of one rapidly running. Presently someone came up breathless, and she heard a voice calling her name.

'Is it *you*, Alma?' called the voice, which she recognised at once as that of Bradley.

'Yes, it is I,' she answered coldly.

The next moment he was by her side.

'I came after you. I could not let you go home without speaking a word to you.'

The voice was strangely agitated, and its agitation communicated itself to the hearer. She turned to him trembling violently, with an impulsive cry.

'O Ambrose, what has happened?'

'Do not ask me to-night,' was the reply. 'When I have thought it all over, I shall be

able to explain, but not *now*. My darling, you must forgive me if I seem unkind and rude, but I have been in great, great trouble, and even now I can scarcely realise it all.'

'You have seen the Bishop?' she asked, thinking to touch the quick of his trouble, and lead him to confession.

'I have seen him, and, as I expected, I shall have to resign or suffer a long persecution. Do not ask me to tell you more yet! Only forgive me for having seemed cold and unkind—I would cut off my right hand rather than cause you pain.'

They were walking on side by side in the direction of the 'Larches.' Not once did Bradley attempt to embrace the woman he loved, or even to take her hand. For a time she retained her self-possession, but

at last, yielding to the sharp strain upon her heart, she stopped short, and with a sob, threw her arms around his neck.

'Ambrose, why are you so strange? Have we not sworn to be all in all to one another? Have I not said that your people shall be my people, your God my God? Do not speak as if there was any change. Whatever persecution you suffer I have a right to share.'

He seemed to shrink from her in terror, and tried to disengage himself from her embrace.

'Don't, my darling! I can't bear it! I need all my strength, and you make me weak as a child. All *that* is over now. I have no right to love you.'

'No right?'

'None. I thought it might have been,

but now I know it is impossible. And I am not worthy of you; I was never worthy.'

'Ambrose! has your heart then changed?'

'It will never change. I shall love you till I die. But now you must see that all is different, that our love is without hope and without blessing. There, there; don't weep!'

'You will always be the same to me,' she cried. 'Whatever happens, or has happened, nothing can part you and me, if your heart is still the same.'

'You do not understand!' he returned, and as he spoke he gently put her aside. 'All must be as if we had never met. God help me, I am not so lost, so selfish, as to involve you in my ruin, or to preserve your love with a living lie. Have compassion on me! I will see you again, or better still, I

will write to you—and then, you will understand.'

Before she could say another word to him he was gone. She stood alone on the dark road, not far from the lights of the lodge. She called after him, but he gave no answer, made no sign. Terror-stricken, appalled, and ashamed, she walked on homeward, and entering the house, passed up to her room, locked the door, and had her dark hour alone.

The next day Alma rose early after a sleepless night. She found awaiting her on the breakfast table a letter which had been brought by hand. She opened it and read as follows:

My Darling,—Yes, I shall call you so for the last time, though it means almost

blasphemy. You would gather from my wild words last night that what has happened for ever puts out of sight and hope my dream of making you my wife. You shall not share my degradation. You shall not bear the burthen of my unfortunate opinions as a clergyman, now that my social and religious plans and aims have fallen like a house of cards. It is not that I have ceased to regard you as the one human being that could make martyrdom happy for me, or existence endurable. As long as life lasts I shall know that its only consecration would have come from you, the best and noblest woman I have ever met, or can hope to meet. But the very ground has opened under my feet. Instead of being a free agent, as I believed, I am a slave, to whom love is a forbidden thing. Even to

think of it (as I have done once or twice, God help me, in my horror and despair) is an outrage upon *you*. I shall soon be far from here. I could not bear to dwell in the same place with one so dear, and to know that she was lost to me for ever. Grant me your forgiveness, and if you can, forget that I ever came to darken your life. My darling! my darling! I cry again for the last time from the depths of my broken heart, that God may bless you! For the little time that remains to me I shall have this one comfort—the memory of your goodness, and that you once loved me!

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

Alma read this letter again and again in the solitude of her own chamber, and the more she read it the more utterly inscrutable it seemed.

That night Bradley sat alone in his study, a broken and despairing man. Before him on his desk lay a letter just written, in which he formally communicated to the Bishop his resignation of his living, and begged to be superseded as soon as possible. His eyes were red with weeping, his whole aspect was indescribably weary and forlorn. So lost was he in his own miserable thoughts, that he failed to notice a ring at the outer door, and a momentary whispering which followed the opening of the door. In another instant the chamber door opened, and a woman, cloaked and veiled, appeared upon the threshold.

'Alma!' he cried, recognising the figure in a moment, and rising to his feet in overmastering agitation.

Without a word she closed the door, and

then, lifting her veil to show a face as white as marble, gazed at him with eyes of infinite sorrow and compassion. Meeting the gaze, and trembling before it, he sank again into his chair, and hid his face in his hands.

'Yes, I have come!' she said in a low voice; then, without another word, she crossed the room and laid her hand softly upon his shoulder.

Feeling the tender touch, he shivered and sobbed aloud.

'O, why did you come?' he cried. 'You —you—have read my letter?'

'Yes, Ambrose,' she answered in the same low, far-away, despairing voice. 'That is why I came—to comfort you if I could. Look up! speak to me! I can bear everything if I can only be still certain of your love.'

He uncovered his face, and gazed at her in astonishment.

'What! can you forgive me?'

'I have nothing to forgive,' she replied mournfully. 'Can you think that my esteem for you is so slight a thing, so light a straw, that even this cruel wind of evil fortune can blow it away? I know that you have been honourable in word and deed; I know that you are the noblest and the best of men. It is no fault of yours, dear, if God is so hard upon us; no, no, *you* are not to blame.'

