The Seeker eBook

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The Age of Fable

[Illustration]

THE SEEKER

BOOK ONE—THE AGE OF FABLE

CHAPTER I

HOW THE CHRISTMAS SAINT WAS PROVED

The whispering died away as they heard heavy steps and saw a line of light under the shut door. Then a last muffled caution from the larger boy on the cot.

“Now, remember! There ain’t any, but don’t you let *on* there ain’t—else he won’t bring you a single thing!”

Before the despairing soul on the trundle-bed could pierce the vulnerable heel of this, the door opened slowly to the broad shape of Clytemnestra. One hand shaded her eyes from the candle she carried, and she peered into the corner where the two beds were, a flurry of eagerness in her face, checked by stoic self-mastery.

At once from the older boy came the sounds of one who breathes labouredly in deep sleep after a hard day. But the littler boy sat rebelliously up, digging combative fists into eyes that the light tickled. Clytemnestra warmly rebuked him, first simulating the frown of the irritated.

“Now, Bernal! Wide awake! My days alive! You act like a wild Indian’s little boy. This’ll *never* do. Now you go right to sleep this minute, while I watch you. Look how fine and good Allan is.” She spoke low, not to awaken the one virtuous sleeper, who seemed thereupon to breathe with a more swelling and obtrusive rectitude.

“Clytie—now—*ain’t* there any Santa Claus?”

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“Now what a sinful question *that* is!”

“But *is* there?”

“Don’t he bring you things?”

“Oh, there *ain’t* any!” There was a sullen desperation in this, as of one done with quibbles. But the woman still paltered wretchedly.

“Well, if you don’t lie down and go to sleep quicker’n a wink I bet you anything he won’t bring you a single play-pretty.”

There came an unmistakable blare of triumph into the busy snore on the cot.

But the heart of the skeptic was sunk. This evasion was more disillusioning than downright confession. A moment the little boy regarded her, wholly in sorrow, with big eyes that blinked alarmingly. Then came his last shot; the final bullet which the besieged warrior will sometimes reserve for his own destruction. There could no longer be any pretense between them. Bravely he faced her.

“Now—you just needn’t try to keep it from me any longer! I *know* there ain’t any—” One tensely tragic second he paused to gather himself—“*It’s all over town!*” There being nothing further to live for, he delivered himself to grief—to be tortured and destroyed.

Clytie set the candle on the bureau and came to hover him. Within the pressing arms and upon the proffered bosom he wept out one of those griefs that may not be told—-that only the heart can understand. Yet, when the first passion of it was spent she began to reassure him, begging him not to be misled by idle gossip; to take not even her own testimony, but to wait and see what he would see. At last he listened and was a little soothed. It appeared that Santa Claus was one you might believe in or might not. Even Clytie seemed to be puzzled about him. He could see that she overflowed with belief in him, yet he could not make her confess it in plain straight words. The meat of it was that good children found things on Christmas morning which must have been left by some one—if not by Santa Claus, then by whom? Did the little boy believe, for example, that Milo Barrus did it? He was the village atheist, and so bad a man that he loved to spell God with a little g.

He mused upon this while his tears dried, finding it plausible. Of course it couldn’t be Milo Barrus, so it *must* be Santa Claus. Was Clytie certain some presents would be there in the morning? If he went directly to sleep, she was.

Hereupon the larger boy on the cot, who had for some moments listened in forgetful silence, became again virtuously asleep in a public manner.

But the littler boy must yet have talk. Could the bells of Santa Claus be heard when he came?

Clytie had known some children, of exceptional merit, it was true, who claimed to have heard his bells on certain nights when they had gone early to sleep.

Why would he never leave anything for a child that got up out of bed and caught him at it? Suppose one had to get up for a drink.

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Because it broke the charm.

But if a very, *very* good child just *happened* to wake up while he was in the room, and didn't pay the least attention to him, or even look sidewise or anything—

Even this were hazardous, it seemed; though if the child were indeed very good all might not yet be lost.

"Well, won't you leave the light for me? The dark gets in my eyes."

But this was another adverse condition, making everything impossible. So she chided and reassured him, tucked the covers once more about his neck, and left him, with a final comment on the advantage of sleeping at once.

When the room was dark and Clytie's footsteps had sounded down the hall, he called softly to his brother; but that wise child was now truly asleep. So the littler boy lay musing, having resolved to stay awake and solve the mystery once for all.

From wondering what he might receive he came to wondering if he were good. His last meditation was upon the Sunday-school book his dear mother had helped him read before they took her away with a new little baby that had never amounted to much; before he and Allan came to Grandfather Delcher's to live—where there was a great deal to eat. The name of the book was "Ben Holt." He remembered this especially because a text often quoted in the story said "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." He had often wondered why Ben Holt should be considered an especially good name; and why Ben Holt came to choose it instead of the goldpiece he found and returned to the schoolmaster, before he fell sick and was sent away to the country where the merry haymakers were. Of course, there were worse names than Ben Holt. It was surely better than Eygji Watts, whose sanguine parents were said to have named him with the first five letters they drew from a hat containing the alphabet; Ben Holt was assuredly better than Eygji, even had this not been rendered into "Hedge-hog" by careless companions. His last confusion of ideas was a wondering if Bernal Linford was as good a name as Ben Holt, and why he could not remember having chosen it in preference to a goldpiece. Back of this, in his fading consciousness was the high-coloured image of a candy cane, too splendid for earth.

Then, far in the night, as it might have seemed to the little boy, came the step of slippered feet. This time Clytie, satisfying herself that both boys slept, set down her candle and went softly out, leaving the door open. There came back with her one bearing gifts—a tall, dark old man, with a face of many deep lines and severe set, who yet somehow shed kindness, as if he held a spirit of light prisoned within his darkness, so that, while only now and then could a visible ray of it escape through the sombre eye or through a sudden winning quality in the harsh voice, it nevertheless radiated from him sensibly at all times, to belie his sternness and puzzle those who feared him.

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Uneasy enough he looked now as Clytie unloaded him of the bundles and bulky toys. In a silence broken only by their breathing they quickly bestowed the gifts—some in the hanging stockings at the fire-place, others beside each bed, in chairs or on the mantel.

Then they were in the hall again, the door closed so that they could speak. The old man took up his own candle from a stand against the wall.

“The little one is like her,” he said.

“He’s awful cunning and bright, but Allan is the handsomest. Never in my born days did I see so beautiful a boy.”

“But he’s like the father, line for line.” There was a sudden savage roughness in the voice, a sterner set to the shaven upper lip and straight mouth, though he still spoke low. “Like the huckstering, godless fiddle-player that took her away from me. What a mercy of God’s he’ll never see her again—she with the saved and he—what a reckoning for him when he goes!”

“But he was not bad to let you take them.”

“He boasted to me that he’d not have done it, except that she begged him with her last breath to promise it. He said the words with great maudlin tears raining down his face, when my own eyes were dry!”

“How good if you can leave them both in the church, preaching the word where you preached it so many years!”

“I misdoubt the father’s blood in them—at least, in the older. But it’s late. Good night, Clytie—a good Christmas to you.”

“More to you, Mr. Delcher! Good night!”

CHAPTER II

AN OLD MAN FACES TWO WAYS

His candle up, he went softly along the white hallway over the heavy red carpet, to where a door at the end, half-open, let him into his study. Here a wood fire at the stage of glowing coals made a searching warmth. Blowing out his candle, he seated himself at the table where a shaded lamp cast its glare upon a litter of books and papers. A big, white-breasted gray cat yawned and stretched itself from the hearthrug and leaped lightly upon him with great rumbling purrs, nosing its head under one of his hands suggestively, and, when he stroked it, looking up at him with lazily falling eye-lids.

He crossed his knees to make a better lap for the cat, and fell to musing backward into his own boyhood, when the Christmas Saint was a real presence. Then he came forward to his youth, when he had obeyed the call of the Lord against his father's express command that he follow the family way and become a prosperous manufacturer. Truly there had been revolt in him. Perhaps he had never enough considered this in excuse for his own daughter's revolt.

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Again he dwelt in the days when he had preached with a hot passion such truth as was his. For a long time, while the old clock ticked on the mantel before him and the big cat purred or slept under his absent pettings, his mind moved through an incident of that early ministry. Clear in his memory were certain passages of fire from the sermon. In the little log church at Edom he had felt the spirit burn in him and he had movingly voiced its warnings of that dread place where the flames forever blaze, yet never consume; where cries ever go up for one drop of water to cool the parched tongues of those who sought not God while they lived. He had told of one who died—one that the world called good, a moral man—but not a Christian; one who had perversely neglected the way of life. How, on his death-bed, this one had called in agony for a last glass of water, seeming to know all at once that he would now be where no drop of water could cool him through all eternity.

So effective had been his putting of this that a terrified throng came forward at his call for converts.

The next morning he had ridden away from Edom toward Felton Falls to preach there. A mile out of town he had been accosted by a big, bearded man who had yet a singularly childish look—who urged that he come to his cabin to minister to a sick friend. He knew the fellow for one that the village of Edom called “daft” or “queer,” yet held to be harmless—to be rather amusing, indeed, since he could be provoked to deliver curious harangues upon the subject of revealed religion. He remembered now that the man’s face had stared at him from far back in the church the night before—a face full of the liveliest terror, though he had not been among those that fled to the mercy-seat. Acceding to the man’s request, he followed him up a wooded path to his cabin. Dismounting and tying his horse, he entered and, turning to ask where the sick man was, found himself throttled in the grasp of a giant.

He was thrust into an inner room, windowless and with no door other than the one now barred by his chuckling captor. And here the Reverend Allan Delcher had lain three days and two nights captive of a madman, with no food and without one drop of water.

From the other side of the log partition his captor had declared himself to be the keeper of hell. Even now he could hear the words maundered through the chinks: “Never got another drop of water for a million years and *still* more, and him a burning up and a roasting up, and his tongue a lolling out, all of a *sizzle*. Now wasn’t that fine—because folks said he’d likely gone crazy about religion!”

Other times his captor would declare himself to be John the Baptist making straight the paths in the wilderness. Again he would quote passages of scripture, some of them hideous mockeries to the tortured prisoner, some strangely soothing and suggestive.

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But a search had been made for the missing man and, quite by accident, they had found him, at a time when it seemed to him his mind must go with his captor's. His recovery from the physical blight of this captivity had been prompt; but there were those who sat under him who insisted that ever after he had been palpably less insistent upon the feature of divine retribution for what might be called the merely technical sins of heterodoxy. Not that unsound doctrine was ever so much as hinted of him; only, as once averred a plain parishioner, "He seemed to bear down on hell jest a *lee-tle* less continuously."

As for his young wife, she had ever after professed an unconquerable aversion for those sermons in which God's punishment of sinners was set forth; and this had strangely been true of their daughter, born but a little time after the father's release from the maniac's cabin. She had grown to womanhood submitting meekly to an iron rule; but none the less betraying an acute repugnance for certain doctrines preached by her father. It seemed to the old man a long way to look back; and then a long way to come forward again, past the death of his girl-wife while their child was still tender, down to the amazing iniquity of that child's revolt, in her thirty-first year. Dumbly, dutifully, had she submitted to all his restrictions and severities, stonily watching her girlhood go, through a fading, lining and hardening of her prettiness. Then all at once, with no word of pleading or warning, she had done the monstrous thing. He awoke one day to know that his beloved child had gone away to marry the handsome, swaggering, fiddle-playing good-for-nothing who had that winter given singing lessons in the village.

Only once after that had he looked upon her face—the face of a withered sprite, subdued by time. The hurt of that look was still fresh in him, making his mind turn heavily, perhaps a little remorsefully, to the two little boys asleep in the west bedroom. Had the seed of revolt been in her, from his own revolt against his father? Would it presently bear some ugly fruit in her sons?

From a drawer in the table he took a little sheaf of folded sheets, and read again the last letter that had come from her; read it not without grim mutterings and oblique little jerks of the narrow old head, yet with quick tender glows melting the sternness.

"You must not think I have ever regretted my choice, though every day of my life I have sorrowed at your decision not to see me so long as I stayed by my husband. How many times I have prayed God to remind you that I took him for better or worse, till death should us part."

This made him mutter.

"Clayton has never in his life failed of kindness and gentleness to me"—so ran the letter—"and he has always provided for us as well as a man of his *uncommon talents* could."

Here the old man sniffed in fine contempt.

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“All last winter he had quite a class to teach singing in the evening and three day-scholars for the violin, one of whom paid him in hams. Another offered to pay either in money or a beautiful portrait of me in pastel. We needed money, but Clayton chose the portrait as a surprise to me. At times he seems unpractical, but now he has started out in *business* again—”

There were bitter shakings of the head here. Business! Standing in a buggy at street-corners, jauntily urging a crowd to buy the magic grease-eradicator, toothache remedy, meretricious jewelry, what not! first playing a fiddle and rollicking out some ribald song to fetch them. Business indeed! A pretty business!

“The boys are delighted with the Bibles you sent and learn a verse each day. I have told them they may some day preach as you did if they will be as good men as you are and study the Bible. They try to preach like our preacher in the cunningest way. I wish you could see them. You would love them in spite of your feeling against their father. I did what you suggested to stimulate their minds about the Scriptures, but perhaps the lesson they chose to write about was not very edifying. It does not seem a pretty lesson to me, and I did not pick it out. They heard about it at Sabbath-school and had their papers all written as a surprise for me. Of course, Bernal’s is *very* childish, but I think Allan’s paper, for a child of his age, shows a *grasp* of religious matters that is *truly remarkable*. I shall keep them studying the Bible daily. I should tell you that I am now looking forward with great joy to—”

With a long sigh he laid down the finely written sheet and took from the sheaf the two papers she had spoken of. Then while the gale roared without and shook his window, and while the bust of John Calvin looked down at him from the book-case at his back, he followed his two grandsons on their first incursion into the domain of speculative theology.

He took first the paper of the older boy, painfully elaborated with heavy, intricate capitals and headed “Elisha and the Wicked Children—by Mr. Allan Delcher Linford, Esquire, aged nine years and six months.”

* * * * *

“This lesson,” it began, “is to teach us to love God and the prophets or else we will likely get into trouble. It says Elisha went up from Bethel and some children came out of the city and said go up thou Baldhead. They said it Twice one after the other and so Elisha got mad right away and turned around and cursed them good in the name of the Lord and so 2 She Bears come along and et up 42 of them for Elisha was a holy prophet of God and had not ought to of been yelled at. So of course the mothers would Take on very much When they found their 42 Children et up but I think that we had ought to learn from this that these 42 Little ones was not the Elected. It says in our catchism God having out of his mere good pleasure elected some to everlasting life. Now God

being a Presbiterian would know these 42 little ones had not been elected so they might as well be et up by bears as anything else to show forth his honour and glory Forever Amen. It should teach a Boy to be mighty carful about kidding old men unless he is a Presbiterian. I spelled every word in this right.

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“Mr. Allan Delcher Linford.”

The second paper, which the old man now held long before him, was partly printed and partly written with a lead-pencil, whose mark was now faint and now heavy, as having gone at intervals to the writer’s lips. As the old man read, his face lost not a little of its grimness.

“BEARS

“It teaches the lord thy God is baldheaded. I ask my deer father what it teeches he said it teeches who ever wrot that storry was baldheaded. He says a man with thik long hair like my deer father would of said o let the kids have their fun with old Elisha so I ask my deer mother who wrot this lesson she said God wrot the holy word so that is how we know God is baldheaded. It was a lot of children for only two 2 bears. I liked to of ben there if the bears wold of known that I was a good child. mabe I cold of ben on a high fense or up a tree. I climd the sor aple tree in our back yard esy.

“By Bernal Linford, aged neerly 8 yrs.”

Carefully he put back both papers with the mother’s letter, his dark face showing all its intricate net-work of lines in a tension that was both pained and humorous.

Two fresh souls were given to his care to be made, please God, the means of grace by which thousands of other souls might be washed clean of the stain of original sin. Yet, if revolt was there—revolt like his daughter’s and like his own? Would he forgive as his own father had forgiven, who had called him back after many years to live out a tranquil old age on the fortune that father’s father had founded? He mused long on this. The age was lax—true, but God’s law was never lax. If one would revolt from the right, one must suffer. For the old man was one of the few last of a race of giants who were to believe always in the Printed Word.

CHAPTER III

THE CULT OF THE CANDY CANE

When the littler boy looked fairly into the frosty gray of that Christmas morning, the trailed banner of his faith was snatched once more aloft; and in the breast of his complacent brother there swelled the conviction that one does ill to flaunt one’s skepticism, when the rewards of belief are substantial and imminent. For before them was an array of gifts such as neither had ever looked upon before, save as forbidden treasure of the few persons whose immense wealth enables them to keep toy-shops.