'But you do not understand! I am a broken man. I must leave this place, and——'

'Listen to me,' she said, interrupting him with that air of gentle mastery which had ever exercised so great a spell upon him, and which

gave to her passionate beauty a certain splendour of command. 'Do you think you are quite just to *me* when you speak—as you *have* spoken—of leaving Fensea, and bidding me an eternal farewell? Since this trouble in the church, you have acted as if I had no part and parcel in your life, save that which might come if we were merely married people; you have thought of me as of a woman to whom you were betrothed, not as of a loving friend whom you might trust till death. Do you think that my faith in you is so slight a thing that it cannot survive even the loss of you as a lover, if that must be? Do you not know that I am all yours, to the deepest fibre of my being, that your sorrow is my sorrow, your God my God—even as I said? I am your sister still, even if I am not to be your wife, and whither you go, be sure I shall follow.'

He listened to her in wonder; for in proportion as he was troubled, she was strangely calm, and her voice had a holy fervour before which he bent in reverent humiliation. When she ceased, with her soft hand still upon his shoulder, he raised his eyes to her, and they were dim with tears.

'You are too good!' he said. 'I am the dust beneath your feet.'

'You are my hero and my master. As Heloise was to Abelard, so would I be to you. So why should you grieve? I shall be to you as before, a loving friend, perhaps a comforter, till death separates us in this world, to meet in a better and a fairer.'

He took her hands in his own, and kissed them, his tears still falling.

'Thank God you are so true! But how

shall I look you in the face after what has happened? You must despise me so much—yes, yes, you *must!*'

She would have answered him with fresh words of sweet assurance, but he continued passionately:

'Think of the world, Alma! Think of your own future, your own happiness! Your life would be blighted, your love wasted, if you continued to care for me. Better to forget me! better to say farewell!'

'Do *you* say that, Ambrose?' she replied; '*you* who first taught me that love once born is imperishable, and that those He has once united—not through the body merely, but through a sacrament of souls—can never be sundered? Nay, you have still your work to do in the world, and I—shall I not help you still? You will not go away?'

'I have written my resignation to the Bishop. I shall quit this place and the Church's ministry for ever.'

'Do not decide in haste,' she said. 'Is *this* the letter?'

And as she spoke she went to the desk and took the letter in her hand.

'Yes.'

'Let me *burn* the letter.'

'Alma!'

'Give yourself another week to think it over, for my sake. All this has been so strange and so sudden that you have not had time to think it out. For my sake, reflect.'

She held the letter over the lamp and looked at him for his answer; he hung down his head in silence, and, taking the attitude for acquiescence, she suffered the paper to reach

the flame, and in a few seconds it was consumed.

'Good night!' she said. 'I must go now.'

'Good night! and God bless you, Alma!'

They parted without one kiss or embrace, but, holding each other's hands, they looked long and tenderly into each other's faces. Then Alma went as she came, slipping quietly away into the night. But no sooner had she left the vicarage than all her self-command forsook her, and she wept hysterically under cover of the darkness.

'Yes, his God is my God,' she murmured to herself. 'May He give me strength to bear this sorrow, and keep us together till the end!'

CHAPTER IX.

FAREWELL TO FENSEA.

I am sick of timeserving. I was borne in the land of Mother-Nakedness; she who bare me was a true woman, and my father was sworn vassal to King Candour, ere he died of a sunstroke; but villains robbed me of my birthright, and I was sent to serve as a mercenary in the army of old Hypocrisy, whom all men now hail Emperor and Pope. Now my armour is rotten, my sword is broken, and I shall never fight more. Heigho! I would I were sleeping under a green tree, in the land where the light shines, and there is no lying!—*The Comedy of Counterfeits.*

AFTER that night's parting the lovers did not meet for several days. Bradley went gloomily about his parochial duties, and when he was not so engaged he was shut up in his study, engaged in correspondence or gloomy contemplation. Alma did not

seek him out again, for the very simple reason that the nervous shock she had received had seriously affected her generally robust health, and brought on a sort of feverish hysteria complicated with sleeplessness, so that she kept her room for some days, finding a homely nurse in Miss Combe. When Sunday came she was too unwell to go to church.

In the afternoon she received the following letter:—

DEAREST ALMA,—For so I must still call you, since my spirit shrinks from addressing you under any more formal name. I have heard that you are ill, and I know the cause is not far to seek, since it must lie at the door of him whose friendship has brought you so much misery. Pray God it is only

a passing shadow in your sunny life! An eternity of punishment would not adequately meet my guilt if it should seriously imperil your happiness or your health! Write to me, since I dare not, must not, come to you — just one word to tell me you are better, and that my fears on your account are without foundation. In the pulpit to-day, when I missed your dear face, I felt terror-stricken and utterly abandoned. Hell itself seemed opening under my feet, and every word I uttered seemed miserable blasphemy. I knew then, if I did not know it before, that my faith, my religion, my eternal happiness or misery, still depend on *you*. A. B.

Two hours later Bradley received this reply :—

'Do not distress yourself, dearest. I shall soon be quite well again. I have been thinking it all over in solitude, and I feel quite sure that if we are patient God will help us. Try to forget your great persecution, and think rather of what is more solemn and urgent—your position in the Church, and the justification of your faith before the world.'

Ambrose Bradley read the above, and thought it strangely cold and calm; he was himself too distracted to read between the lines and perceive the bitter anguish of the writer. He still lacked the moral courage to make a clean breast of the truth, and confess to Alma that his change had come through that sad discovery in London. He

dreaded her sorrow more than her anger; for he knew, or feared, that the one unpardonable sin in her eyes would be—to have loved another woman. She had no suspicion of the truth. An entanglement of a disgraceful kind, involving the life of a person of her own sex, was the last thing to occur to her mind in connection with her lover. She attributed everything, his change of manner, his strange passion, his unreasoning despair, to the exquisite sensitiveness of a proudly intellectual nature. How deluded she was by her own idolatry of his character the reader knows. What cared he for the Church's inquisition *now*? What cared he for dogmatic niceties, or spiritual difficulties, or philosophic problems? He was sick of the whole business. The great

problem troubled him no longer, save that he felt more and more in revolt against any kind of authority, more and more tired of the sins and follies and blind fatalities of the world. Even her tender appeals to his vanity seemed trivial and beside the question. His ambition was dead.

Again and again he tried to summon up courage enough to make a complete explanation; but his heart failed him, and so he temporised. He *could* not say the word which, in all probability, would sunder them for ever. He would wait; perhaps Heaven, in its mercy, might relieve him, and justify him. In his own mind he felt himself a martyr; yet he could escape the sense of contamination consequent on the possession of so guilty a secret. The pure

currents of his life seemed poisoned,—as indeed they were.

The situation was a perilous one. Behind all Alma's assumption of tender acquiescence, she was deeply wounded by her lover's want of confidence in her devotion. His manner had shocked her inexpressibly, more even than she yet knew, yet it only drew her more eagerly towards him. In her despair and anger, she turned to the topic which, from the first moment of their acquaintance, had been constantly upon his tongue, and she tried to persuade herself that her strongest feeling towards him was religious and intellectual. In reality, she was hungering towards him with all the suppressed and suffocating passion of an unusually passionate nature. Had he been

a reckless man, unrestrained by moral sanctions, she would have been at his mercy. So implicit was her faith in the veracity of his perception, and so strong at the same time was his personal attraction for her, that she might have been ready, for his sake, had he told her the whole truth, to accept as right any course of conduct, however questionable, which he might sanctify as right and just.

From all this it will be gathered that Miss Alma Craik was in a position of no inconsiderable peril. She had long been dwelling far too much in the sphere of ideas, not to say crotchets, for a young lady without protectors. Her one safeguard was her natural purity of disposition, coupled with her strength of will. She was not the sort of woman to be seduced into wrong-doing, as weak women are seduced,

against her conscience. Any mistake she might make in life was certain to be the result of her own intellectual acquiescence,—or of wilful deception, which indeed was imminent.

So the days passed on, in deepening gloom; for the situation was a wretched one. Many other letters were interchanged, but the two seldom met, and when they did it was only briefly and in the presence of other people.

It was a life of torture, and could not last.

Meantime the Bishop of the diocese had not been idle. He had consulted with the powers of the Church, and all had come to one conclusion—that under any circumstances, a public scandal must be avoided. Pending any action on the part of his superiors, Bradley gave no fresh occasion for offence. His sermons became old-fashioned, not to say

infantine. For the rest, he was ready to resign at a moment's notice; and he wrote to the Bishop to that effect, inviting him to choose a successor.

'After thinking the matter well over,' he wrote, 'I have concluded that your lordship is right, and that my opinions are at present out of harmony with the principles of the Establishment. A little while ago I might have been inclined to stand my ground, or at any rate not to yield without a protest; but my mind has changed, and I shall resign without a murmur. Nor shall I seek another living in the English Church as at present constituted. Even if I were likely to succeed in my search, I should not try. Let me depart in peace, and rely on my uttering no syllable which can be construed into resistance.'

The Bishop answered him eagerly, in the following words:

My dear Sir,—I think you have decided wisely, and I am grateful to you for the temper in which you have accepted the situation. You have the spirit of a true Christian, though your ideas are errant from the great principles of Christianity. What I would suggest is this, and I hope it will meet with your approval:—that under the plea of ill-health, or some similar pretext, you offer your resignation, and withdraw *temporarily* from your ministry. I say temporarily, because I believe that a brief period of reflection will bring you back to us, with all your original enthusiasm, with all the fresh faith and fervour of your first days. When that time comes, the Church, I need not say, will remember your self-sacrifice, and

receive you back in due season like the Prodigal Son. Until then, believe me, now as ever, your faithful friend and well-wisher,

W. M., Darkdale and Dells.

The result of this correspondence was speedily seen in a paragraph which appeared in the 'Guardian':—

'We understand that the Rev. Ambrose Bradley, M.A., vicar of Fensea, has resigned his living on account of continued ill-health. The living is in the gift of the Bishop of the diocese, who has not yet appointed a successor.'

This paragraph was copied into the local paper, and when they read it, the Craiks (father and son) were exultant. Alma saw it also, but as Bradley had privately intimated

his decision to her, it caused her no surprise. But an affair of so much importance was not destined to be passed over so quietly. A few days later, a paragraph appeared in some of the more secular journals to the effect that the Vicar of Fensea had 'seceded' from the Christian Church, on account of his inability to accept its dogmas, more particularly the Miracles and the Incarnation. The announcement fell like a thunderbolt, and no one was more startled by it than the clergyman himself.

He at once sat down and wrote the following letter to the 'Guardian':—

Sir,—I have seen with much pain a paragraph in several journals to the effect that my reason for resigning the living of Fensea

is because I have ceased to believe in the essential truths of Christianity. Permit me with indignation to protest against this unwarrantable imputation, both upon myself and upon a religion for which I shall always have the deepest reverence. My reasons for ceasing to hold office are known to the Church authorities alone. It is enough to say that they are partly connected with physical indisposition, and partly with private matters with which the public has nothing to do. I believe now, as I have always believed, that the Church of England possesses within herself the secret which may yet win back an errant world into the fold of Christian faith. In ceasing to hold office as a Christian clergyman, I do not cease in my allegiance to Jesus Christ or to the Church He founded; and all assertions

to the contrary are quite without foundation. —I am, Sir, &c.,

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

It will be seen that this epistle was couched in the most ambiguous terms; it was perfectly true, yet thoroughly misleading, as indeed it was meant to be. When he had written and posted it, Bradley felt that he had reached the depth of moral humiliation. Still, he had not the heart just then to say anything which might do injury, directly or indirectly, to the Establishment in which he had been born and bred.

CHAPTER X.

FROM THE POST-BAG.

I.

Ambrose Bradley to Alma Craik.

Versailles,——, 18—.

Dearest Alma,—I came here from Rouen this day week, and have more than once sat down to write to you; but my heart was too full, and the words would not come, until to-day. Since we parted—since at your loving intercession I consented to wander abroad for a year, and to write you the record of my doings from time to time—I have been like a

man in the Inferno, miserable, despairing, thinking only of the Paradise from which he has fallen; in other words, my sole thought has been of the heavenly days now past, and of you.