The tale of the princely Saint was now authenticated delightfully. That which had made him seem unreal in moments of spiritual laxity—the impenetrable secrecy of his private

life—was now seen to enhance manyfold his wondrous givings. Here was a charm which could never have sat the display before them had it been dryly bought in their presence from one of the millionaire toy-shop keepers. For a wondering moment they looked from their beds, sputtering, gibbering, gasping, with cautious calls one to the other. Then having proved speech to

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be no disenchantment they shouted and laughed crazily. There followed a scramble from the beds and a swift return from the cold, each bearing such of the priceless bits as had lain nearest. And while these were fondled or shot or blown upon or tasted or wound up, each according to its wonderful nature, they looked farther afield seeing other and ever new packages bulk mysteriously into the growing light; bundles quickening before their eyes with every delight to be imagined of a Saint with epicurean tastes and prodigal habits—bundles that looked as if a mere twitch at the cord would expose their hidden charms.

The littler boy now wore a unique fur cap that let down to cover the neck and face, with openings wonderfully contrived for the eyes, nose and mouth—an easy triumph, surely, over the deadliest cold known to man. In one hand he flourished a brass-handled knife with both of its blades open; with the other he clasped a striped trumpet, into the china mouthpiece of which he had blown the shreds of a caramel, not meaning to; and here he was made to forget these trifles by discovering at the farther side of the room a veritable rocking-horse, a creature that looked not only magnificently willing, but superbly untamable, with a white mane and tail of celestial flow, with alert, pointed ears of maroon leather nailed nicely to the right spot. At this marvel he stared in that silence which is the highest power of joy: a presentiment had been his that such a horse, curveting on blue rockers, would be found on this very morning. Two days before had he in an absent moment beheld a vision of this horse poised near the door of the attic; but when he ran to make report of it below, thinking to astound people by his power of insight, Clytemnestra, bidding him wait in the kitchen where she was baking, had hurried to the spot and found only some rolls of blue cambric. She had rather shamed him for giving her such a start. A few rolls of shiny blue cambric against a white wall did not, she assured him, make a rocking-horse; and, what was more, they never would. Now the vision came back with a significance that set him all a-thrill. Next time Clytie would pay attention to him. He laughed to think of her confusion now.

But here again, at the very zenith of a shout, was he frozen to silence by a vision—this time one too obviously of no ponderable fabric. There in the corner, almost at his hand, seemed to be a thing that he had dreamed of possessing only after he entered Heaven—a candy cane: one of fearful length, thick of girth, vast of crook, and wide in the spiral stripe that seemed to run a living flame before his ravished eyes, beginning at the bottom and winding around and around the whole dizzy height. Fearfully in nerve-braced silence he leaned far out of his bed to bring against this amazing apparition one cool, impartial forefinger of skeptic research. It did not vanish; it resisted his touch. Then his heart fainted with rapture, for he knew the unimagined had become history.

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Standing before the windows of the great, he had gazed long at these creations. They were suspended on a wire across the window in various lengths, from little ones to sizes too awesome to compute. On one occasion so long had he stood motionless, so deep the trance of his contemplation, that the winter cold had cruelly bitten his ears and toes. He had not supposed that these things were for mere vulgar ownership. He had known of boys who had guns and building-blocks and rocking-horses as well as candy in the lesser degrees; but never had he known, never had he been able to hear of one who had owned a thing like this. Indeed, among the boys he knew, it was believed that they were not even to be seen save on their wire at Christmas time in the windows of the rich. One boy had hinted that the “set” would not be broken even if a person should appear with money enough to buy a single one. And here before him was the finest of them all, receding neither from his gaze or his touch, one as long as the longest of which Heaven had hitherto vouchsafed him a chilling vision through glass; here was the same fascinating union of transcendent merit with a playful suggestion of downright utility. And he had blurted out to Clytie that the news of there being no Santa Claus was all over town! He was ashamed, and the moment became for him one of chastening in which he humbled his unbelieving spirit before this symbol of a more than earthly goodness—a symbol in whose presence, while as yet no accident had rendered it less than perfect, he would never cease to feel the spiritual uplift of one who has weighed the fruits of faith and found them not wanting.

He issued from some bottomless stupor of ecstacy to hear the door open to Allan’s shouts; then to see the opening nicely filled again by the figure of Clytemnestra, who looked over at them with eager, shining eyes. He was at first powerless to do more than say “Oh, Clytie!” with little impotent pointings toward the candy cane. But the action now in order served to restore him to a state of working sanity. There was washing and dressing after Clytie had the fire crackling; the forgetting of some treasures to remember others; and the conveyance of them all down stairs to the big sitting-room where the sun came in over the geraniums in the bay-window, and where the Franklin heater made the air tropic. The rocking-horse was led and pushed by both boys; but to Clytie’s responsible hand alone was intrusted the more than earthly candy cane.

Downstairs there was the grandfather to greet—erect, fresh-shaven, flashing kind eyes from under stern brows. He seemed to be awkwardly pleased with their pleasure, yet scarce able to be one with them; as if that inner white spirit of his fluttered more than its wont to be free, yet found only tiny exits for its furtive flashes of light.

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Breakfast was a chattering and explosive meal, a severe trial, indeed, to the patience of the littler boy, who decided that he wished never to eat breakfast again. During the ten days that he had been a member of the household a certain formality observed at the beginning of each meal had held him in abject fascination, so that he looked forward to it with pleased terror. This was that, when they were all seated, there ensued a pause of precisely two seconds—no more and no less—a pause that became awful by reason of the fact that every one grew instantly solemn and expectant—even apprehensive. His tingling nerves had defined his spine for him before this pause ended, and then, when the roots of his hair began to crinkle, his grandfather would suddenly bow low over his plate and rumble in his head. It was very curious and weirdly pleasurable, and it lasted one minute. When it ceased the tension relaxed instantly, and every one was friendly and cordial and safe again.

This morning the little boy was actually impatient during the rumble, so eager was he to talk. And not until he had been assured by both his grandfather and Clytie that Santa Claus meant everything he left to be truly kept; that he came back for nothing—not even for a cane—*of any kind*—that he might have left at a certain house by mistake—not until then would he heave the sigh of immediate security and consent to eat his egg and muffins, of which latter Clytie had to bring hot ones from the kitchen because both boys had let the first plate go cold. For Clytie, like Grandfather Delcher, was also one of the last of a race of American giants—in her case a race preceding servants, that called itself “hired girls”—who not only ate with the family, but joyed and sorrowed with it and for long terms of years was a part of it in devotion, responsibility and self-respect. She had, it is true, dreaded the coming of these children, but from the moment that the two cold, subdued little figures had looked in doubting amazement at the four kinds of preserves and three kinds of cake set out for their first collation in the new home, she had rejoiced unceasingly in a vicarious motherhood.

Within an hour after breakfast the morning’s find had been examined, appraised, and accorded perpetual rank by merit. Grandfather Delcher made but one timid effort to influence decisions.

“Now, Bernal, which do you like best of all your presents?” he asked. With a heart too full for words the littler boy had pointed promptly but shyly at his candy cane. Not once, indeed, had he been able to say the words “candy cane.” It was a creation which mere words were inadequate to name. It was a presence to be pointed at. He pointed again firmly when the old man asked, “Are you quite certain, now, you like it best of all?”—-suggestively—“better than this fine book with this beautiful picture of Joseph being sold away by his wicked brothers?”

The questioner had turned then to the older boy, who tactfully divined that a different answer would have pleased the old man better.

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“And what do you like best, Allan?”

“Oh, I like this fine and splendid book best of all!”—and he read from the title-page, in the clear, confident tones of the pupil who knows that the teacher’s favour rests upon him—“’From Eden to Calvary; or through the Bible in a year with our boys and girls; a book of pleasure and profit for young persons on Sabbath Afternoon. By Grandpa Silas Atterbury, the well-known author and writer for young people.”

His glance toward his brother at the close was meant to betray the consciousness of his own superiority to one who dallied sensuously with created objects.

But the unspiritual one was riding the new horse at a furious gallop, and the glance of reproof was unnoted save by the old man—who wondered if it might be by any absurd twist that the boy most like the godless father were more godly than the one so like his mother that every note of his little voice and every full glance of his big blue eyes made the old heart flutter.

In the afternoon came callers from the next house; Dr. Crealock, rubicund and portly, leaning on his cane, to pass the word of seasonable cheer with his old friend and pastor; and with him his tiny niece to greet the grandchildren of his friend. The Doctor went with his host to the study on the second floor, where, as a Christmas custom, they would drink some Madeira, ancient of days, from a cask prescribed and furnished long since by the doctor.

The little boy was for the moment left alone with the tiny niece; to stare curiously, now that she was close, at one of whom he had caught glimpses in a window of the big house next door. She was clad in a black velvet cloak and hood, with pink satin next her face inside the hood, and she carried a large closely-wrapped doll which she affected to think might have taken cold. With great self-possession she doffed her cloak and overshoes; then slowly and tenderly unwound the wrappings of the doll, talking meanwhile in low mothering tones, and going with it to the fire when she had it uncloaked. Of the boy who stared at her she seemed unconscious, and he could do no more than stand timidly at a little distance. An eye-flash from the maid may have perceived his abjectness, for she said haughtily at length, “I’m astonished no one in this house knows where Clytie is!”

He drew nearer by as far as he could slowly spread his feet twice.

“*I* know—now—she went to get two glasses from the dresser to take to my grandfather and that gentleman.” He felt voluble from the mere ease of the answer. But she affected to have heard nothing, and he was obliged to speak again.

“Now—why, *I* know a doll that shuts up her eyes every time she lies down.”

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The doll at hand was promptly extended on the little lap and with a click went into sudden sleep while the mother rocked it. He could have ventured nothing more after this pricking of his inflated little speech. A moment he stood, suffering moderately, and then would have edged cautiously away with the air of wishing to go, only at this point, without seeming to see him, she chirped to him quite winningly in a soft, warm little voice, and there was free talk at once. He manfully let her tell of all her silly little presents before talking of his own. He even listened about the doll, whose name Santa Claus had thoughtfully painted on the box in which she came; it was a French name, "Fragile."

Then, being come to names, they told their own. Hers, she said, was Lillian May.

"But your uncle, now—that gentleman—he called you *Nancy* when you came in." He waited for her solving of this.

"Oh, Uncle Doctor doesn't know it yet, what my *real* name is. They call me Nancy, but that's a very disagreeable name, so I took Lillian May for my real name. But I tell *very* few persons," she added, importantly. Here he was at home; he knew about choosing a good name.

"Did you give up the gold-piece you found?" he asked. But this puzzled her.

"'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,'" he reminded her. "Didn't you find a gold-piece like Ben Holt did?"

But it seemed she had never found anything. Indeed, once she had lost a dime, even on the way to spending it for five candy bananas and five jaw-breakers. Plainly she had chosen her good name without knowing of the case of Ben Holt. Then he promised to show her something the most wonderful in all the world, which she would never believe without seeing it, and led her to where the candy cane towered to their shoulders in its corner. He saw at once that it meant less to her than it did to him.

"Oh, it's a candy cane!" she said, *calling* it a candy cane commonly, with not even a hush of tone, as one would say "a brick house" or "a gold watch," or anything. She, promptly detecting his disappointment at her coldness, tried to simulate the fervour of an initiate, but this may never be done so as to deceive any one who has truly sensed the occult and incommunicable virtue of the candy cane. For one thing, she kept repeating the words "candy cane" baldly, whenever she could find a place for them in her soulless praise; whereas an initiate would not once have uttered the term, but would have looked in silence. Another initiate, equally silent by his side, would have known him to be of the brotherhood. Perhaps at the end there would have been respectful wonder expressed as to how long it would stay unbroken and so untasted. Still he was not unkind to her, except in ways requisite to a mere decent showing forth of his now ascertained superiority. He helped her to a canter on the new horse; and even

pretended a polite and superficial interest in the doll, Fragile, which she took up often. Being a girl, she had to be humoured in that manner. But any boy could see that the thing went to sleep by turning its eyes inside out, *and its garters were painted on its fat legs*. These things he was, of course, too much the gentleman to point out.

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When the Doctor and his host came down stairs late in the afternoon, the little boy and girl were fairly friendly. Only there was talk of kissing at the door, started by the little girl's uncle, and this the little boy of course could not consider, even though he suddenly wished it of all things—for he had never kissed any one but his father and mother. He had told Clytie it made him sick to be kissed. Now, when the little girl called to him as if it were the simplest thing in the world, he could not go. And then she stabbed him by falsely kissing the complacent Allan standing by, who thereupon smirked in sickening deprecation and promptly rubbed his cheek.

Not until the pair were out in the street did his man-strength come back to him, and then he could only burn with indignation at her and at Allan. He wondered that no one was shocked at him for feeling as he did. But, as they seemed not to notice him, he rode his horse again. No mad gallop now, but a slow, moody jog—a pace ripe for any pessimism.

"Clytie!" he called imperiously, after a little. "Do you think there's a real bone in this horse—like a *regular* horse?"

Clytie responded from the dining-room with a placid "I guess so."

"If I sawed into its neck, would the saw go right into a real *bone*?"

"My suz! what talk! Well?"

"I know there *ain't* any bone in there, like a regular horse. It's just a *wooden* bone."

Nor was this his last negative thought of the day. It came to him then and there with cruel, biting plainness, that no one else in the house felt as he did toward his chief treasure. Allan didn't. He had spent hardly a moment with it. Clytie didn't; he had seen her pick it up when she dusted the sitting-room; there was sacrilege in her very grasp of it; and his grandfather seemed hardly to know of its existence. The little girl who had chosen the good name of Lillian May might have been excused; but not these others. If his grandfather was without understanding in such a matter, in what, then, could he be trusted?

He descended to a still lower plane before he fell asleep that night. Even if he had *one* of them, he would probably never have a whole row, graduated from a pigmy to a mammoth, to hang on a wire across the front window, after the manner of the rich, and dazzle the outer world into envy. The mood was but slightly chastened when he remembered, as he now did, that on last Christmas he had received only one pretentious candy rooster, falsely hollow, and a very uninteresting linen handkerchief embroidered with some initials not his own. He fell asleep on a brutal reflection that the cane could be broken accidentally and eaten.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIG HOUSE OF PORTENTS

In this big white house the little boys had been born again to a life that was all strange. Novel was the outer house with its high portico and fluted pillars, its vast areas of white wall set with shutters of relentless green; its stout, red chimneys; its surprises of gabled window; its big front door with the polished brass knocker and the fan-light above. Quite as novel was the inner house, and quite as novel was this new life to its very center.

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For one thing, while the joy of living had hitherto been all but flawless for the little boys, the disadvantages of being dead were now brought daily to their notice. In morning and evening prayer, in formal homily, informal caution, spontaneous warning, in the sermon at church, and the lesson of the Sabbath-school, was their excessive liability to divine wrath impressed upon them “when the memory is wax to receive and marble to retain.”

Within the home Clytie proved to be an able coadjutor of the old man, who was, indeed, constrained and awkward in the presence of the younger child, and perhaps a thought too severe with the elder. But Clytie, who had said “I’ll make my own of them,” was tireless and not without ingenuity in opening the way of life to their little feet.

Allan, the elder, gifted with a distinct talent for memorising, she taught many instructive bits chosen from the scrap-book in which her literary treasures were preserved. His rendition of a passage from one of Mr. Spurgeon’s sermons became so impressive under her drilling that the aroma of his lost youth stole back to the nostrils of the old man while he listened.

“There is a place,” the boy would declaim loweringly, and with fitting gesture, with hypnotic eye fastened on the cowering Bernal, “where the only music is the symphony of damned souls. Where howling, groaning, moaning, and gnashing of teeth make up the horrible concert. There is a place where demons fly swift as air, with whips of knotted burning wire, torturing poor souls; where tongues on fire with agony burn the roofs of mouths that shriek in vain for drops of water—that water all denied. When thou diest, O Sinner—”

But at this point the smaller boy usually became restless and would have to go to the kitchen for a drink of water. Always he became thirsty here. And he would linger over his drink till Clytie called him back to admire his brother in the closing periods.

—“but at the resurrection thy soul will be united to thy body and then thou wilt have twin hells; body and soul will be tormented together, each brimful of agony, the soul sweating in its utmost pores drops of blood, thy body from head to foot suffused with pain, thy bones cracking in the fire, thy pulse rattling at an enormous rate in agony, every nerve a string on which the devil shall play his diabolical tune of hell’s unutterable torment.”