Well, I must not talk of that; I must conquer my passionate words and try to write coldly, dispassionately, according to promise, of the things that I have seen. That I can do so at all, will be a proof to you, my darling, that I am already much better. Another proof is that I am almost able (as you will see when you read on) to resume my old British prerogative of self-satisfied superiority over everything foreign, especially over everything French. It is extraordinary how thoroughly national even a cold-blooded cosmopolite becomes when he finds himself daily con-

fronted by habits of thought he does not understand.

I am staying at a small hotel on the Paris side of Versailles, within easy reach of the gay city either by train or tram. I have exchanged my white neckcloth for a black necktie, and there is nothing in my dress or manner to mark me out for that most disagreeable of fishes out of water—a Parson in Paris! I see my clerical brethren sometimes, white-tied, black-coated, broad-brim'd-hatted, striding along the boulevards defiantly, or creeping down bye-streets furtively, or peeping like guilty things into the windows of the photograph shops in the Rue Rivoli. As I pass them by in my rough tourist's suit, they doubtless take me for some bagman out for a holiday; and I—I smile in my sleeve, thinking how out of place

they seem, here in Lutetia of the Parisians. But my heart goes out most to those other brethren of mine, who draw their light from Rome. One pities them deeply *now*, in the time of their tribulation, as they crawl, forlorn and despised, about their weary work. The public prints are full of cruel things concerning them, hideous lampoons, unclean caricatures; what the Communist left surviving the journalist daily hacks and stabs. And indeed, the whole of this city presents the peculiar spectacle of a people without religion, without any sort of spiritual aspiration. Even that vague effluence of transcendental liberalism, which is preached by some of their leading poets and thinkers, is pretty generally despised. Talking with a leading bookseller the other day concerning your idol, Victor Hugo, and

discussing his recent utterances on religious subjects, I found the good *bourgeois* to be of opinion that the great poet's brain was softening through old age and personal vanity! The true hero of the hour, now all the tinsel of the Empire is rubbed away, is a writer named Zola, originally a printer's devil, who is to modern light literature what Schopenhauer is to philosophy—a dirty, muddy, gutter-searching pessimist, who translates the 'anarchy' of the ancients into the bestial *argot* of the Quarties Latin.

It has been very well said by a wit of this nation that if on any fine day the news arrived in Paris that '*God was dead*,' it would not cause the slightest astonishment or interest in a single *salon*; indeed, to all political intents and purposes the Divinity

is regarded as extinct. A few old-fashioned people go to church, and here and there in the streets you see little girls in white going to confirmation; but the majority of the people are entirely without the religious sentiment in any form. A loathsome publication, with hideous illustrations, called the *Bible pour Rire*, is just now being issued in penny numbers; and the character of its humour may be guessed when I tell you that one of the pictures represents the 'bon Dieu,' dressed like an old clothesman, striking a lucifer on the sole of his boot, while underneath are the words, 'And God said, Let there be Light!' The same want of good taste, to put reverence aside as out of the question, is quite as manifest in the higher literature, as where Hugo himself, in a recent

poem, thus describes the Tout-Puissant, or All-Powerful :—

> Pris d'un vieux rhumatisme incurable à l'échine,
> Après avoir créé le monde, et la machine
> Des astres pêle-mêle au fond des horizons,
> La vie et l'engrenage énorme des saisons,
> La fleur, l'oiseau, la femme, et l'abîme, et la terre,
> Dieu s'est laissé tomber dans son fauteuil-Voltaire !

Is it any wonder that a few simple souls, who still cherish a certain reverence for the obsolete orthodox terminology should go over in despair to Rome?

One of the great questions of the day, discussed in a spirit of the most brutal secularity, is Divorce. I know your exalted views on this subject, your love of the beautiful old fashion which made marriage eternal, a sacrament of souls, not to be abolished even by death itself. Well, our French neighbours wish to render it a simple contract, to be

dissolved at the whim of the contracting parties. Their own social life, they think, is a living satire on the old dispensation.

But I sat down to write you a letter about myself, and here I am prosing about the idle topics of the day, from religion to the matrimonial musical glasses. I am wonderfully well in body; in fact, never better. But oh, my Alma, I am still miserably sick of soul! More than ever do I perceive that the world wants a creed. When the idea of God is effaced from society, it becomes—this Paris—a death's head with a mask of pleasure:—

> The time is out of joint—ah cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

All my foolish plans have fallen like a house of cards. I myself seem strangling in the evils of the modern snake of Pessimism. If

it were not for you, my guardian angel, my star of comfort, I think I should try euthanasia. Write to me! Tell me of yourself, of Fensea; no news that comes from my heaven on earth will fail to interest and soothe me. What do you think of my successor? and what does the local Inquisition think of him? Next to the music of your voice will be the melody of your written words. And forgive this long rambling letter. I write of trifles light as air, because I *cannot* write of what is deepest in my heart.—Yours always,

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

II.

From Alma Craik to Ambrose Bradley.

THANKS, DEAREST AMBROSE, for your long and loving letter. It came to me in good

season, when I was weary and anxious on your account, and I am grateful for its good tidings and its tone of growing cheerfulness. You see my prescription is already working wonders, for you wrote like your old self—almost! I am so glad that you are well in health, so thankful you are beginning to forget your trouble. If such a cure is possible in a few short weeks, what will time not do in a year?

There is no news, that is, none worth telling.

Your successor (since you ask concerning him) is a mild old gentleman with the most happy faith in *all* the articles of the Athanasian creed—particularly that of eternal punishment, which he expounds with the most benevolent of smiles. I should say he will be a favourite; indeed, he is a favourite already, though he

has the disadvantage, from the spinster point of view, of being a very, very married man. He has a wife and seven children, all girls, and is far too poor in this world's goods to think much of his vested interest in those of the next world. I have heard him preach once, which has sufficed.

What you say of life in France interests me exceedingly, and my heart bleeds for those poor priests of the despised yet divine creed. If you had not taught me a purer and a better faith, I think I should be a Roman Catholic, and even as it is, I can feel nothing but sympathy for the Church which, after all, possesses more than all others the form of the Christian tradition.

Agatha Combe has returned to London. She is still full of that beautiful idea (was it

yours or mine, or does it belong to both of us?) of the New Church, in which Religion, Science, and Art should all meet together in one temple, as the handmaids of God. I hope you have not dismissed it from your mind, or forgotten that, at a word from you, it may be realised. Agatha's conception of it was, I fear, a little too secular; her Temple of worship would bear too close a resemblance to her brother's dingy Hall of Science. She has just finished a treatise, or essay, to be published in one of the eclectic magazines, the subject, 'Is growth possible to a dogmatic religion?' Her answer is in the negative, and she is dreadfully severe on what she calls the 'tinkering' fraternity, particularly her *bête noire*, young Mr. Mallock. Poor Agatha! She should have been a man by rights, but

cruel fate, by just a movement of the balance, made her the dearest of old maids, and a Blue! Under happier conditions, with just a little less of the intellectual leaven, she would have made a capital wife for such a parson as your successor; for in spite of her cleverness, and what they call her infidelity, she is horribly superstitious—won't pass a pin in the road without lifting it up, throws salt over her shoulder if she happens to spill a morsel, and can tell your fortune by the cards! Besides all this, she is a born humanitarian; her thoughts for ever running on the poor, and flannel, and soup-kitchens, and (not to leave the lower animals out of her large heart) the woes of the vivisected dogs and rabbits. And yet, when the pen is in her hand and her controversial vein is open, she

hurls her argumentative thunderbolts about like a positive Demon!

There, I am trying to rattle on, as if I were a giddy girl of eighteen. But my heart, like yours, is very full. Sometimes I feel as if you were lost to me for ever; as if you were gone into a great darkness, and would never come back. Dearest, you think of me sometimes—nay, often?—and when your wound is healed, you will come back to me, better and stronger and happier than ever, will you not? For am I not your Rachel, who still follows you in soul wherever you go? I sit here for hours together, thinking of the happy days that are fled for ever; then I wander out to the churchyard, and look at the dear old vicarage, and wherever I go I find some traces of him

I love. Yesterday I went over to the abbey. Do you remember, dear, when we last met there, and swore our troth in the moonlight, with our ears full of the solemn murmuring of the sea?

That reminds me of what you say concerning the French agitation on the subject of Divorce. I read some time ago an abstract of M. Naquet's famous discourse—it was published in the English newspapers—and I felt ashamed and sad beyond measure. How low must a nation have fallen when one of its politicians dares to measure with a social foot-rule the holiest of human covenants! If marriage is a bond to be worn or abandoned at pleasure, if there is nothing more sacred between man and woman than the mere union of the body, God help us women, and *me* most

of all! For has not God already united my soul to yours, not as yet by the sacrament of the Church, but by that sacrament of Love which is also eternal; and if we were spiritually sundered, should I not die; and if I thought that Death could break our sacrament of Love, should I not become even as those outcast ones who believe there is no God? I have never loved another man; you have never loved (how often have you not sworn it to me!) another woman. Well, then, can man ever separate what God has so joined together? Even if we were never man and wife in the conventional sense, even if we never stand together at the earthly altar, in the eyes of Heaven we are man and wife, and we have been united at the altar of God. This, at least, is my conception of Marriage.

Between those that love, Divorce (as these hucksters call it) is impossible.

Alas! I write wildly, and my Abelard will smile at his handmaid's eager words. 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much,' I hear him exclaim with Shakespeare. But I know that you hold with me that those things are holy beyond vulgar conception.

Write to me again soon. All my joy in life is hearing from you.—Ever your own,

ALMA.

III.

From Ambrose Bradley to Alma Craik.

DEAREST ALMA,—Just a few lines to say that I am going on to Germany; I will write to you again directly I come to an anchorage in that brave land. For I am sick of France

and Frenchmen; sick of a people that have not been lessoned by misfortune, but still hunger for aggression and revenge; sick of the Dead Sea fruit of Parisian pleasure, poisoned and heart-eaten by the canker-worm of unbelief. Our English poetess is virtuously indignant (you remember) with those who underrate this nation.

> The English have a scornful insular way
> Of calling the French light, &c.

And it is true they are not light, but with the weight of their own blind vanity, heavy as lead. The curse of spiritual dulness is upon them. They talk rhodomontade and believe in nothing. How I burn for the pure intellectual air of that nobler people which, in the name of the God of Justice, recently taught France so terrible a lesson! Here, in France,

every man is a free agent, despising everything, the government which he supports, the ideas which he fulminates, despising most his own free, frivolous, miserable self: there, in Germany, each man is a patriot and a pillar of the state, his only dream to uphold the political fabric of a great nation. To efface one's selfish interest is the first step to becoming a good citizen; to believe in the government of God, follows as a natural consequence.

What you say about our spiritual union, touches me to the soul, though it is but the echo of my own fervent belief. But I am not so sure that *all* earthly unions, even when founded in affection and good faith, are indissoluble. Surely also, there are marriages which it is righteous to shatter and destroy?

You are a pure woman, to whom even a thought of impurity is impossible; but alas! all women are not made in the same angelic mould, and we see every day the spectacle of men linked to partners in every respect unworthy. Surely you would not hold that the union of a true man with a false woman, a woman who (for example) was untrue to her husband in thought and deed, is to last for ever? I know that is the Catholic teaching, that marriage is a permanent sacrament, and that no act of the parties, however abominable, can render either of them free to marry again; and we find even such half-hearted Liberals as Gladstone upholding it (see his 'Ecclesiastical Essays'), and flinging mud in the blind face of Milton, because (out of the bitterness of his own cruel experience) he argued the

contrary. Divorce is recognised in our own country and countenanced by our own religion; and I believe it to be necessary for the guarantee of human happiness. What is most hideous in our England is the horrible institution of the civil Court, where causes that should be heard *in camerâ* are exposed shamefully to the light of day; so that men would rather bear their life-long torture than submit to the ordeal of a degrading publicity, and only shameless men and women dare to claim their freedom at so terrible a price.