Here the little boy always listened at his wrist to know if his pulse rattled yet, and felt glad indeed that he was a Presbyterian, instead of being in that dreadful place with Jews and Papists and Milo Barrus, who spelled God with a little g.

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As to his own performance, Clytie found that he memorised prose with great difficulty. A week did she labour to teach him one brief passage from a lecture of Francis Murphy, depicting the fate of the drunkard. She bribed him to fresh effort with every carnal lure the pantry afforded, but invariably he failed at a point where the soul of the toper was going "down—*down*—DOWN—into the bottomless depths of HELL!" Here he became pitiful in his ineffectiveness, and Clytie had at last to admit that he would never be the elocutionist Allan was. "But, my Land!" she would say, at each of his failures, "if you only *could* do it the way Mr. Murphy did—and then he'd talk so plain and natural, too,—-just like he was associating with a body in their own parlour—and so pathetic it made a body simply bawl. My suz! how I did love to set and hear that man tell what a sot he'd been!"

However, Clytie happily discovered that the littler boy's memory was more tenacious of rhyme, so she successfully taught him certain metrical conceits that had been her own to learn in girlhood, beginning with pithy couplets such as:

"Xerxes the Great did die
And so must you and I."

"As runs the glass
Man's life must pass."

"Thy life to mend
God's book attend."

From these it was a step entirely practicable to longer warnings, one of her favourites being:

UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE

"I in the burying-place may see
Graves shorter there than I.
From Death's arrest no age is free,
Young children, too, may die.

"My God, may such an awful sight
Awakening be to me;
Oh, that by early grace, I might
For death prepared be!"

She was not a little proud of Bernal the day he recited this to Grandfather Delcher without a break, though he began the second stanza somewhat timidly, because it sounded so much like swearing.

Nor did she neglect to teach both boys the lessons of Holy Writ.

Of a Sabbath afternoon she would read how God ordered the congregation to stone the son of Shelomith for blasphemy; or, perhaps, how David fetched the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjath-jearim on a new cart; and of how the Lord “made a breach” upon Uzza for wickedly putting his hand upon the Ark to save it when the oxen stumbled. The little boys were much impressed by this when they discovered, after questioning, exactly what it meant to Uzza to have “a breach” made upon him. The unwisdom of touching an Ark of the Covenant, under any circumstances, could not have been more clearly brought home to them. They liked also to hear of the instruments played upon before the Lord by those that went ahead of the Ark; harps, psalteries, and timbrels; cornets, cymbals, and instruments made of fir-wood.

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Then there was David, who danced at the head of the procession “girded with a linen ephod,” which, somehow, sounded insufficient; and indeed, it appeared that Clytie was inclined to side wholly with Michal, David’s wife, who looked through a window and despised him when she saw him “leaping and dancing before the Lord,” uncovered save for the presumably inadequate ephod of linen. She, Clytie, thought it not well that a man of David’s years and honour should “make himself ridiculous that way.”

So it was early in this new life that the little boys came to walk as it behooves those to walk who shall taste death. And to the littler boy, prone to establish relations and likenesses among his mental images, the big house itself would at times be more than itself to him. There was the Front Room. Only the use of capital letters can indicate the manner in which he was accustomed to regard it. Each Friday, when it was opened for a solemn dusting, he timidly pierced its stately gloom from the threshold of its door. It seemed to be an abode of dead joys—a place where they had gone to reign forever in fixed and solemn festival. And while he could not see God there, actually, neither in the horse-hair sofa nor the bleak melodeon surmounted by tall vases of dyed grass, nor in the center-table with its cemeterial top, nor under the empty horsehair and green-rep chairs, set at expectant angles, nor in the cold, tall stove, ornately set with jewels of polished nickel, and surely not in the somewhat frivolous air-castle of cardboard and scarlet zephyr that fluttered from the ceiling—yet in and over and through the dark of it was a forbidding spirit that breathed out the cold mustiness of the tomb—an all-pervading thing of gloom and majesty which was nothing in itself, yet a quality and part of everything, even of himself when he looked in. And this quality or spirit he conceived to be God—the more as it came to him in a flash of divination that the superb and immaculate coal-stove must be like the Ark of the Covenant.

Thus the Front Room became what “Heaven” meant to him when he heard the word—a place difficult of access, to be prized not so much for what it actually afforded as for what it enabled one to avoid; a place whose very joys, indeed, would fill with dismay any but the absolutely pure in heart; a place of restricted area, moreover, while all outside was a speciously pleasant hell, teeming with every potent solicitation of evil, of games and sweets and joyous idleness.

The word “God,” then, became at this time a word of evil import to the littler boy, as sinister as the rustle of black silk on a Sabbath morning, when he must walk sedately to church with his hand in Clytie’s, with scarce an envious glance at the proud, happy loafers, who, clean-shaven and in their own Sabbath finery, sat on the big boxes in front of the shut stores and whittled and laughed and gossiped rarely, like very princes.

To Clytie he once said, of something for which he was about to ask her permission, “Oh, it must be awful, *awful* wicked—because I want to do it very, very much!—not like, going to church.”

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Yet the ascetic life was not devoid of compensation—particularly when Milo Barrus, the village atheist, was pointed out to him among the care-free Sabbath loafers.

Clytie predicted most direly interesting things of him if he did not come to the Feet before he died. "But I believe he *will* come to the Feet," she added, "even if it's on his very death-bed, with the cold sweat standing on his brow. It would make a lovely tract—him coming to the Feet at the very last moment and his face lighting up and everything."

The little boy, however, rather hoped Milo Barrus wouldn't come to the Feet. It was more worth while going to Heaven if he didn't, and if you could look down and see him after it was too late for him to come. During church that morning he chiefly wondered about the Feet. Once, long ago, it seemed, he had been with his dear father in a very big city, and out of the maze of all its tangled marvels of sound and sight he had brought and made his own forever one image: the image of a mighty foot carved in marble, set on a pedestal at the bottom of a dark stairway. It had been severed at the ankle, and around the top was modestly chiselled a border of lace. It was a foot larger than his whole body, and he had passed eager, questioning hands over its whole surface, pressing it from heel to each perfect toe. Of course, this must be one of the Feet to which Milo Barrus might come; he wondered if the other would be up that dark stairway, and if Milo Barrus would go up to look for it—and what did you have to do when you got to the Feet? The possibility of not getting to them, or of finding only one of them, began to fill his inner life quite as the sombre shadows filled and made a presence of themselves in the Front Room—particularly of a Sabbath, when one must be uncommonly good because God seemed to take more notice than on week-days.

During the week, indeed, Clytie often relaxed her austerity. She would even read to him verses of her own composition, of which he never tired and of which he learned to repeat not a few. One of her pastoral poems told of a visit she had once made to the home of a relative in a neighbouring State. It began thus:

"New Hampshire is a pretty place,
I did go there to see
The maple-sugar being boiled
By one that's dear to me."

Bernal came to know it all as far as the stanza—

"I loved to hear the banjo hum,
It sounds so very calmly;
If a happy home you wish to find,
Visit the Thompson family."

After this the verses became less direct, and, to his mind, rather wordy and purposeless, though he never failed of joy in the mere verbal music of them when Clytie read, with sometimes a kind of warm tremble in her voice—

> “At lovers’ promises fates grow merrilee;
> Some are made on land,
> Some on the deep sea.
> Love does sometimes leave
> Streams of tears.”

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He thought she looked very beautiful when she read this, in a voice that sounded like crying, with her big, square face, her fat cheeks that looked like russet apples, her very tiny black moustache, her smooth, oily black hair with a semicircle of tight little curls over her brow, and her beautiful, big, rounded, shining forehead.

Yet he preferred her poems of action, like that of Salmon Faubel, whose bride became so homesick in Edom that she was in a way to perish, so that Salmon took her to her home and found work there for himself. He even sang one catchy couplet of this to music of his own:

"For her dear sake whom he did pity,
He took her back to Jersey City."

But the Sabbath came inexorably to bring his sinful nature before him, just as the door of the Front Room was opened each week to remind him of the awful joys of Heaven. And then his mind was like the desert of shifting sands. There were so many things to be done and not done if one were to avert the wrath of this God that made the Front Room a cavern of terror, that rumbled threateningly in the prayer of his grandfather and shook the young minister to a white passion each Sabbath.

There was being good—which was not to commit murder or be an atheist like Milo Barrus and spell God with a little g; and there was Coming to the Feet—not so simple as it sounded, he could very well tell them; and there was the matter of Blood. There were hymns, for example, that left him confused. The "fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins" sounded interesting. Vividly he saw the "sinners plunged beneath that flood" losing all their guilty stains. It was entirely reasonable, and with an assumption of carelessness he glanced cautiously over his own body each morning to see if his guilty stains showed yet. But who was Immanuel? And where was this excellent fountain?

Then there was being "washed in the blood of the lamb," which was considerably simpler—except for the matter of its making one "whiter than snow." He was doubtful of this result, unless it was only poetry-writing which doesn't mean everything it says. He meant to try this sometime, when he could get a lamb, both as a means of grace and as a desirable experiment.

But plunging into the fountain filled with blood sounded far more important and effectual—if it were only practicable. As the sinners came out of this flood he thought they must look as Clytie did in her scarlet flannel petticoat the night he was taken with croup and she came running with the Magnetic Ointment—even redder!

The big white house of Grandfather Delcher and Clytie, in short, was a house in which to be terrified and happy; anxious and well-fed. And if its inner recesses took on too much gloomy portent one could always fly to the big yard where grew monarch elms

and maples and a row of formal spruces; where the lawn on one side was bordered with beds of petunias and fuschias, tiger-lilies and dahlias; where were a great clump of white lilacs and many bushes of yellow roses; a lawn that stretched unbrokenly to the windows of the next big house where lived the gentle stranger with the soft, warm little voice who had chosen the good name of Lillian May.

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Life was severely earnest but by no means impracticable.

CHAPTER V

THE LIFE OF CRIME IS APPRAISED AND CHOSEN

It came to seem expedient to Bernal, however, in the first spring of his new life, to make a final choice between early death and a life, of sin. Matters came to press upon him, and since virtue was useful only to get one into Heaven, it was not worth the effort unless one meant to die at once. This was an alternative not without its lures, despite the warnings preached all about him. It would surely be interesting to die, if one had come properly to the Feet. Even coming to but one of the Feet, as he had, might make it still more interesting. Perhaps he would not, for this reason, be always shut up in Heaven. In his secret heart was a lively desire to see just what they did to Milo Barrus, if he *should* continue to spell God with a little g on his very death-bed—that is, if he could see it without disadvantage to himself: But then, you could save that up, because you *must* die sometime, like Xerxes the Great; and meantime, there was the life of evil now opening wide to the vision with all enticing refreshments.

First, it meant no school. He had ceased to picture relief in this matter by the school-house burning some morning, preferably a Monday morning, one second after school had taken in. For a month he had daily dramatised to himself the building's swift destruction amid the kind and merry flames. But Allan, to whom he had one day hinted the possibility of this gracious occurrence, had reminded him brutally that they would probably have school in the Methodist church until a new school-house could be built. For Allan loved his school and his teacher.

But a life of evil promised other joys besides this negative one of no school. In his latest Sunday-school book, Ralph Overton, the good boy, not only attended school slavishly, so that at thirteen he "could write a good business hand"; but he practised those little tricks of picking up every pin, always untying the string instead of cutting it, keeping his shoes neatly polished and his hands clean, which were, in a simpler day, held to lay the foundations of commercial success in our republic. Besides this, Ralph had to be bright and cheery to every one, to work for his widowed mother after school; and every Saturday afternoon he went, sickeningly of his own accord, to split wood for an aged and poor lady. This lady seemed to Bernal to do nothing much but burn a tremendous lot of stove-wood, but presently she turned out to be the long-lost cousin of Mr. Granville Parkinson, the Great Banker from the City, who thereupon took cheery Ralph there and gave him a position in the bank where he could be honest and industrious and respectful to his superiors. Such was the barren tale of Virtue's gain. But contrasted with Ralph Overton in this book was one Budd Jackson, who led

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a life of voluptuous sloth, except at times when the evil one moved him to activity. At these bad moments he might go bobbing for catfish on a Sabbath, or purloin fruit from the orchard of Farmer Haskins (who would gladly have given some to him if he had but asked for it civilly, so the book said); or he might bully smaller boys whom he met on their way to school, taking their sailor hats away from them, or jeering coarsely at their neatly brushed garments. When Budd broke a window in the Methodist parsonage with his slung-shot and tried to lie it on to Ralph Overton, he seemed to have given way utterly to his vicious nature. He was known soon thereafter to have drunk liquor and played a game called pin-pool with a “flashy stranger” at the tavern; hence no one was surprised when he presently ran off with a circus, became an infidel, and perished miserably in the toils of vice.

This touch about the circus, well-intended, to be sure, was yet fatal to all good the tale might have done the little boy. Clytie, who read most of the story to him, declared Budd Jackson to be “a regular mean one.” But in his heart Bernal, thinking all at once of the circus, sickened unutterably of Virtue. To drive eight spirited white horses, seated high on one of those gay closed wagons—those that went through the street with that delicious hollow rumble—hearing perchance the velvet tread, or the clawing and snarling of some pent ferocity—a leopard, a lion, what not; to hear each day that muffled, flattened beating of a bass drum and cymbals far within the big tent, quick and still more quickly, denoting to the experienced ear that pink and spangled Beauty danced on the big white horse at a deathless gallop; to know that one might freely enter that tented elysium—if it were possible he would run off with a circus though it meant that he had the morals of a serpent!

Now, eastward from the big house lay the village and its churches: thither was tame virtue. But westward lay a broad field stretching off to an orchard, and beyond swelled a gentle hill, mellow in the distance. Still more remotely far, at the hill’s rim, was a blur of woods beyond which the sun went down each night. This, in the little boy’s mind, was the highway to the glad free Life of Evil. Many days he looked to that western wood when the sky was a gush of colour behind its furred edge, perceiving all manner of allurements to beckon him, hearing them plead, feeling them tug. Daily his spirit quickened within him to their solicitations, leaping out and beyond him in some magic way to bring back veritable meanings and values of the future.

Then a day came when the desire to be off was no longer resistible. There was a month of school yet; an especially bitter thought, for had he not lately been out of school a week with mumps; and during that very week had not the teacher’s father died, so that he was cheated out of the resulting three-days’ vacation, other children being free while he lay on a bed of pain—if you tasted pickles or any sour thing? Not only was it useless to try to learn to write “a good business hand,” like Ralph Overton—he took the phrase to mean one of those pictured hands that were always pointing to things in the

newspaper advertisements—but there was the circus and other evil things—and he was getting on in years.

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It was a Saturday afternoon. To-morrow would be too late. He knew he would not be allowed to start on the Sabbath, even in a career that was to be all wickedness. In the grape-arbour he massed certain articles necessary for the expedition: a very small strip of carpet on which he meant to sleep; a copy of "*Golden Days*," with an article giving elaborate instructions for camping in the wilderness. He was compelled to disregard all of them, but there was comfort and sustenance in the article itself. Then there was the gun that came at Christmas. It shot a cork as far as the string would let it go, with a fairly satisfying report (he would have that string off, once he was in the woods!). Also there were three glass alleys, two agate taws and thirty-eight commies. And to hold his outfit there was a rather sizable box which he with his own hands had papered inside and out from a remnant of gorgeously flowered wall-paper.

When all was ready he went in to break the news to Clytie. She, busy with her baking, heard him declare:

"Now—I'm going to leave this place!" with the look of one who will not be coaxed nor in any manner dissuaded. He thought she took it rather coolly, though Allan ran, as promptly as he could have wished, to tell his grandfather.

"I'm going to be a regular mean one—*worse'n* Budd Jackson!" he continued to Clytie. He was glad to see that this brought her to her senses.

"Will you stay if I give you—an orange?"

"No, *sir;*—you'll never set eyes on *me* again!"

"Oh, now!—two oranges?"

"I can't—I *got* to go!" in a voice tense with effort.

"All right! Then I'll give them to Allan."

She continued to take brown loaves from the oven and to put other loaves in to bake, while he stood awkwardly by, loath to part from her. Allan came back breathless.

"Grandpa says you can go as far as you like and you needn't come back till you get ready!"

He shifted from one foot to the other and absently ate a warm cookie from the jarful at his hand. He thought this seemed not quite the correct attitude to take toward him, yet he did not waver. They would be sorry enough in a few days, when it was too late.