I intended to write only a few lines, and here am I arguing with you on paper, just as we used to argue in the old times *vivâ voce*, on a quite indifferent question. Forgive me! And yet writing so seems like having one of our nice, long, cosy, serious talks. Discussions

of this kind are like emptying one's pocket to find what they contain; I never thought I had any ideas on the subject till I began, school-boy-like, to turn them out!

God bless you, my darling! When you hear from me next, I shall be in the land of the 'ich' and the 'nicht ich,' of beer and philosophy, of Deutschthum and Strasbourg pies.

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

IV.

The Same to the Same.

DEAREST,—I wrote to you the other day from Berlin—merely a line to say that my movements were uncertain, and asking you to address your next letter care of Grädener the banker, here at Frankfort. I suppose there

must have been some delay in the transmission, or the letter must have gone astray: at all events, here I am, and grievously disappointed to find you have not written. Darling, do not keep me in suspense; but answer this by return, and then you shall have a long prosy letter descriptive of my recent experiences. Write! write!

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

V.

Alma Craik to Ambrose Bradley.

DEAREST AMBROSE,—You are right in supposing that your letter from Berlin went astray; it has certainly never reached me, and you can imagine my impatience in consequence. However, all's well that ends well; and the sight of your dear handwriting is like spring sunshine.

Since I last wrote to you I have been reading in a French translation those wonderful letters of Héloïse to the great Abelard, and his to her; and somehow they seemed to bring you close to me, to recall your dear face, the very sound of your beautiful voice. Dearest, what would you have said if I had addressed this letter to you in the old sweet terms used by my prototype—not for the world to see, but for your loving eyes alone? 'A son maître, ou plutôt à son père; à son époux, ou plutôt à son frère: sa servante, ou plutôt sa fille; son épouse, ou plutôt sa sœur; à Ambrose, Alma.' All these and more are you to me, my master and my father, my husband and my brother; while I am at once your servant and your daughter, your sister and your spouse. Do you believe, did you ever feel inclined to believe, in the

transmigration of souls? As I read these letters, I seem to have lived before, in a stranger, stormier time; and every word *she* wrote seemed to be the very echo of my burning heart. Ah! but our lot is happier, is it not? There is no shadow of sin upon *us* to darken our loving dream: we have nothing to undo, nothing to regret; and surely our spiritual union is blest by God. For myself, I want only one thing yet to complete my happiness—to see you raised as *he* was raised to a crown of honour and glory in the world. What I think of you, all mankind must think of you, when they know you as I know you, my apostle of all that is great and good. Ah, dearest, I would gladly die, if by so doing I could win you the honour you deserve.

But I must stop now. When I begin to

write to you, I scarcely know when to cease. *Adieu, tout mon bien!*

ALMA.

VI.

Ambrose Bradley to Alma Craik

'À Alma, sa bien-aimée épouse et sœur en Jésus-Christ, Ambrose son époux et frère en Jésus-Christ!' Shall I begin thus, dearest, in the very words of the great man to whom, despite my undeserving, you have lovingly compared me? You see I remember them well. But alas! Abelard was thrown on different days, when at least faith was *possible*. What would he have become, I wonder, had he been born when the faith was shipwrecked, and when the trumpet of Euroclydon was sounding the destruction of

all the creeds? Yonder, in France, one began to doubt everything, even the divinity of love; so I fled from the Parisian Sodom, trusting to find hope and comfort among the conquerors of Sedan. Alas! I begin to think that I am a sort of modern Diogenes, seeking in vain for a people with a Soul. I went first to Berlin, and found there all the vice of Paris without its beauty, all the infidelity of Frenchmen without their fitful enthusiasm in forlorn causes. The people of Germany, it appears to me, put God and Bismarck in the same category; they accept both as a solution of the political difficulty, but they truly reverence neither. The typical German is a monstrosity, a living contradiction: intellectually an atheist, he assents to the conventional uses of Deity;

politically a freethinker, he is a slave to the idea of nationality and a staunch upholder of the divine right of kings. Long ago, the philosophers, armed with the jargon of an insincere idealism, demolished Deism with one hand and set it up with the other; what they proved by elaborate treatises not to exist, they established as the only order of things worth believing; till at last the culmination of philosophic inconsistency was reached in Hegel, who began by the destruction of all religion and ended in the totem-worship of second childhood. In the course of a very short experience, I have learned cordially to dislike the Germans, and to perceive that, in spite of their tall talk and their splendid organisation, they are completely without ideas. In proportion as

they have advanced politically, they have retrograded intellectually. They have no literature now and no philosophy; in one word, no spiritual zeal. They have stuck up as their leader a man with the moral outlook of Brander in 'Faust,' a swash-buckler politician, who swaggers up and down Europe and frowns down liberalism wherever it appears. Upon my word, I even preferred the Sullen Talent which he defeated at Sedan.

I think I see you smiling at my seeming anger; but I am not angry at all—only woefully disenchanted.

This muddy nation stupefies me like its own beer. Its morality is a sham, oscillating between female slavery in the kitchen and male drunkenness in the beer-garden. The

horrible military element predominates everywhere; every shopkeeper is a martinet, every philosopher a dull sergeant. And just in time to reap the fruit of the predominant materialism or realism, has arisen the new Buddha Gautama without his beneficence, his beauty, his tenderness, or his love for the species.

Here in Frankfort (which I came to eagerly, thinking of its famous Judenstrasse, and eager to find the idea of the 'one God' at least among the Jews), I walk in the new Buddha's footsteps wherever I go.