"I guess I better take a few of these along with me," he said, stowing cookies in the pockets of his jacket. He would have liked one of the big preserved peaches all

punctuated with cloves, but he saw no way to carry it, and felt really unable to eat it on the spot.

“Well, good-bye!” he called to Clytie, turning back to her from the door.

“Good-bye! Won’t you shake hands with me?”

Very solemnly he shook her big, floury hand.

“Now—could I take Penny along?” (Penny was an inconsequential dog that had been given to Clytie by one whom she called Cousin Bill J.)

“Yes, you’ll need a dog to keep the animals off. Now be sure you write to us—at least twice a year—don’t forget!” And, brutally before his very eyes, she handed the sniffing and virtuous Allan two of the largest, most goldenly beautiful oranges ever beheld by man.

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Bitterly the self-exiled turned from this harrowing scene and strode toward his box.

Here ensued a fresh complication. Nancy, who had chosen the good name of Lillian May, wanted to go with him. She, too, it appeared, was fresh from a Sunday-school book—one in which a girl of her own age was so proud of her long raven curls that she was brought to an illness and all her hair came out. There was a distressing picture of this little girl after a just Providence had done its work as a depilatory. And after she recovered from the fever, it seemed, she had cared to do nothing but read the Scriptures to bed-ridden old ladies—even after a good deal of her hair came in again—-though it didn't curl this time. The only pleasure she ever experienced thereafter was that, by virtue of her now singularly angelic character, she was enabled to convert an elderly female Papist—an achievement the joys of which were problematic, both to Nancy and the little boy. Certainly, whatever converting a Papist might be, it was nothing comparable to driving a red-and-green-and-gold wagon in which was caged the Scourge of the Jungle.

But Nancy could not go with him. He told her so plainly. It was no place for a girl beyond that hill where they commonly drove caged beasts, and no one ever so much as thought of Coming to the Feet or washing in the blood of the Lamb, or writing a good business hand with the first finger of it pointing out, or anything.

The little girl pleaded, promising to take her new pink silk parasol, her buff buttoned shoes, a Christmas card with real snow on it, shining like diamonds, and Fragile, her best doll. The thing was impossible. Then she wept.

He whistled to Penny, who came barking joyously—a pretender of a dog, if there ever was one—and they moved off. Weeping after them went Nancy—as far as the first fence, between two boards of which she put her head and sobbed with a heavenly bitterness; for to the little boy, pushing sternly on, her tears afforded that certain thrill of gratified brutality under conscious rectitude, the capacity for which is among those matters by which Heaven has set the male of our species apart from the female. The sensation would have been flawless but for Allan's lack of dignity: from the top board of the fence he held aloft in either hand a golden orange, and he chanted in endless inanity:

Chink, Chink Chiraddam!
Don't you wisht you had 'em?
Chink, Chink Chiraddam!
Don't you wisht you had 'em?

Still he was actually and triumphantly off.

And here should be recalled the saying of a certain wise, simple man: “If our failures are made tragic by courage they are not different from successes.” For it came about that the subsequent dignity of this revolt was to be wholly in its courage.

The way led over a stretch of grassy prairie to a fence. This surmounted, there came a ploughed field, of considerable extent to one carrying an inconvenient box. At the farther end of this was another fence, and beyond this an ancient orchard with a grassy floor, where lingered a few old apple-trees, under which the recumbent cows, chewing and placid, dozed like stout old ladies over their knitting.

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Nearest the fence was an aged, gnarled and riven tree, foolishly decked in blossoms, like some faded, wrinkled dame, fatuously reluctant to leave off girlish finery. Under its frivolous branches on the grassy sward would be the place for his first night's halt—for the magic wood just this side of the sun was now seen to be farther off than he had once supposed. So he spread his carpet, arranged the contents of his box neatly, and ate half his food-supply, for one's strength must be kept up in these affairs. As he ate he looked back toward the big house—now left forever—and toward the village beyond. The spires of the three churches were all pointing sternly upward, as if they would mutely direct him aright, but in their shelter one must submit to the prosaic trammels of decency. It was not to be thought of.

He longed for morning to come, so that he might be up and on. He lay down on his mat to be ready for sleep, and watched a big bird far above, cutting lazy graceful figures in the air, like a fancy skater. Then, on a bough above him, a little dusty-looking bird tried to sing, but it sounded only like a very small door creaking on tiny rusted hinges. A fat, gluttonous robin that had been hopping about to peer at him, chirped far more cheerfully as it flew away.

Just at this point he suffered a real adventure. Eight cows sauntered up interestedly and chewed their cuds at him in unison, standing contemplative, calculating, determined. It is a fact in natural history not widely enough recognised that the domestic cow is the most ferocious appearing of all known beasts—a thing to be proved by any who will survey one amid strange surroundings, with a mind cleanly disabused of preconceptions. A visitor from another planet, for example, knowing nothing of our fauna, and confronted in the forest simultaneously by a common red milch cow and the notoriously savage black leopard of the Himalyas, would instinctively shun the cow as a dangerous beast and confidingly seek to fondle the pretty leopard, thus terminating his natural history researches before they were fairly begun.

It can be understood, then, that a moment ensued when the little boy wavered under the steady questioning scrutiny of eight large and powerful cows, all chewing at him in unison. Yet, even so, and knowing, moreover, that strange cows are ever untrustworthy, only for a moment did he waver. Then his new straw hat was off to be shaken at them and he heaved a fierce "*H-a-y—y-u-p!*"

At this they started, rather indignantly, seeming to meditate his swift destruction; but another shout turned and routed them, and he even chased them a little way, helped now by the inconsiderable dog who came up from pretending to hunt gophers.

After this there seemed nothing to do but eat the other half of the provisions and retire again for the night. Long after the sun went down behind the magic wood he lay uneasily on his lumpy bed, trying again and again to shut his eyes and open them to find it morning—which was the way it always happened in the west bedroom of the big house he had left forever.

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But it was different here. And presently, when it seemed nearly dark except for the stars, a disgraceful thing happened. He had pictured the dog as faithful always to him, refusing in the end even to be taken from over his dead body. But the treacherous Penny grew first restive, then plainly desirous of returning to his home. At last, after many efforts to corrupt the adventurer, he started off briskly alone—cornerwise, as little dogs seem always to run—fleeing shamelessly toward that east where shone the tame lights of Virtue.

Left alone, the little boy began strangely to remember certain phrases from a tract that Clytie had tried to teach him—“the moment that will close thy life on earth and begin thy song in heaven or thy wail in hell”—“impossible to go from the haunts of sin and vice to the presence of the Lamb”—“the torments of an eternal hell are awaiting thee”—

“To-night may be thy latest breath,
Thy little moment here be done.
Eternal woe, the second death,
Awaits the Christ-rejecting one.”

This was more than he had ever before been able to recall of such matters. He wished that he might have forgotten them wholly. Yet so was he turned again to better things. Gradually he began to have an inkling of a possibility that made his blood icy—a possibility that not even the spectacle of Milo Barrus having interesting things done to him could mitigate—namely, a vision of himself in the same plight with that person.

Now it was that he began to hear Them all about him. They walked stealthily near, passed him with sinister rustlings, and whispered over him. If They had only talked out—but they whispered—even laughing, crying and singing in whispers. This horror, of course, was not long to be endured. Yet, even so, with increasing myriads of Them all about, rustling and whispering their awful laughs and cries—it was no ignominious rout. With considerable deliberation he folded the carpet, placed it in the box with his other treasure, and started at a pace which may, perhaps, have quickened a little, yet was never undignified—never more than a moderately fast trudge.

He wondered sadly if Clytie would get up to unlock the door for him so late at night. As for Penny, things could never be the same between them again.

He was astounded to see lights burning and the house open—how weird for them to have supper at such an hour! He concealed his box in the grape-arbour and slunk through the kitchen into the dining-room. Probably they had gotten up in the middle of the night, out of tardy alarm for him. It served them right. Yet they seemed hardly to notice him when he slid awkwardly into his chair. He looked calculatingly over the table and asked, in tones that somehow seemed to tell of injury, of personal affront:

“What you having supper for at this time of night?”

His grandfather regarded him now not unkindly, while Clytie seemed confused.

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“It’s more’n long past midnight!” he insisted.

“Huh! it ain’t only a quarter past seven,” put in his superior brother. He seemed about to say more, but a glance from the grandfather silenced him.

So *that* was as late as he had stayed—a quarter after seven? He was ready now to rage at any taunt, and began to eat in haughty silence. He was still eating when his grandfather and Allan left the table, and then he began to feel a little grateful that they had not noticed or asked annoying questions, or tried to be funny or anything. Over a final dish of plum preserves and an imposing segment of marble cake he relented so far as to tell Clytie something of his adventures—especially since she had said that the big hall-clock was very likely slow—that it must surely be a lot later than a quarter past seven. The circumstances had combined to produce a narrative not entirely perspicuous—the two clear points being that They do everything in a whisper, and that Clytie ought to get rid of Penny at once, since he could not be depended upon at great moments.

As to ever sleeping under a tree, Clytie discouraged him. She knew of some Boys that once sat under a tree which was struck by lightning, all being Killed save one, who had the rare good luck to be the son of a Presbyterian clergyman. The little boy resolved next time to go beyond the trees to sleep; perhaps if he went far enough he would come to the other one of the Feet, and so have a safeguard against lightning, foreign cows, and Those that walk with rustlings and whisper in the lonely places at night.

The little boy fell asleep, half-persuaded again to virtue, because of its superior comforts. The air about his head seemed full of ghostly “good business hands,” each with its accusing forefinger pointed at him for that he had not learned to write one as Ralph Overton did.

Down the hall in his study the old man was musing backward to the delicate, quiet girl with the old-fashioned aureole of curls, who would now and then toss them with a little gesture eloquent of possibilities for unrestraint when she felt the close-drawn rein of his authority. Again he felt her rebellious little tugs, and the wrench of her final defiance when she did the awful thing. He had been told by a plain speaker that her revolt was the fault of his severity. And here was the flesh of her flesh—was it in the same spirit of revolt against authority, a thousandfold magnified? Might he not by according the boy a wise liberty save him in after years from some mad folly akin to his mother’s?

CHAPTER VI

THE GARDEN OF TRUTH AND THE PERFECT FATHER

It was a different summer from those that had gone before it.

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A little passionate Protestant had sallied out to make bed with the gods; and the souls of such the just gods do truly take into certain shining realms whither poor involatile bodies of flesh may not follow. The requirement is that one feel his own potential godship enough to rebel. For, having rebelled, he will assuredly venture beyond mortal domains into that garden where stands the tree of Truth—this garden being that one to the west just beyond the second fence (or whichever fence); that point where the mortal of invertebrate soul is beset with the feeling that he has already dared too far—that he had better make for home mighty quick if he doesn't want Something to get him. The essence of this decision is quite the same whether the mortal be eight years old or eighty. Now the Tree of Truth stands just over this line at which all but the gods' own turn to scamper back before supper. It is the first tree to the left—an apple-tree, twisted, blackened, scathed, eaten with age, yet full of blossoms as fresh and fertile as those first born of any young tree whatsoever. Those able rightly to read this tree of Truth become at once as the gods, keeping the faith of children while absorbing the wisdom of the ages—lacking either of which, be it known, one may not become an imperishable ornament of Time.

But to him who is bravely faithful to the passing of that last fence, who reclines under that tree even for so long as one aspiration, comes a substantial gain: ever after, when he goes into any solitude, he becomes more than himself. Then he reads the first lesson of the tree of Truth, which is that the spirit of Life ages yet is ageless; and suffers yet is joyous. This is no inconsiderable reward for passing that frontier, even if one must live longer to comprehend reasons. It is worth while even if the mortal become a mere dilettante in paradoxes and never learn even feebly to spell the third lesson, which is the ultimate wisdom of the gods.

These matters being precisely so, the little boy knew quite as well as the gods could know it, that a credit had been set down to his soul for what he had ventured—even though what he had not done was, so far, more stupendous than what he had, in the world of things and mere people. He now became enamoured of life rather than death; and he studied the Shorter Catechism with such effect that he could say it clear over to "*Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse both in this life and that which is to come.*" Each night he tried earnestly to learn two new answers; and glad was he when his grandfather would sit by him, for the old man had now become his image of God, and it seemed fitting to recite to him. Often as they sat together the little boy would absently slip his hand into the big, warm, bony hand of the old man, turning and twisting it there until he felt an answering pressure. This embarrassed the old man. Though he would really have liked to take the little boy up to his breast and hold him there, he knew not how; and he would even be careful not to restrain the little hand in his own—to hold it, yet to leave it free to withdraw at its first uneasy wriggle.

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Of this shackled spirit of kindness, always striving within the old man, the little boy had come to be entirely conscious. So real was it to him, so dependable, that he never suspected that a certain little blow with the open hand one day was meant to punish him for conduct he had persisted in after three emphatic admonitions.

“Oh! that *hurts*!” he had cried, looking up at the confused old man with unimpaired faith in his having meant not more than a piece of friendly roughness. This look of flawless confidence in the uprightness of his purpose, the fine determination to save him chagrin by smiling even though the hurt place tingled, left in the old man’s mind a biting conviction that he had been actually on the point of behaving as one gentleman may not behave to another. Quick was he to make the encounter accord with the child’s happy view, even picking him up and forcing from himself the gaiety to rally him upon his babyish tenderness to rough play. Not less did he hold it true that “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame—” and with the older boy he was not unconscientious in this matter. For Allan took punishment as any boy would, and, indeed, was so careful that he seldom deserved it. But the old man never ceased to be grateful that the littler boy had laughed under that one blow, unable to suspect that it could have been meant in earnest.

From the first day that the little boy felt the tender cool grass under his bare toes that summer, life became like perfectly played music. This was after the long vacation began, when there was no longer any need to remember to let his voice fall after a period, or to dread his lessons so that he must learn them more quickly than any other pupil in school. There would be no more of that wretched fooling until fall, a point of time inconceivably far away. Before it arrived any one of a number of strange things might happen to avert the calamity of education. For instance, he might be born again, a thing of which he had lately heard talk; a contingency by no means flawless in prospect, since it probably meant having the mumps again, and things like that. But if it came on the very last day of vacation, or on the first morning of school, just as he was called on to recite, snatching him from the very jaws of the Moloch, and if it fixed him so he need not be afraid in the night of going where Milo Barrus was going, then it might not be so bad.

Nancy, who had now discarded the good name of Lillian May for simple Alice, disapproved heartily of being born again; unless, indeed, one could be born a boy the second time. She was only too eager for the day when she need not submit to having her hair brushed and combed so long every morning of her life. Not for the world would she go through it again and have to begin French all over, even at “*J’ai, tu as, il a*.” Yet, if it were certain she could be a boy—

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He was too considerate to tell her that this was as good as impossible—that she quite lacked the qualities necessary for that. Instead, he reassured her with the chivalrous fiction that he, at least, would like her as well as if she *were* a boy. And, indeed, as a girl, she was not wholly unsatisfactory. True, she played "school" (of all things!) in preference to "wild animals," practised scales on the piano an hour every day, wore a sun-hat frequently—spite of which she was freckled—wore shoes and stockings on the hottest days, when one's feet are so hungry for the cool, springy turf, and performed other acts repugnant to a soul that has brought itself erect. But she was fresh and dainty to look at, like an opened morning glory, with pretty frocks that the French lady whose name was Madmasel made her wear every day, and her eyes were much like certain flowers in the bed under the bay-window, with very long, black lashes that got all stuck together when she cried; and she made superb capital letters, far better than the little boy's, though she was a year younger.

Also, which was perhaps her chief charm, she could be made to believe that only he could protect her from the Gratcher, a monstrous thing, half beast, half human, which was often seen back of the house; sometimes flitting through the grape-arbour, sometimes coming out of the dark cellar, sometimes peering around corners. It was a thing that went on enormous crutches, yet could always catch you if it saw you by daylight out of its right eye, its left being serviceable only at night, when, if you were wise, you kept in the house. Once the Gratcher saw you with its right eye the crutches swung toward you and you were caught: it picked you up and began to look you all over, with the eyes in the ends of its fingers. This tickled you so that you went crazy in a minute.

Nancy feared the Gratcher, and she became supremely lovely to the little boy when she permitted him to guard her from it, instead of running home across the lawn when it was surely coming;—a loveliness he felt more poignantly at certain reflective times when he was not also afraid. For, the Gratcher being his own invention, these moments of superiority to its terrors would inevitably seize him.

[Illustration: "She could be made to believe that only he could protect her from the Gratcher."]

Better than protecting Nancy did he love to report the Gratcher's immediate presence to Allan, daring him to stay on that spot until it put its dreadful head around the corner and shook one of its crutches at them. In low throbbing tones he would report its fearful approach, stride by stride, on the crutches. This he could do by means of the Gratcher-eye, with which he claimed to be endowed. One having a Gratcher-eye can see around any corner when a Gratcher happens to be coming—yet only then, not at any other time, as Allan had proved by experiment on the first disclosure of this phenomenon. He of the

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Gratcher-eye could positively not see around a corner, if, for example, Allan himself was there; the Gratcher-eye could not tell if his hat was on his head or off. But this by no means proved that the Gratcher-eye did not exercise its magic function when a Gratcher actually approached, and Allan knew it. He would stand staunchly, with a fine incredulity, while the little boy called off the strides, perhaps, until he announced "*Now* he's just passed the well-curb—*now* he's—" but here, scoffing over an anxious shoulder, Allan would go in where Clytie was baking, feigning a sudden great hunger.

Nancy would stay, because she believed the little boy's protestations that he could save her, and the little boy himself often believed them.

"I love Allan best, because he is so comfortable, but I think you are the most admirable," she would say to him at such times; and he thought well of her if she had seemed very, very frightened.

So life had become a hardy sport with him. No longer was he moved to wish for early dissolution when Clytie's song floated to him:

"'I should like to die,' said Willie,
If my papa could die, too;
But he says he isn't ready,
'Cause he has so much to do!"

This Willie had once seemed sweet and noble to him, but the words now made him avid of new life by reminding him that his own dear father would soon come to be with him one week, as he had promised when last they parted, and as a letter written with magnificent flourishes now announced.

Late in August this perfect father came—a fine laughing, rollicking, big gentleman, with a great, loud voice, and beautiful long curls that touched his velvet coat-collar. His sweeping golden moustache, wide-brimmed white hat, the choice rings on his fingers, his magnificently ponderous gold watch-chain and a watch of the finest silver, all proclaimed him a being of such flawless elegance both in person and attire that the little boy never grew tired of showing him to the village people and to Clytie. He did not stay at the big house, for some reason, but at the Eagle Hotel, whence he came to see his boys each day, or met them hurrying to see him. And for a further reason which the little boys did not understand, their grandfather continued to be too busy to see this perfect father once during the week he stayed in the village.

Deeming it a pity that two such choice spirits should not be brought together, the little boy urged his father to bring his fiddle to the big house and play and sing some of his fine songs, so that his grandfather could have a chance to hear some good music. He

knew well enough that if the old man once heard this music he would have to give in and enjoy it, even if he was too busy to come down. And if only his father would tune up the fiddle and sing that very, very good song about,

"The more she said 'Whoa!'
They cried, 'Let her go!'
And the swing went a little bit higher,"

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if only his grandfather could hear this, one of the funniest and noisiest songs in the world, perhaps he would come right down stairs. But his father laughed away the suggestion, saying that the old gentleman had no ear for music; which, of course, was a joke, for he had two, like any person.

Clytemnestra, too, was at first strangely cool to the incomparable father, though at last she proved not wholly insensible to his charm, providing for his refection her very choicest cake and the last tumbler of crab-apple jelly. She began to suspect that a man of manners so engaging must have good in him, and she gave him at parting the tracts of “The Dying Drummer Boy” and “Sinner, what if You Die To-day?” for which he professed warm gratitude.

The little boy afterward saw his perfect father hand these very tracts to Milo Barrus, when they met him on the street, saying, “Here, Barrus, get your soul saved while you wait!” Then they laughed together.

The little boy wondered if this meant that Milo Barrus had come to the Feet, or been born again, or something. Or if it meant that his father also spelled God with a little g. He did not think of it, however, until it was too late to ask.

The flawless father went away at the end of the week, “over the County Fair circuit, selling Chief White Cloud’s Great Indian Remedy,” the little boy heard him tell Clytie. Also he heard his grandfather say to Clytie, “Thank God, not for another year!”

The little boy liked Nancy better than ever after that, because she had liked his father so much, saying he was exactly like a prince, giving pennies and nickels to everybody and being so handsome and big and grand. She wished her own Uncle Doctor could be as beautiful and great; and the little boy was generous enough to wish that his own plain grandfather might be *almost* as fine.

CHAPTER VII

THE SUPERLATIVE COUSIN BILL J.

A splendid new interest had now come into the household in the person of one whom Clytemnestra had so often named as Cousin Bill J. Grandfather Delcher having been ordered south for the winter by Dr. Crealock, Cousin Bill J., upon Clytie’s recommendation, was imported from up Fredonia way to look after the cow and be a man about the place. Clytie assured Grandfather Delcher that Cousin Bill J. had “never uttered an oath, though he’s been around horses all his life!” This made him at once an object of interest to the little boy, though doubtless he failed to appraise the restraint at anything like its true value. It had sufficed Grandfather Delcher, however, and Cousin

Bill J., securing leave of absence from the livery-stable in Fredonia, arrived the day the old man left, making a double excitement for the household.

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He proved to be a fascinating person; handsome, affable, a ready talker upon all matters of interest—though sarcastic, withal—and fond of boys. True, he had not long hair like the little boy's father. Indeed, he had not much hair at all, except a sort of curtain of black curls extending from ear to ear at the back of his bare, pink head. But the little boy had to admit that Cousin Bill J.'s moustache was even grander than his father's. It fell in two graceful festoons far below his chin, with a little eyelet curled into each tip, and, like the ringlets, it showed the blue-black lustre of the crow's wing. In the full sunlight, at times, it became almost a royal purple.

Later observation taught the little boy that this splendid hue was applied at intervals by Cousin Bill J. himself. He did it daintily with a small brush, every time the moustache began to show a bit rusty at the roots; Bernal never failed to be present at this ceremony; nor to resolve that his own moustache, when it came, should be as scrupulously cared for—not left, like Dr. Crealock's, for example, to become speckled and gray.

Cousin Bill J.'s garments were as splendid as his character. He had an overcoat and cap made from a buffalo hide; his high-heeled boots had maroon tops set with purple crescents; his watch-charm was a large gold horse in full gallop; his cravat was an extensive area of scarlet satin in the midst of which was caught a precious stone as large as a robin's egg; and in smoking, which his physician had prescribed, he used a superb meerschaum cigar-holder, all tinted a golden brown, upon which lightly perched a carven angel dressed like those that ride the big white horse in the circus.

But aside from these mere matters of form, Cousin Bill J. was a man with a history. Some years before he had sprained his back, since which time he had been unable to perform hard labour; but prior to that mishap he had been a perfect specimen of physical manhood—one whose prowess had been the marvel of an extensive territory. He had split and laid up his three hundred and fifty rails many a day, when strong men beside him had blushingly to stop with three hundred or thereabouts; he had also cradled his four acres of grain in a day, and he could break the wildest horse ever known. Even the great Budd Doble, whom he personally knew, had said more than once, and in the presence of unimpeachable witnesses, that in some ways he, Budd Doble, knew less about a horse than Cousin Bill J. did. The little boy was wrought to enthusiasm by this tribute, resolving always to remember to say "hoss" for horse; and, though he had not heard of Budd Doble before, the name was magnetic for him. After you said it over several times he thought it made you feel as if you had a cold in your head.

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Still further, Cousin Bill J. could throw his thumbs out of joint, sing tenor in the choir, charm away warts, recite “Roger and I” and “The Death of Little Nell,” and he knew all the things that would make boys grow fast, like bringing in wood, splitting kindling, putting down hay for the cow, and other out-of-door exercises that had made him the demon of strength he once was. The little boy was not only glad to perform these acts for his own sake, but for the sake of lightening the labours of his hero, who wrenched his back anew nearly every time he tried to do anything, and was always having to take a medicine for it which he called “peach-and-honey.” The little boy thought the name attractive, though his heart bled for the sufferer each time he was obliged to take it; for after every swallow of the stuff he made a face that told eloquently how nauseous it must be.

As for the satire and wit of Cousin Bill J., they were of the dry sort. He would say to one he met on the street when the mud was deep, “Fine weather overhead”—then adding dryly, after a significant pause—“*but few going that way!"* Or he would exclaim with feigned admiration, when the little boy shot at a bird with his bow and arrow, “My! you made the feathers fly *that* time!”—then, after his terrible pause—*"only, the bird flew with them*.” Also he could call it “Fourth of Ju-New-Years” without ever cracking a smile, though it cramped the little boy in helpless laughter.

Altogether, Cousin Bill J. was a winning and lovely character of merits both spiritual and spectacular, and he brought to the big house an exotic atmosphere that was spicy with delights. The little boy prayed that this hero might be made again the man he once was; not because of any flaw that he could see in him—but only because the sufferer appeared somewhat less than perfect to himself. To Bernal’s mind, indeed, nothing could have been superior to the noble melancholy with which Cousin Bill J. looked back upon his splendid past. There was a perfect dignity in it. Surely no mere electric belt could bring to him an attraction surpassing this—though Cousin Bill J. insisted that he never expected any real improvement until he could save up enough money to buy one. He showed the little boy a picture cut from a newspaper—the picture of a strong, proud-looking man with plenteous black whiskers, girded about with a wide belt that was projecting a great volume of electricity into the air in every direction. It was interesting enough, but the little boy thought this person by no means so beautiful as Cousin Bill J., and said so. He believed, too, though this he did not say, from tactful motives, that it would detract from the dignity of Cousin Bill J. to go about clad only in an electric belt, like the proud-looking gentleman in the picture—even if the belt did send out a lot of electric wiggles all the time. But, of course, Cousin Bill J. knew best. He looked forward to having his father meet this new hero—feeling that each was perfect in his own way.

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CHAPTER VIII

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Around the evening lamp that winter the little boys studied Holy Writ, while Allan made summaries of it for the edification of the proud grandfather in far-off Florida.

Tersely was the creation and the fall of man set forth, under promptings and suggestions from Clytie and Cousin Bill J., who was no mean Bible authority: how God, "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," found his first pair ashamed of their nakedness, and with his own hands made them coats of skins and clothed them. "What a treasure those garments would be in this evil day," said Clytie—"what a silencing rebuke to all heretics!" But the Lord drove out the wicked pair, lest they "take also of the tree of life and live forever," saying, "Behold, the man is become as one of *us!*" This provoked a lengthy discussion the very first evening as to whether it meant that there was more than one God. And Clytie's view—that God called himself "Us" in the same sense that kings and editors of newspapers do—at length prevailed over the polytheistic hypothesis of Cousin Bill J.

On they read to the Deluge, when man became so very bad indeed that God was sorry for ever having made him, and said: "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and the beast and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them."

Hereupon Bernal suggested that all the white rabbits at least should have been saved—thinking of his own two in the warm nest in the barn. He was unable to see how white rabbits with twitching pink noses and pink rims around their eyes could be an offense, or, indeed, other than a pure joy even to one so good as God. But he gave in, with new admiration for the ready mind of Cousin Bill J., who pointed out that white rabbits could not have been saved because they were not fish. He even relished the dry quip that maybe he, the little boy, thought white rabbits *were* fish; but Cousin Bill J. didn't, for his part.

Past the Tower of Babel they went, when the Lord "came down to see the city and the tower," and made them suddenly talk strange tongues to one another so they could not build their tower actually into Heaven.

The little boy thought this a fine joke to play on them, to set them all "jabbering" so.

After that there was a great deal of fighting, and, in the language of Allan's summary, "God loved all the good people so he gave them lots of wives and cattle and sheep and he let them go out and kill all the other people they wanted to which was their enemies." But the little boy found the butcheries rather monotonous.

Occasionally there was something graphic enough to excite, as where the heads of Ahab's seventy children were put into a basket and exposed in two heaps at the city's gate; but for the most part it made him sleepy.

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True, when it came to getting the Children of Israel out of Egypt, as Cousin Bill J. observed, “Things brisked up considerable.”

The plan of first hardening Pharaoh’s heart, then scaring him by a pestilence, then again hardening his heart for another calamity, quite won the little boy’s admiration for its ingenuity, and even Cousin Bill J. would at times betray that he was impressed. Feverishly they followed the miracles done to Egypt; the plague of frogs, of lice, of flies, of boils and blains on man and beast; the plague of hail and lightning, of locusts, and the three days of darkness. Then came the Lord’s final triumph, which was to kill all the first-born in the land of Egypt, “from the first-born of Pharaoh, that sitteth upon the throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts.” Again the little boy’s heart ached as he thought pityingly of the first-born of all white rabbits, but there was too much of excitement to dwell long upon that humble tragedy. There was the manner in which the Israelites identified themselves, by marking their doors with a sprig of hyssop dipped in the blood of a male lamb without blemish. Vividly did he see the good God gliding cautiously from door to door, looking for the mark of blood, and passing the lucky doors where it was seen to be truly of a male lamb without blemish. He thought it must have taken a lot of lambs to mark up all the doors!

Then came that master-stroke of enterprise, when God directed Moses to “speak now in the ears of the people and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold,” so that they might “spoil” the Egyptians. Cousin Bill J. chuckled when he read this, declaring it to be “a regular Jew trick”; but Clytie rebuked him quickly, reminding him that they were God’s own words, spoken in His own holy voice.

“Well, it was mighty thoughtful in God,” insisted Cousin Bill J., but Clytie said, however that was, it served Pharaoh right for getting his heart hardened so often.

The little boy, not perceiving the exact significance of “spoil” in this connection, wondered if Cousin Bill J. would spoil if some one borrowed his gold horse and ran off with it.

Then came that exciting day when the Lord said, “I will get me honour upon Pharaoh and all his host,” which He did by drowning them thoroughly in the Red Sea. The little boy thought he would have liked to be there in a boat—a good safe boat that would not tip over; also that he would much like to have a rod such as Aaron had, that would turn into a serpent. It would be a fine thing to take to school some morning. But Cousin Bill J. thought it doubtful if one could be procured; though he had seen Heller pour five colours of wine out of a bottle which, when broken, proved to have a live guinea-pig in it. This seemed to the little boy more wonderful than Aaron’s rod, though he felt it would not reflect honour upon God to say so.

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Another evening they spent before Sinai, Cousin Bill J. reading the verses in a severe and loud tone when the voice of the Lord was sounding. Duly impressed was the little boy with the terrors of the divine presence, a thing so awful that the people must not go up into the mount nor even touch its border—lest "the Lord break forth upon them: There shall not a hand touch it but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether it be beast or man it shall not live." Clytie said the goodness of God was shown herein. An evil God would not have warned them, and many worthy but ignorant people would have been blasted.

Then He came down in thunder and smoke and lightning and earthquakes—which Cousin Bill J. read in tones that enabled Bernal to feel every possible joy of terror; came to tell them that He was a very jealous God and that they must not worship any of the other gods. He commanded that "thou shalt not revile the Gods," also that they should "make no mention of the names of other Gods," which Cousin Bill J. said was as fair as you could ask.

When they reached the directions for sacrificing, the little boy was doubly alert—in the event that he should ever determine to be washed in the blood of the lamb and have to do his own killing.

"Then," read Cousin Bill J., in a voice meant to convey the augustness of Deity, "thou shalt kill the ram and take of his blood and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot." So you didn't have to wash all over in the blood. He agreed with Clytie, who remarked that no one could ever have found out how to do it right unless God had told. The God-given directions that ensued for making the water of separation from "the ashes of a red heifer" he did not find edifying; but some verses after that seemed more practicable. "And thou shalt take of the ram," continued the reader in majestic cadence, "the fat and the rump and the fat that covereth the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is upon them—"

Here was detail with a satisfying minuteness; and all this was for "a wave-offering" to be waved before the Lord—which was indeed an interesting thought.

"If God was so careful of His children in these small matters," said Clytie; "no wonder they believed He would care for them in graver matters, and no wonder they looked forward so eagerly to the coming of His Son, whom He promised should be sent to save them from His wrath."