His name was Arthur Schopenhauer, a German of Germans, with the one non-national merit, that he threw aside the mask of religion and morality. He was a piggish, selfish, conceited, *honest* scoundrel, fond of gormandising, in love with his own shadow, miserable, and a

money-grubber like all his race. One anecdote they tell of him is worth a thousand, as expressing the character of the man. Seated at the table d'hôte here one day, and observing a stranger's astonishment at the amount he was consuming, Schopenhauer said, 'I see you are astonished, sir, that I eat twice as much as you, but the explanation is simple—*I have twice as much brains!*'

The idea of this Heliogabalus of pessimism was that life is altogether an unmixed evil; that all things are miserable of necessity, even the birds when they sing on the green boughs, and the babes when they crow upon the breast; and that the only happiness, to be secured by every man as soon as possible, and the sooner the better, was in Nirwâna, or total extinction. A cheerful creed, without a God of any kind—

nay, without a single godlike sentiment! There are pessimists and pessimists. Gautama Buddha himself, *facile princeps*, based his creed upon infinite pity; his sense of the sorrows of his fellow-creatures was so terrible as to make existence practically unbearable. John Calvin was a Christian pessimist; his whole nature was warped by the sense of infinite sin and overclouded by the shadow of infinite justice. But this Buddha of the Teutons is a different being.; neither love nor pity, only a predominating selfishness complicated with constitutional suspicion.

And yet, poor man, he was happy enough when his disciples hailed him as the greatest philosopher of the age, the clearest intellect on the planet; and nothing is more touching than to witness how, as his influence grew, and he

emerged from neglect, his faith in human nature brightened. Had he lived a little longer and risen still higher in esteem—had the powers that be crowned him, and the world applauded him, he too, like Hegel, would doubtless have added to his creed a corollary that, though there is no God, religion is an excellent thing; that though there is no goodness, virtue is the only living truth!

Be that as it may, I am thoroughly convinced that there is no *via media* between Christ's christianity and Schopenhauer's pessimism; and these two religions, like the gods of good and evil, are just now preparing for a final struggle on the battle-field of European thought. Just at present I feel almost a pessimist myself, and inclined to laugh more than ever at poor Kingsley's feeble twaddle

about this 'singularly well-constructed world.' Every face I see, whether of Jew or Gentile, is scribbled like the ledger with figures of addition and subtraction; every eye is crowsfooted with tables of compound interest; and the money-bags waddle up and down the streets, and look out of the country house windows, like things without a soul. But across the river, at Sachsenhausen, there are trees, in which the birds sing, and pretty children, and lovers talking in the summer shade. I go there in the summer afternoons and smoke my pipe, and think over the problem of the time. Think you, dearest, that Schopenhauer was right, and that there is no gladness or goodness in the world? Is the deathblow of foolish supernaturalism the destruction also of heavenly love and hope? Nay, God forbid! But this

hideous pessimism is the natural revolt of the human heart, after centuries of optimistic lies. Perhaps, when another century has fled, mankind may thank God for Schopenhauer, who proved the potency of materialistic Will, and for Strauss, who has shown the fallacy of human judgment. The Germans have given us these two men as types of their own degradation; and when we have thoroughly digested their bitter gospel, we shall know how little hope for humanity lies *that* way. Meantime, the Divine Ideal, the spiritual Christ survives—the master of the secret of sorrow, the lord of the shadowy land of hope. He turns his back upon the temple erected in his name; he averts his sweet eyes from those who deny He is, or ever was. He is patient, knowing that his kingdom must some day come.

More than ever now do I feel what a power the Church might be if it would only reconstruct itself by the light of the new knowledge. Without it, both France and Germany are plunged into darkness and spiritual death. As if man, constituted as he is, can exist without religion! As if the creed of cakes and ale, or the gospel of Deutschthum and Sauer-kraut were in any true sense of the word religion at all! No, the hope and salvation of the human race lies now, as it lay eighteen hundred years ago, in the Christian promise. If this life were all, if this world were the play and not the prelude, then the new Buddha would have conquered, and nothing be left us but Nirwâna. But the Spirit of Man, which has created Christ and imagined God, knows better. It trusts its own

deathless instinct, and by the same law through which the swallow wings its way, it prepares for flight to a sunnier zone.

Pray, my Alma, that even this holy instinct is not merely a dream! Pray that God may keep us together till the time comes to follow the summer of our love to its bright and heavenly home!—Yours till death, and after death,

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

VII.

Alma Craik to Ambrose Bradley.

YOUR last letter, dearest Ambrose, has reached me here in London, where I am staying for a short time with Agatha Combe. Everybody is out of town, and even the Grosvenor Club (where I am writing this letter) is quite deserted.

I never like London so much as when it is empty of everybody that one knows.

And so you find the Germans as shallow as the French, and as far away from the living truth it is your dream to preach? For my own part, I think they must be rather a *stupid* people, in spite of their philosophic airs. Agatha has persuaded me lately to read a book by a man called Haeckel, who is constructing the whole history of Evolution as children make drawings, out of his own head; and when the silly man is at a loss for a link in the chain, he invents one, and calls it by a Latin name! I suppose Evolution is true (and I know you believe in it), but if I may trust my poor woman's wit, it proves nothing whatever. The mystery of life remains just the same when all is said and done; and I see

as great a miracle in a drop of albumen passing through endless progressions till it flowers in sense and soul, as in the creation of all things at the fiat of an omnipotent personal God and Father. The poor purblind German abolishes God altogether!