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Through God's succeeding minute directions for the building and upholstery of His tabernacle, "with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet, with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them," the interest of the little boys rather languished; likewise through His regulations about such dry matters as slavery, divorce, and polygamy. His directions for killing witches and for stoning the ox that gores a man or woman had more of colour in them. But there was no real interest until the good God promised His children to bring them in unto the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, to "cut them off." It was not uninteresting to know that God put Moses in a cleft of the rock and covered it with His hand when He passed by, thus permitting Moses a partial view of the divine person. But the actual fighting of battles was thereafter the chief source of interest. For God was a mighty God of battles, never weary of the glories of slaughter. When it was plain that He could make a handful of two thousand Israelites slay two hundred thousand Midianites, in a moment, as one might say, the wisdom of coming to the Feet, being born again, and washing in the blood ceased to be debatable. It would seem very silly, indeed, to neglect any precaution that would insure the favour of this God, who slew cities full of men and women and little children off-hand. The little boy thought Milo Barrus would begin to spell a certain word with the very biggest "G" he could make, if any one were to bring these matters to his notice.

As to Allan, who made abstracts of the winter's study, Clytemnestra and her transcendent relative agreed that he would one day be a power in the land. Off to Florida each week they sent his writing to Grandfather Delcher, who was proud of it, in spite of his heart going out chiefly to the littler boy.

"So this is all I know now about God," ran the conclusion, "except that He loved us so that He gave His only Son to be crucified so that He could forgive our sins as soon as He saw His Son nailed up on the cross, and those that believed it could be with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and those that didn't believe it, like the Jews and heathens, would have to be in hell for ever and ever Amen. This proves His great love for us and that He is the true God. So this is all I have learned this winter about God, who is a spirit infinite eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom and power holiness justice goodness and truth, and the word of God is contained in the scriptures of the old and new testament which is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. In my next I will take up the meek and lowly Jesus and show you how much I have learned about him."

They had been unable to persuade the littler boy into this species of composition, his mind dwelling too much on the first-born of white rabbits and such, but to show that his winter was not wholly lost, he submitted a secular composition, which ran:

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“BIRDS

“The Animl kindom is devided into birds and reguler animls. Our teacher says we had ougt to obsurv so I obsurv there is three kinds of birds Jingle birds Squeek birds and Clatter birds. Jingle birds has fat rusty stumacks. I have not the trouble to obsurv any more kinds.”

CHAPTER IX

ON SURVIVING THE IDOLS WE BUILD

It is the way of life to be forever building new idols in place of the old. Into the fabric of these the most of us put so much of ourselves that a little of us dies each time a cherished image crumbles from age or is shattered by some lightning-stroke of truth from a cloud electric with doubt. This is why we fade and wither as the leaf. Could we but sweep aside the wreck without dismay and raise a new idol from the overflowing certainty of youth, then indeed should we have eaten from that other tree in Eden, for the defence of which is set the angel with the flaming sword. But this may not be. Fatuously we stake our souls on each new creation—deeming that *here*, in sooth, is one that shall endure beyond the end of time. To the last we are dull to the truth that our idols are meant to be broken, to give way to other idols still to be broken.

And so we lose a little of ourselves each time an idol falls; and, learning thus to doubt, wistfully, stoically we learn to die, leaving some last idol triumphantly surviving us. For—and this is the third lesson from that tree of Truth—we learn to doubt, not the perfection of our idols, but the divinity of their creator. And it would seem that this is quite as it should be. So long as the idol-maker will be a slave to his creatures, so long should the idol survive and the maker go back to useful dust. Whereas, did he doubt his idols and never himself—but this is mostly a secret, for not many common idolmongers will cross that last fence to the west, beyond the second field, where the cattle are strange and the hour so late that one must turn back for bed and supper.

To one who accepts the simple truth thus put down precisely, it will be apparent that the little boy was destined to see more than one idol blasted before his eyes; yet, also, that he was not come to the foolish caution of the wise, whom failure leads to doubt their own powers—as if we were not meant to fail in our idols forever! Being, then, not come to this spiritual decrepitude, fitted still to exercise a blessed contempt for the Wisdom of the Ages, it is plain that he could as yet see an idol go to bits without dismay, conscious only of the need for a new and a better one.

Not all one’s idols are shattered in a day. This were a catastrophe that might wrench even youth’s divine credulity.

Not until another year had gone, with its heavy-gaited school-months and its galloping vacation-days, did the little boy come to understand that Santa Claus was not a real presence. And instead of wailing over the ruins of this idol, he brought a sturdy faith to bear, building in its place something unseen and unheard of any save himself—an idol discernible only by him, but none the less real for that.

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The Imp with the hammer being no respecter of dignities, the idol of the Front Room fell next, increasing the heap of ruins that was gathering about his feet. Tragically came a day one spring, a cold, cloudy, rational day, it seemed, when the Front Room went down; for the little boy saw all its sanctities violated, its mysteries laid bare. And the Front Room became a mere front room. Its shutters were opened and its windows raised to let in light and common fresh air; its carpet was on the line outside to be scourged of dust; the black, formidable furniture was out on the wide porch to be re-varnished, like any common furniture, plainly needing it; the vases of dyed grass might be handled without risk; and the dark spirit that had seemed to be in and over all was vanished. Even the majestic Ark of the Covenant, which the sinful Uzza once died for so much as touching reverently, was now seen to be an ordinary stove for the burning of anthracite coal, to be rattled profanely and polished for an extra quarter by Sherman Tranquillity Tyler after he had finished whitewashing the cellar. Fearlessly the little boy, grown somewhat bigger now, walked among the debris of this idol, stamping the floor, sounding the walls, detecting cracks in the ceiling, spots on the wall-paper and cobwebs in the corners. Yet serene amid the ruins towered his valiant spirit, conscious under the catastrophe of its power to build other and yet stauncher idols.

Thus was it one day to stretch itself with new power amid the base ruins of Cousin Bill J., though the time was mercifully deferred—that his soul might gain strength in worship to put away even that which it worshipped when the day of new truth dawned.

When Cousin Bill J., in the waning of that first winter, began actually to refine his own superlative elegance by spraying his superior garments with perfume, by munching tiny confections reputed to scent the breath desirably, by a more diligent grooming of the always superb moustache, the little boy suspected no motive. He saw these works only as the outward signs of an inward grace that must be ever increasing. So it came that his amazement was above that of all other persons when, at Spring's first breath of honeyed fragrance, Cousin Bill J. went to be the husband of Miss Alvira Abney. He had not failed to observe that Miss Alvira sang alto, in the choir, out of the same book from which Cousin Bill J. produced his exquisite tenor. But he had reasoned nothing from this, beyond, perhaps, the thought that Miss Alvira made a poor figure beside her magnificent companion, even if her bonnet was always the gayest bonnet in church, trembling through every season with the blossoms of some ageless springtime. For the rest, Miss Alvira's face and hair and eyes seemed to be all one colour, very pale, and her hands were long and thin, with far too many bones in them for human hands, the little boy thought.

Yet when he learned that the woman was not without merit in the sight of his clear-eyed hero, he, too, gave her his favour. At the marriage he felt in his heart a certain high, pure joy that must have been akin to that in the bride's own heart, for their faces seemed to speak much alike.

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Tensely the little boy listened to the words that united these two, understanding perfectly from questions that his hero endowed the woman at his side with all his worldly goods. Even a less practicable person than Miss Alvira would have acquired distinction in this light—being endowed with the gold horse, to say nothing of the carven cigar-holder or the precious jewel in the scarlet cravat. Probably now she would be able to throw her thumbs out of joint, too!

But to the little boy chiefly the thing meant that Cousin Bill J. would stay close at hand, to be a joy forever in his sight and lend importance to the town of Edom. For his hero was to go and live in the neat rooms of Miss Alvira over her millinery and dressmaking shop, and never return to the scenes of his early prowess.

After the wedding the little boy, on his way to school of a morning, would watch for Cousin Bill J. to wheel out on the sidewalk the high glass case in which Miss Alvira had arranged her pretty display of flowered bonnets. And slowly it came to life in his understanding that between the not irksome task of wheeling out this case in the morning and wheeling it back at night, Cousin Bill J. now enjoyed the liberty that a man of his parts deserved. He was free at last to sit about in the stores of the village, or to enthrone himself publicly before them in clement weather, at which time his opinion upon a horse, or any other matter whatsoever, could be had for the asking. Nor would he be invincibly reticent upon the subject of those early exploits which had once set all of Chautauqua County marvelling at his strength.

At first the little boy was stung with jealousy at this. Later he came to rejoice in the very circumstance that had brought him pain. If his hero could not be all his, at least the world would have to blink even as he had blinked, in the dazzling light of his excellences—yes, and smart under the lash of his unequalled sarcasm.

It should, perhaps, be said that dissolution by slow poison is not infrequently the fate of an idol.

Doubtless there was never a certain day of which the little boy could have said “that was the first time Cousin Bill J. began to seem different.” Yet there came a moment when all was changed—a time of question, doubt, conviction; a terrible hour, in short, when, face to face with his hero, he suffered the deep hurt of knowing that mentally, morally, and even esthetically, he himself was the superior of Cousin Bill J.

He could remember that first he had heard a caller say to Clytie of Miss Alvira, “Why, they do say the poor thing has to go down those back stairs and actually split her own kindlings—with that healthy loafer setting around in the good clothes she buys him, in the back room of that drug-store from morning till night. And what’s worse, he’s been seen with that eldest—”

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Here the caller's eyes had briefly shifted sidewise at the small listener, whereupon Clytie had urged him to run along and play like a good boy. He pondered at length that which he had overheard and then he went to Miss Alvira's wood-pile at the foot of her back stairs, reached by turning up the alley from Main Street. He split a large pile of kindling for her. He would have been glad to do this each day, had not Miss Alvira proved to be lacking in delicacy. Instead of ignoring him, when she saw him from her back window, where she was second-fitting Samantha Rexford's pink waist, she came out with her mouth full of pins and gave him five cents and tried to kiss him. Of course, he never went back again. If *that* was the kind she was she could go on doing the work herself. He was no Ralph Overton or Ben Holt, to be shamed that way and made to feel that he had been Doing Good, and be spoken of all the time as "our Hero."

As for Cousin Bill J., of *course* he was a loafer! Who wouldn't be if he had the chance? But it was false and cruel to say that he was a healthy loafer. When Cousin Bill J. was healthy he had been able to fell an ox with one blow of his fist.

Nor was he disturbed seriously by rumours that his hero was a "come-outer"; that instead of attending church with Miss Alvira he could be heard at the barbershop of a Sabbath morning, agreeing with Milo Barrus that God might have made the world in six days and rested on the seventh; but he couldn't have made the whale swallow Jonah, because it was against reason and nature; and, if you found one part of the Bible wasn't so, how could you tell the rest of it wasn't a lot of grandmother's tales?

Nor did he feel anything but sympathy for a helpless man imposed upon when he heard Mrs. Squire Cumpston say to Clytie, "Do you know that lazy brute has her worked to a mere shadow; she just sits in that shop all day long and lets tears fall every minute or so on her work. She spoiled five-eighths of a yard of three-inch lavender satin ribbon that way, that was going on to Mrs. Beasley's second-mourning bonnet. And she's had to cut him down to twenty-five cents a day for spending-money, and order the stores not to trust him one cent on her account."

He was sorry to have Miss Alvira crying so much. It must be a sloppy business, making her hats and things. But what did the woman *expect* of a man like Cousin Bill J., anyway?

Yet somehow it came after a few years the new light upon his old idol. One day he found that he neither resented nor questioned a thing he heard Clytie herself say about Cousin Bill J.: "Why, he don't know as much as a goat." Here she reconsidered, with an air of wanting to be entirely fair:—"Well, not as much as a goat really *ought* to know!" And when he overheard old Squire Cumpston saying on the street, a few days later, "Of all God's mean creatures, the meanest is a male human that can keep his health on the money a woman earns!" it was no shock, though he knew that Cousin Bill J. was meant.

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Departed then was the glory of his hero, his splendid dimensions shrunk, his effective lustre dulled, his perfect moustache rusted and scraggly, his chin weakened, his pale blue eyes seen to be in force like those of a china doll.

He heard with interest that Squire Cumpston had urged Miss Alvira to divorce her husband, that she had refused, declaring God had joined her to Cousin Bill J. and that no man might put them asunder; that marriage had been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament and was now indissoluble—an emblem, indeed, of Christ's union with His Church; and that, as she had made her bed, so would she lie upon it.

Nor was the boy alone in regarding as a direct manifestation of Providence the sudden removal of Cousin Bill J. from this life by means of pneumonia. For Miss Alvira had ever been esteemed and respected even by those who considered that she sang alto half a note off, while her husband had gradually acquired the disesteem of almost the entire village of Edom. Many, indeed, went so far as to consider him a reproach to his sex.

Yet there were a few who said that even a pretended observance of the decencies would have been better. Miss Alvira disagreed with them, however, and after all, as the village wag, Elias Cuthbert, said in the post-office next day, "It was *her* funeral." For Miss Alvira had made no pretense to God; and, what is infinitely harder, she would make none to the world. She rode to the last resting-place of her husband—Elias also made a funny joke about his having merely changed *resting-places*—decked in a bonnet on which were many blossoms. She had worn it through years when her heart mourned and life was bitter, when it seemed that God from His infinity had chosen her to suffer the cruellest hurts a woman may know—and now that He had set her free she was not the one to pretend grief with some lying pall of crepe. And on the new bonnet she wore to church, the first Sabbath after, there still flowered above her somewhat drawn face the blossoms of an endless girlhood, as if they were rooted in her very heart. Beneath these blossoms she sang her alto—such as it was—with just a hint of tossing defiance. Yet there was no need for that. Edom thought well of her.

No one was known to have mourned the departed save an inferior dog he had made his own and been kind to; but this creature had little sympathy or notice, though he was said to have waited three days and three nights on the new earth that topped the grave of Cousin Bill J. For, quite aside from his unfortunate connection, he had not been thought well of as a dog.

CHAPTER X

THE PASSING OF THE GRATCHER; AND ANOTHER

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From year to year the perfect father came to Edom to be a week with his children. And though from visit to visit there were external variations in him, his genial and refreshing spirit was changeless. When his garments were appreciably less regal, even to the kind eye of his younger son; when his hat was not all one might wish; the boots less than excellent; the priceless watch-chain absent, or moored to a mere bunch of aimless keys, though the bounty from his pockets was an irregular and minute trickle of copper exclusively, the little boy strutted as proudly by his side, worshipping him as loyally, as when these outer affairs were quite the reverse. Yet he could not avoid being sensible of the fluctuations.

One year the parent would come with the long hair of one who, having been brother to the red Indian for years, has wormed from his medicine man the choicest secret of his mysterious pharmacopaeia, and who would out of love for suffering humanity place this within the reach of all for a nominal consideration.

Another year he would be shorn of the sweeping moustache and much of the tawny hair, and the little boy would understand that he had travelled extensively with a Mr. Haverly, singing his songs each evening in large cities, and being spoken of as “the phenomenal California baritone.” His admiring son envied the fortunate people of those cities.

Again he would be touring the world of cities with some simple article of household use which, from his luxurious barouche, he was merely introducing for the manufacturers—-perhaps a rare cleaning-fluid, a silver-polish, or that ingenious tool which will sharpen knives and cut glass, this being, indeed, one of his prized staples. It appeared—so the little boy heard him tell Milo Barrus—that few men could resist buying a tool with which he actually cut a pane of glass into strips before their eyes; that one beholding the sea of hands waving frantically up to him with quarters in them, after his demonstration, would have reason to believe that all men had occasion to slice off a strip of glass every day or so. Instead of this, as an observer of domestic and professional life, he believed that out of the thousands to whom he had sold this tool, not ten had ever needed to cut glass, nor ever would.

There was another who continued indifferent to the personal estate of this father. This was Grandfather Delcher, who had never seen him since that bleak day when he had tried to bury the memory of his daughter. When the perfect father came to Edom the grandfather went to his room and kept there so closely that neither ever beheld the other. The little boy was much puzzled by this apparently intentional avoidance of each other by two men of such rare distinction, and during the early visits of his father he was fruitful of suggestion for bringing them together. But when he came to understand that they remained apart by wish of the elder man, he was troubled. He

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ceased then all efforts to arrange a meeting to which he had looked forward with pride in his office of exhibiting each personage to the other. But he was grieved toward his grandfather, becoming sharp and even disdainful to the queer, silent old man, at those times when the father was in the village. He could have no love and but little friendliness for one who slighted his dear father. And so a breach widened between them from year to year, as the child grew stouter fibre into his sentiments of loyalty and justice.

Meantime, age crept upon the little boy, relentlessly depriving him of this or that beloved idol, yet not unkindly leaving with him the pliant vitality that could fashion others to be still more warmly cherished.

With Nancy, on afternoons when cool shadows lay across the lawn between their houses, he often discussed these matters of life. Nancy herself had not been spared the common fate. Being now a mere graceless rudiment of humanity, all spindling arms and legs, save for a puckered, freckled face, she was past the witless time of expecting to pick up a bird with a broken wing and find it a fairy godmother who would give her three wishes. It was more plausible now that a prince, “all dressed up in shiny Prince Clothes,” would come riding up on a creamy white horse, lift her to the saddle in front of him and gallop off, calling her “My beautiful darling!” while Madmasel, her uncle, and Betsy, the cook, danced up and down on the front piazza impotently shouting “Help!” She suspected then, when it was too late, that certain people would bitterly wish they had acted in a different manner. If this did not happen soon, she meant to go into a convent where she would not be forever told things for her own good by those arrogantly pretending to know better, and where she could devote a quiet life to the bringing up of her children.

The little boy sympathised with her. He knew what it was to be disappointed in one’s family. The family he would have chosen for his own was that of which two excellent views were given on the circus bills. In one picture they stood in line, maddeningly beautiful in their pink tights, ranging from the tall father and mother down through four children to a small boy that always looked much like himself. In the other picture these meritorious persons were flying dizzily through the air at the very top of the great tent, from trapeze to trapeze, with the littlest boy happily in the greatest danger, midway in the air between the two proud parents, who were hurling him back and forth.

It was absurd to think of anything like this in connection with a family of which only one member had either courage or ambition. One had only to study Clytie or Grandfather Delcher a few moments to see how hopeless it all was.

The next best life to be aspired to was that of a house-painter, who could climb about unchided on the frailest of high scaffolds, swing from the dizziest cupola, or sway

jauntily at the top of the longest ladder—always without the least concern whether he spilled paint on his clothes or not.

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Then, all in a half-hour, one afternoon, both he and Nancy seemed to cross a chasm of growth so wide that one thrilled to look back to the farther side where all objects showed little and all interests were juvenile. And this phenomenon, signalised by the passing of the Gratcher, came in this wise. As they rested from play—this being a time when the Gratcher was most likely to be seen approaching by him of the Gratcher-eye, the usual alarm was given, followed by the usual unbreathing silence. The little boy fixedly bent his magic eye around the corner of the house, the little girl scrambling to him over the grass to clutch one of his arms, to listen fearfully for the setting of the monster's crutches at the end of each stride, to feel if the earth trembled, as it often distinctly did, under his awful tread.

Wider grew the eyes of both at each "Now he's nearer still!" of the little boy, until at last the girl must hide her head lest she see that awful face leering past the corner. For, once the Gratcher's eye met yours fairly, he caught you in an instant and worked his will. This was to pick you up and look at you on all sides at once with the eyes in his finger-ends, which tickled you so that you lost your mind.

But now, at the shrillest and tensest report of progress from the gifted watcher, all in a wondrous second of realisation, they turned to look into each other's eyes—and their ecstasy of terror was gone in the quick little self-conscious laughs they gave. It was all at once as if two grown-ups had in a flash divined that they had been playing at a childish game under some spell. The moment was not without embarrassment, because of their having caught themselves in the very act and frenzy of showing terror of this clumsy fiction. Foolishly they averted their glances, after that first little laugh of sudden realisation; but again their eyes met, and this time they laughed loud and long with a joy that took away not only all fears of the Gratcher forever, but their first embarrassment of themselves. Then, with no word of the matter whatsoever, each knowing that the other understood, they began to talk of life again, feeling older and wiser, which truly they were.

For, though many in time wax brave to beard their Gratcher even in his lair, only the very wise learn this—that the best way to be rid of him is to laugh him away—that no Gratcher ever fashioned by the ingenuity of terror-loving humans can keep his evil power over one to whom he has become funny.

The passing of the Gratcher had left no pedestal crying for another idol. In its stead, for his own chastening and with all reverence, the little boy erected the spirit of that God which the Bible tells of, who is all-wise and loving, yet no sentimentalist, as witness his sudden devastations among the first-born of all things, from white rabbits to men.

But an idol next went down that not only left a wretched vacancy in the boy's pantheon, but fell against his heart and made an ugly wound. It was as if he had become suddenly clear-seeing on that day when the Gratcher shrivelled in the blast of his laugh.

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A little later came the father on his annual visit, and the dire thing was done. The most ancient and honoured of all the idols fell with a crash. A perfect father was lost in some common, swaggering, loud-voiced, street-mannered creature, grotesquely self-satisfied, of a cheap, shabby smartness, who came flaunting those things he should not have flaunted, and proclaiming in every turn of his showy head his lack of those things without which the little boy now saw no one could be a gentleman.

He cried in his bed that night, after futile efforts to believe that some fearful change had been wrought in his father. But his memory of former visits was scrupulously photographic—phonographic even. He recalled from the past certain effects once keenly joyed in that now made his cheeks burn. The things rioted brutally before him, until it seemed that something inside of him strove to suppress them—as if a shamed hand reached out from his heart to brush the whole offense into decent hiding with one quick sweep.

This time he took care that Nancy should not meet his father. Yet he walked the streets with him as before—walking defiantly and with shame those streets through which he had once led the perfect father in festal parade, to receive the applause of a respectful populace. Now he went forth awkwardly, doggedly, keen for signs that others saw what he did, and quick to burn with bitter, unreasoning resentment, when he detected that they did so. Once his father rallied him upon his “grumpiness”; then he grew sullen—-though trying to smile—thinking with mortification of his grandfather. He understood the old man now.

He was glad when the week came to an end. Bruised, bewildered, shamed, but loyal still and resentful toward others who might see as he did, he was glad when his father went—this time as Professor Alfiretti, doing a twenty-minute turn of hypnotism and mind-reading with the Gus Levy All-Star Shamrock Vaudeville, playing the “ten-twenty-thirties,” whatever they were!

CHAPTER XI

THE STRONG PERSON’S NARRATIVE

Near the close of the following winter came news of the father’s death. In some town of which the boy had never heard, in another State, a ramshackle wooden theatre had burned one night and the father had perished in the fire through his own foolhardiness. The news came by two channels: first, a brief and unilluminating paragraph in the newspaper, giving little more than the fact itself.

But three days later came a friend of the father, bringing his few poor effects and a full relation of the matter. He was a person of kind heart, evidently, to whom the father had spoken much of his boys in Edom—a bulky, cushiony, youngish man who was billed on

the advertising posters of the Gus Levy All-Star Shamrock Vaudeville as “Samson the Second,” with a portrait of himself supporting on the mighty arch of his chest a grand piano, upon which were superimposed three sizable and busy violinists.

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He told his tale to the two boys and Clytie, Grandfather Delcher having wished to hear no more of the occurrence.

“You understan’, it was like this now,” he began, after having with a calculating eye rejected two proffered chairs of delicate structure and selected a stout wooden rocker into which he settled tentatively, as one whom experience had taught to distrust most of the chairs in common use.

“The people in front had got out all right, the fire havin’ started on the stage from the strip-light, and also our people had got out through the little stage-entrance, though havin’ to leave many of our props—a good coat I had to lose meself, fur-lined around the collar, by way of helpin’ the Sisters Devere get out their box of accordions that they done a Dutch Daly act with for an enn-core. Well, as I was sayin’, we’d all hustled down these back stairs—they was already red hot and smokin’ up good, you understan’, and there we was shiverin’ outside in the snow, kind of rattled, and no wonder, at that, and the ladies of the troupe histurrical—it had come like a quick-change, you understan’, when all of a sudden up in the air goes the Original Kelly. Say, he lets out a yell for your life—’Oh, my God!’ he says, ‘my kids—up there,’ pointin’ to where the little flames was spittin’ out through the side like a fire-eatin’ act. Then down he flops onto his knees in the snow, prayin’ like the—prayin’ like *mad*, you understan’, and callin’ on the blessed Virgin to save little Patsy, who was just gittin’ good with his drum-major act and whirlin’ a fake musket—and also little Joseph, who was learnin’ to do some card-tricks that wasn’t so bad. Well, so everybody begins to scream louder and run this way and that, you understan’, callin’ the kids and thinkin’ Kelly was nutty, because they must ’a got out. But Kelly keeps right on prayin’ to the holy Virgin, the tears runnin’ down his make-up—-say, he looked awful, on the dead! And then we hears another yell, and here was Prof. at the window with one of the kids, sure enough. He’d got up them two flights of stairs, though they was all red smoky, like when you see fire through smoke. Well, he motions to catch the kid, so we snatches a cloak off one of the girls and holds it out between us, you understan’, while he leans out and drops the kid into it, all safe and sound.

“Just then we seen the place all light up back of him, and we yelled to him to jump, too—he could ‘a saved himself, you understan’, but he waves his hand and shook his head—say, lookin’ funny, too, with his *mus*-tache half burned off, and we seen him go back out of sight for the other little Kelly—Kelly still promisin’ to give up all he had to the Virgin if she saved his boys.

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“Well, for a minute the crowd kep’ still, kind ‘a holdin’ its breath, you understan’, till the Prof.’d come back with the other kid—and holdin’ it and holdin’ it till the fire gits brighter and brighter through the window—and—nothin’ happens, you understan’—just the fire keeps on gittin’ busy. Honest, I begun to feel shaky, but then up comes one of these day-after-to-morrow fire-departments, like they have in them towns, with some fine painted ladders and a nice new hose-cart, and there was great doings with these Silases screamin’ to each other a foot away through their fire-trumpets, only the stairs had been ablaze ever since the Prof. got up ’em, and before any one does anything the whole inside caves in and the blaze goes way up to the sky.

“Well, of course, that settles it, you understan’—about the little Kelly and the Prof. We drags the original Kelly away to a drug-store on the corner of the next block, where they was workin’ over the kid Prof. saved—it was Patsy—and Kelly was crazy; but the Doc. was bringin’ the kid around all right, when one of the Miss Deveres, she has to come nutty all to once—say, she sounded like the parrot-house in Central Park, laughin’ till you’d think she’d bust, only it sounded like she was cryin’ at the same time, and screamin’ out at the top of her voice, ’Oh, he looked so damned funny with his *mus*-tache burned off! Oh, he looked so damned funny with his *mus*-tache burned off!’—way up high like that, over and over. Well, so she has to be held down till the Doc. jabs her arm full of knockouts. Honest, I needed the dope myself for fair by that time, what with the lady bein’ that way I’m ‘a tellin’ you, and Kelly, the crazy Irishman—I could hear him off in one corner givin’ his reg’ler stunt about his friend, O’Houlihan, lately landed and lookin’ for work, comes to a sausage factory and goes up to the boss and says, ’Begobs!’—*you* know the old gag—say, I run out in the snow and looked over to the crowd around the fire and thought of Prof. pokin’ around in that dressin’-room for Kelly’s other kid, when he might ’a jumped after he got the first one, and, say, this is no kid—-first thing I knew I begin to bawl like a baby.

“Well, as I was sayin’, there I am and all I can see through the fog is one ’a these here big lighted signs down the street with ‘George’s Place’ on it, and a pitcher of a big glass of beer. Me to George’s, at once. When Levy himself finds me there, about daylight, I’m tryin’ to tell a gang of Silases how it all happened and chokin’ up every time so’s I have to have another.

“Well, of course, we break up next day. Kelly tells me, after he gits right again, that little Patsy was saved by havin’ one ’a these here scapulars on—he shows it to me hanging around the kid’s neck, inside his clothes. He says little Joseph must ’a left his off, or he’d ‘a’ been saved, too. He showed me a piece in one ’a these little religious books that says there was nothing annoyed the devil like a scapular—that a man can’t be burned or done dirt to in no way if he wears one. I says it’s a pity the Prof. didn’t have one on, but Kelly says they won’t work for Protestants. But I don’t know—I never *purtended* to be good on these propositions of religious matters. And there wasn’t any chance of findin’ the kid to prove if Kelly had it right or not.

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“But the Prof. he was certainly a great boy for puttin’ up three-sheets about his own two kids; anybody that would listen—friend or stranger—made no difference to *him*. He starred ’em to anybody, you understan’—what corkers they was, and all like that. It seemed like Kelly’s havin’ two kids also kind ’a touched on his feelin’s. Honest, I ain’t ever got so worked up over anything before in me whole life.”

When this person had gone the old man called the two boys to his room and prayed with them; keeping the younger to sit with him a long time afterward, as if feeling that his was the heavier heart.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW THEORY OF A CERTAIN WICKED MAN

The time of the first sorrow was difficult for the boy. There was that first hard sleep after one we love has gone—in which we must always dream that it is not true—a sleep from which we awaken to suffer all the shock of it again. Then came black nights when the perfect love for the perfect father came back in all its early tenderness to cry the little boy to sleep. Yet it went rapidly enough at last, as times of sorrow go for the young. There even came a day when he found in a secret place of his heart a chastened, hopeful inquiry if all might not have been for the best. He had loved his father—there had been between them an unbreakable bond; yet this very love had made him suffer at every thought of him while he was living, whereas now he could love him with all tender memories and with no poisonous misgivings about future meetings with their humiliations. Now his father was made perfect in Heaven, and even Grandfather Delcher—whose aloofness here he had ceased to blame—would not refuse to meet and know him there.

Naturally, then, he turned to his grandfather in his great need for a new idol to fill the vacant niche. Aforetime the old man in his study upstairs had been little more than a gray shadow, a spirit of gloom, stubbornly imprisoning another spirit that would have been kind if it could have escaped. But the little boy drew near to him, and found him curiously companionable. Where once he had shunned him, he now went freely to the study with his lessons or his storybook, or for talk of any little matter. His grandfather, it seemed, could understand many things which so old a man could scarcely have been expected to understand. In token of this there would sometimes creep over his brown old face a soft light that made it seem as if there must still be within him somewhere the child he had once been; as if, perhaps, he looked into the little boy as into a mirror that threw the sunlight of his own boyhood into his time-worn face. Side by side, before the old man’s fire, they would talk or muse, since they were friendly enough to be silent if they liked. Only one confidence the little boy could not bring himself to make: he could not tell the old man that he no longer felt hard toward him, as once he had done, for his coldness to his father; that he had divined—and felt a great shame for—the true reason

of that coldness. But he thought the old man must understand without words. It was hardly a matter to be talked of.

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About his other affairs, especially his early imaginings and difficulties, he was free to talk; about coming to the Feet, and the Front Room, and being washed in the blood, and born again—matters that made the old man wish their intimacy had not been so long delayed.

But now they made up for lost time. Patiently and ably he taught the little boy those truths he needed to know; to seek for eternal life through the atoning blood of the Saviour, whose part it had been to purchase our redemption from God's wrath by his death on Calvary. Of other matters more technical: of how the love that God of necessity has for His own infinitely perfect being is the reason and the measure of the hatred he has for sin. Above all did he teach the little boy how to pray for the grace of effectual calling, in order that, being persuaded of his sin and misery, he might thereafter partake of justification, adoption, sanctification, and those several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them. They looked forward with equal eagerness to the day when he should become a great and good man, preaching the gospel of the crucified Son to spellbound throngs.

[Illustration: "They looked forward with equal eagerness to the day when he should become a great and good man."]

Together they began again the study of the Scriptures, the little boy now entering seriously upon that work of writing commentaries which had once engaged Allan. In one of these school-boyish papers the old man came upon a passage that impressed him as notable. It seemed to him that there was not only that vein of poetic imagination—without which one cannot be a great preacher—but a certain individual boldness of approach, monstrous in its naive sentimentality, to be sure, but indicating a talent that promised to mature splendidly.

"Now Jesus told his disciples," it ran, "that he must be crucified before he could take his seat on the right hand of God and send to hell those who had rejected him. He told them that one of them would have to betray him, because it must be like the Father had said. It says at the last supper Jesus said, 'The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; it had been good for that man if he had not been born.'

"Now it says that Satan entered into Judas, but it looks to me more like the angel of the Lord might have entered into him, he being a good man to start with, or our Lord would not have chosen him to be a disciple. Judas knew for sure, after the Lord said this, that one of the disciples had got to betray the Saviour and go to hell, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Well, Judas loved all the disciples very much, so he thought he would be the one and save one of the others. So he went out and agreed to betray him to the rulers for thirty pieces of silver. He knew if he didn't do it, it might have to be Peter, James, or John, or

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some one the Saviour loved very dearly, because it *had* to be one of them. So after it was done and he knew the others were saved from this foul deed, he went back to the rulers and threw down their money, and went out and hung himself. If he had been a bad man, it seems more like he would have spent that money in wicked indulgences, food and drink and entertainments, *etc*. Of course, Judas knew he would go to hell for it, so he was not as lucky as Jesus, who knew he would go to heaven and sit at the right hand of God when he died, which was a different matter from Judas's, who would not have any reward at all but going to hell. It looks to me like poor Judas had ought to be brought out of hell-fire, and I shall pray Jesus to do it when he gets around to it."