Agatha has read your Schopenhauer, and thinks him a wonderful man; I believe, too, he has many disciples in this country. To me, judging from what I hear of him, and also from your description of him, he seems another *stupid* giant—a Fee-fo-fi-fum full of self-conceit and hasty pudding, and sure to fall a victim, some day, to Little Jack Horner. But every word you write (it seems always like your own dear voice speaking!) makes me think of yourself, of your quarrel with the Church, and of your justification before the world. If purblind men like these can persuade the

world to listen to them, why should your 'one talent, which is death to lose,' be wasted or thrown away? When you have wandered a little longer, you must return and take your place as a teacher and a preacher in the land. You must not continue to be an exile. You are my hero, my Abelard, my teacher of all that is great and good to a perverse generation, and I shall never be happy until you reach the summit of your spiritual ambition and are recognised as a modern apostle. You *must not* leave the ministry; you must not abandon your vocation; or if you do so, it must be only to change the scene of your labours. Agatha Combe tells me that there is a great field for a man like you in London; that the cultivated people here are sick of the old dogmas, and yet equally sick of mere materialism; that what they want is a leader such as

you, who would take his stand upon the laws of reason, and preach a purified and exalted Christian ideal. Well, since the English Establishment has rejected you, why not, in the greatest city of the world, form a Church of your own? I have often thought of this, but never so much as lately. There you are tongue-tied and hand-tied, at the mercy of the ignorant who could never comprehend you; *here* you could speak with a free voice, as the great Abelard did when he defied the thunders of the Vatican. Remember, I am rich. You have only to say the word, and your handmaid (am I not still *that*, and your spouse and your *sister*?) will upbuild you a Temple! Ah, how proudly!

Yes, think of *this*, think of the great work of your life, not of its trivial disappointments. Be worthy of my dream of you, my Abelard.

When I see you wear your crown of honour with all the world worshipping the new teaching, I shall be blest indeed.

ALMA.

VIII.

Ambrose Bradley to Alma Craik.

DEAREST ALMA,—How good you are! How tenderly do you touch the core of my own secret thought, making my whole spirit vibrate to the old ambition, and my memory tremble with the enthusiasm of my first youth. Oh, to be a modern Apostle, as you say! to sway the multitude with words of power, to overthrow at once the tables of the money-changers of materialism, and the dollish idols of the Old Church.

But I know too well my own incapacity, as

compared with the magnitude of that mighty task. I believe at once too little and too much; I should shock the priests of Christ, and to the priests of Antichrist I should be a standing jest; neither Montague nor Capulet would spare me, and I should lose my spiritual life in some miserable polemical brawl.

It is so good of you, so like you, to think of it, and to offer out of your own store to build me a church; but I am not so lost, so unworthy, as to take advantage of your loving charity, and to secure my own success—or rather, my almost certain failure—on such a foundation.

And that reminds me, dearest, of what in my mad vanity I had nearly forgotten—the difference between our positions in the world. You are a rich woman; I, as you know, am very poor. It was different, perhaps, when I

was an honoured member of the Church, with all its prizes and honours before me; I certainly felt it to be different, though the disparity always existed. But *now!* I am an outcast, a ruined man, without property of any kind. It would be base beyond measure to think of dragging you down to my present level; and, remember, I have now no opportunity to rise. If you linked your lot with mine, all the world would think that I loved you, not for your dear self, but for your gold; they would despise me, and think you were insane. No, dearest, I have thought it sadly over, again and again, and I see that it is hopeless. I have lost you for ever.

When you receive this, I shall be on my way to Rome.

How the very writing of that word thrills me, as if there were still magic in the name that

witched the world! Rome! the City of the Martyrs! the City of the Church! the City of the Dead! Her glory is laid low, her pride is dust and ashes, her voice is senile and old, and yet . . . the name, the mighty deathless name, one to conjure with yet. Sometimes, in my spiritual despair, I hear a voice whispering in my ear that one word 'Rome'; and I seem to hear a mighty music, and a cry of rejoicing, and to see a veiled Figure arising with the keys of all the creeds,—behind her on the right her handmaid Science, behind her on the left her handmaid Art, and over her the effulgence of the new-risen sun of Christ.

And if such a dream were real, were it not possible, my Alma, that you and I might enter the new Temple, not as man and wife, but as sister and brother? There was something after

all in that old idea of the consecrated priest and the vestal virgin. I often think with St. Paul that there is too much marrying and giving in marriage. 'Brother and sister' sounds sweetly, does it not?

Forgive my wild words. I hardly know what I am writing. Your loving letter has stirred all the fountains of my spirit, your kindness has made me ashamed.

You shall hear from me again, from the very heart of the Seven Hills! Meantime, God bless you!—Ever your faithful and devoted,

AMBROSE BRADLEY.

IX.

Alma Craik to Ambrose Bradley.

BE true to your old dream, dearest Ambrose, and remember that in its fruition

lies *my* only chance of happiness. Do not talk of unworthiness or unfitness; you are cruel to me when you distrust yourself. Will you be very angry if I tell you a secret? Will you forgive me if I say to you that even now the place where you shall preach the good tidings is rising from the ground, and that in a little while, when you return, it will be ready to welcome its master? But there, I have said too much. If there is anything more you would know, you must guess it, dearest! Enough to say that you have friends who love you, and who are not idle.

If I thought you meant what you said in your last I should indeed despair; but it was the shadow of that abominable Schopenhauer who spoke, and not my Abelard. To tell me that I am rich, and you are poor—as if even

a *mountain* of money, high as Ararat, could separate those whom God has joined! To talk of the world's opinion, the people's misconception—as if the poor things who crawl on the ground could alter the lives of those who soar with living thoughts to heaven! Get thee behind me, Schopenhauer! When any voice, however like his own, talks of the overthrow of the man I love, I only smile. I know better than to be deceived by a trick of the ventriloquist. You and I know, my Ambrose, that you have not been overthrown at all—that you have not fallen, but risen—how high, the world shall know in a very little while.

Meantime, gather up strength, both of the body and the mind. Drink strength from the air of the holy city, and come back to wear

your priestly robes. Your dream will be realised, be sure of that!

Do you think to daunt me when you say that I must not be your wife? Do you think your handmaid cares so long as she may serve at your feet? Call her by what name you please, spouse or sister, is it not all the same? Your hope is my hope, your country my country, your God my God—now and for ever. Only let us labour together earnestly, truthfully, patiently, and all will be well.—Yours always faithfully and affectionately,

ALMA.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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