However it might be with our Lord's betrayer, there was one soul now seen to be deservedly in hell. Through the patient study of the Scriptures as expounded by Grandfather Delcher, the little boy presently found himself accepting without demur the old gentleman's unspoken but sufficiently indicated opinion. His father was in everlasting torment—having been not only unbaptised, but godless and a scoffer. With a quickening sense of the majesty of that Spirit infinitely good, a new apprehension of His plan's symmetry, he read the words meant to explain, to comfort him, silently indicated one day by the old man:

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

"What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?

"And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory."

It hurt at first, but the young mind hardened to it dutifully—the big, laughing, swaggering, scoffing father—a device of God made for torment, that the power of the All-loving might show forth! If the father had only repented, he might have gone straight to heaven as did Cousin Bill J. For the latter had obtained grace in his last days, and now sang acceptably before the thrones of the Father and the Son. But the unbaptised scoffer must burn forever—and the little boy knew at last what was meant by "the majesty of God."

BOOK TWO

The Age of Reason

[Illustration]

CHAPTER I

THE REGRETTABLE DEMENTIA OF A CONVALESCENT

“You know you *please* me—*really* you do!”

Allan, perfect youth of the hazel eyes and tawny locks, bent upon inquiring Nancy a look of wholly pleasant reassurance, as one wishful to persuade her from doubt.

“I’m not joking a bit. When I say you please me, I mean it.”

His look became rather more expansive with a smile that seemed meant to sympathise guardedly with her in her necessary rejoicing.

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Meekly, for a long second, Nancy drew the black curtains of her eyes, murmuring from out the friendly gloom:

“It’s very good of you, Allan!”

Then, before he could tell reasons for his pleasing, which she divined he was about to do, the curtains were up and the eyes wide open to him with a question about Bernal.

He turned to the house and pointed up to the two open windows of the study, in and out of which the warm breeze puffed the limp white curtains.

“He’s there, poor chap! He was able to get that far for the first time yesterday, leaning on me and Clytie.”

“And to think I never knew he was sick until we came from town last night. I’d surely have left the old school and come before if I’d heard. I wouldn’t have cared *what* Aunt Bell said.”

“Eight weeks down, and you know we found he’d been sick long before he found it out himself—walking typhoid, they called it. He came home from college with me Easter week, and Dr. Merritt put him to bed the moment he clapped eyes on him. Said it was walking typhoid, and that he must have been worrying greatly about something, because his nervous system was all run down.”

“And he was very ill?”

“Doctor Merritt says he went as far as a man can go and get back at all.”

“How dreadful—poor Bernal! Oh, if he *had* died!”

“Out of his head for three weeks at a time—raving fearfully. And you know, he’s quite like an infant now—says the simplest things. He laughs at it himself. He says he’s not sure if he knows how to read and write.”

“Poor, dear Bernal!”

With some sudden arousing he studied her face swiftly as she spoke, then continued:

“Yes, Bernal’s really an awfully good chap at bottom.” He turned again to look up at the study windows. “You know, I intend to stand by that fellow always—no matter *what* he does! Of course, I shall not let his being my brother blind me to his faults—doubtless we *all* have faults; but I tell you, Nancy, a good heart atones for many things in a man’s make-up.”

She seemed to be waiting, slightly puzzled, but he broke off—“Now I must hurry to mail these letters It’s good to be home for another summer. You really *do* please me, Nance!”

She thought, as he moved off, that Allan was handsome—more than handsome, indeed. He left an immediate conviction of his superb vitality of body and mind, the incarnation of a spirit created to prevail. Featured in almost faultless outline, of a character unconsciously, unaffectedly proclaiming its superior gravity among human masses, he was a planet destined to have many satellites and be satellite to none; an *ego* of genuine lordliness; a presence at once masterly and decorative.

And yet she was conscious of a note—not positively of discord, but one still exciting a counter-stream of reflection. She had observed that each time Allan turned his head, ever so little, he had a way of turning his shoulders with it: the perfect head and shoulders were swung with almost a studied unison. And this little thing had pricked her admiration with a certain needle-like suspicion—a suspicion that the young man might be not wholly oblivious of his merits as a spectacle.

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Yet this was no matter to permit in one's mind. For Nancy of the lengthened skirts and the massed braids was now a person of reserves. Even in that innocent insolence of first womanhood, with its tentatively malicious, half-conscious flauntings, she was one of reticences toward the world including herself, with petticoats of decorum draping the child's anarchy of thought—her luxuriant young emotions "done up" sedately with her hair. She was now one to be cautious indeed of imputations so blunt as this concerning Allan. Besides, how nobly he had spoken of Bernal. Then she wondered *why* it should seem noble, for Nancy would be always a creature to wonder where another would accept. She saw it had seemed noble because Bernal must have been up to some deviltry.

This phrase would not be Nancy's—only she knew it to be the way her uncle, for example, would translate Allan's praise of his brother. She hoped Bernal had not been very bad—and wondered *how* bad.

Then she went to him. Her first little knock brought no answer, nor could she be sure that the second did. But she knew it was loud enough to be heard if the room were occupied, so she gently opened the door a crack and peeped in. He lay on the big couch across the room under the open window, a scarlet wool dressing-gown on, and a steamer-rug thrown over the lower part of his body. He seemed to be looking out and up to the tree that appeared above the window. She thought he could not have heard her, but he called:

"Clytie!"

She crossed the room and bent a little over to meet his eyes when he weakly turned his head on the pillow.

"Nancy!"

He began to laugh, sliding a thin hand toward one of hers. The laugh did not end until there were tears in his eyes. She laughed with him as a strong-voiced singer would help a weaker, and he tried to put a friendly force into his grip of the firm-fleshed little hand he had found.

"Don't be flattered, Nance—it's only typhoid emotion," he said at last, in a voice that sounded strangely unused. "You don't really overcome me, you know—the sight of you doesn't unman me as much as these fond tears might make you suspect. I shall feel that way when Clytie brings my lunch, too." He smiled and drew her hand into both his own as she sat beside him.

"How plump and warm your hand is—all full of little whispering pulses. My hands are cold and drowsy and bony, and *so* uninterested! Doesn't fever bring forward a man's bones in the most shameless way?"

“Oh, Bernal—but you’ll soon have them decently hidden again—indeed, you’re looking—quite—quite plump.” She smiled encouragingly. A sudden new look in his eyes made her own face serious again.

“Why, Nance, you’re rather lovely when you smile!”

She smiled.

“Only then?”

He studied her, while she pretended to be grave.

He became as one apart, giving her a long look of unbiassed appraisal.

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“Well—you know—now you have some little odds and ends of features—not bad—no, not even half bad, for that matter. I can see thousands of miles into your eyes—there’s a fire smouldering away back in there—it’s all smoky and mysterious after you go the first few thousand miles—but, I don’t know—I believe the smile is *needed*, Nance. Poor child, I tell you this as a friend, for your own good—it seems to make a fine big perfection out of a lot of little imperfections that are only fairly satisfactory.”

She smiled again, brushing an escaped lock of hair to its home.

“Really, Nance, no one could guess that mouth till it melts.”

“I see—now I shall be going about with an endless, sickening grin. It will come to that—doubtless I shall be murdered for it—people that do grin that way always make *me* feel like murder.”

“And they could never guess your eyes until the little smile runs up to light their chandeliers.”

“Dear me!—Like a janitor!”

“—or the chin, until the little smile does curly things all around it—”

“There, now—calm yourself—the doctor will be here presently—and you know, you’re among friends—”

“—or the face itself until those little pink ripples get to chasing each other up to hide in your hair, as they are now. You know you’re blushing, Nance, so stop it. Remember, it’s when you smile; remember, also, that smiles are born, not made. It’s a long time since I’ve seen you, Nance.”

“Two years—we didn’t come here last summer, you know.”

“But you’ve aged—you’re twice the woman you were—so, on the whole, I’m not in the least disappointed in you.”

“Your sickness seems to have left you—well—in a remarkably unprejudiced state of mind.”

He laughed. “That’s the funny part of it. Did they tell you this siege had me foolish for weeks? Honest, now, Nance, here’s a case—how many are two times two?” He waited expectantly.

“Are you serious?”

“It seems silly to you, doesn’t it—but answer as if I were a child.”

“Well—twice two are four—unless my own mind is at fault.”

“There!—now I begin to believe it. I suppose, now, it *couldn’t* be anything else, could it? Yesterday morning the doctor said something was as plain as twice two are four. You know, the thing rankled in me all day. It seemed to me that twice two ought to be twenty-two. Then I asked Clytie and she said it was four, but that didn’t satisfy me. Of course, Clytemnestra is a dear soul, and I truly, love her, but her advantages in an educational way have been meagre. She could hardly be considered an authority in mathematics, even if she is the ideal cook and friend. But I have more faith in your learning, Nance. The doctor’s solution seems plausible, since you’ve sided with him. I suppose you could have no motive for deceiving me?”

She was regarding him with just a little anxiety, and this he detected.

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“It’s nothing to worry about, Nance—it’s only funny. I haven’t lost my mind or anything, you know—spite of my tempered enthusiasm for your face—but this is it: first there came a fearful shock—something terrible, that shattered me—then it seemed as if that sickness found my brain like a school-boy’s slate with all his little problems worked out on it, and wickedly gave it a swipe each side with a big wet sponge. And now I seem to have forgotten all I ever learned. Clytie was in to feed me the inside of a baked potato before you came. After I’d fought with her to eat the skin of it—such a beautiful brown potato-skin, with delicious little white particles still sticking to the inside where it hadn’t all been dug out—and after she had used her strength as no lady should, and got it away from me, it came to me all at once that she was my mother. Then she assured me that she was not, and that seemed quite reasonable, too. I told her I loved her enough for a mother, anyway—and the poor thing giggled.”

“Still, you have your lucid moments.”

“Ah, still thinking about the face? You mean I’m lucid when you smile, and daffy when you don’t. But that’s a case of it—your face—”

“My face a case of *what?* You’re getting commercial—even shoppy. Really, if this continues, Mr. Linford, I shall be obliged—”

“A case of it—of this blankness of mine. Instead of continuing my early prejudice, which I now recall was preposterously in your favour, I survey you coldly for the first time. You know I’m afraid to look at print for fear I’ve forgotten how to read.”

“Nonsense!”

“No—I tell you I feel exactly like one of those chaps from another planet, who are always reaching here in the H.G. Wells’s stories—a gentleman of fine attainments in his own planet, mind you—bland, agreeable, scholarly—with marked distinction of bearing, and a personal beauty rare even on a planet where the flaunting of one’s secretest bones is held to betoken the only beauty—you understand *that?*—Well, I come here, and everything is different—ideals of beauty, people absurdly holding for flesh on their bones, for example—numbers, language, institutions, everything. Of course, it puzzles me a little, but see the value I ought to be to the world, having a mature mind, yet one as clean of preconceptions and prejudice as a new-born babe’s.”

“Oh, so that is why you could see that I’m not—”

“Also, why I could see that you *are*—that’s it, smile! Nance, you *are* a dear, when you smile—you make a man feel so strong and protecting. But if you knew all the queer things I’ve thought in the last week about time and people and the world. This morning I woke up mad because I’d been cheated out of the past. Where *is* all the past, Nance? There’s just as much past somewhere as there is future—if one’s soul has no end, it

had no beginning. Why not worry about the past as we do about the future? First thing I'm going to do—start a Worry-About-the-Past Club, with dues and a president, and by-laws and things!"

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“Don’t you think I’d better send Clytie, now?”

“No; please wait a minute.” He clutched her hand with a new strength, and raised on his elbow to face her, then, speaking lower:

“Nance, you know I’ve had a feeling it wasn’t the right thing to ask the old gentleman this—he might think I hadn’t been studying at college—but *you* tell me—what is this about the atoning blood of Jesus Christ? It was a phrase he used the other day, and it stuck in my mind.”

“Bernal—you surely know!”

“Truly I don’t—it seems a bad dream I’ve had some time—that’s all—some awful dream about my father.”

“It was the part of the Saviour to purchase our redemption by his death on Calvary.”

“Our redemption from what?”

“From sin, to be sure.”

“What sin?”

“Why, our sin, of course—the sin of Adam which comes down to us.”

“You say this Jesus purchased our redemption from that sin by dying?”

“Yes.”

“From whom did he purchase it?”

“Oh, dear—this is like a catechism—from God, of course.”

“The God that made Adam?”

“Certainly.”

“Oh, yes—now I seem to remember him—he was supposed to make people, and then curse them, wasn’t he? And so he had to have his son killed before he could forgive Adam for our sins?”

“No; before he could forgive *us* for Adam’s sin, which descended to us.”

“Came down like an entail, eh? ... Adam couldn’t disinherit us? Well, how did this God have his son die?”

“Why, Bernal—you *must* remember, dear—you knew so well—don’t you know he was crucified?”

“To be sure I do—how stupid! And was God *very* cheerful after that? No more trouble about Adam or anything?”

“You must hush—I can’t tell you about these things—wait till your grandfather comes.”

“No, I want to have it from you, Nance—grandad would think I’d been slighting the classics.”

“Well, God takes to heaven with him those who believe.”

“Believe what?”

“Who believe that Jesus was his only begotten son.”

“What does he do with those who don’t believe it?”

“They—they—Oh, I don’t know—really, Bernal, I must go now.”

“Just a minute, Nance!” He clutched more tightly the hand he had been holding. “I see now! I must be remembering something I knew—something that brought me down sick. If a man doesn’t believe God was capable of becoming so enraged with Adam that only the bloody death of his own son would appease his anger toward *us*, he sends that man where—where the worm doeth something or other—what is it? Oh, well!—of course, it’s of no importance—only it came to me it was something I ought to remember if grandad should ask me about it. What a quaint belief it must have been.”

“Oh, I must go!—let me, now.”

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“Don’t you find it interesting, Nance, rummaging among these musty old religions of a dead past—though I admit that this one is less pleasant to study than most of the others. This god seems to lack the majesty and beauty of the Greek and the integrity of the Norse gods. In fact, he was too crude to be funny—by the way, what is it I seem to recall, about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the son?—’unless ye eat the flesh of the son—’”

She drew her hand from his now and arose in some dismay. He lay back upon his pillow, smiling.

“Not very agreeable, is it, Nance? Well, come again, and I’ll tell you about some of the pleasanter old faiths next time—I remember now that they interested me a lot before I was sick.”

“You’re sure I shouldn’t send Clytie or some one?” She looked down at him anxiously, putting her hand on his forehead. He put one of his own lightly over hers.

“No, no, thank you! It’s not near time yet for the next baked potato. If Clytie doesn’t give up the skin of this one I shall be tempted to forget that she’s a woman. There, I hear grandad coming, so you won’t be leaving me alone.”

Grandfather Delcher came in cheerily as Nancy left the room.

“Resting, my boy? That’s good. You look brighter already—Nancy must come often.”

He took Nancy’s chair by the couch and began the reading of his morning’s mail. Bernal lay still with eyes closed during the reading of several letters; but when the old man opened out a newspaper with little rustlings and pats, he turned to him.

“Well, my boy?”

“I’ve been thinking of something funny. You know, my memory is still freakish, and things come back in splotches. Just now I was recalling a primitive Brazilian tribe in whose language the word ‘we’ means also ’good. ‘Others,’ which they express by saying ‘not we,’ means also ‘evil.’ Isn’t that a funny trait of early man—we—good; not we—bad! I suppose our own tongue is but an elaboration of that simple bit of human nature—a training of polite vines and flowering shrubs over the crude lines of it.

“And this tribe—the Bakairi, it is called—is equally crude in its religion. It is true, sir, is it not, that the most degraded of the savages tribes resort to human sacrifice in their religious rites?”

“Generally true. Human sacrifice was practised even by some who were well advanced, like the Aztecs and Peruvians.”

“Well, sir, this Bakairi tribe believed that its god demanded a sacrifice yearly, and their priests taught them that a certain one of their number had been sent by their god for this sacrifice each year; that only by butchering this particular member of the tribe and—-incredible as it sounds—eating his body and drinking his blood, could they avert drouth and pestilence and secure favours for the year to come. I remember the historian intimated that it were well not to incur the displeasure of any priest; that one doing this might find it followed by an unpleasant circumstance when the time came for the priests to designate the next yearly sacrifice.”

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“Curious, indeed, and most revolting,” assented the old man, laying down his paper. “You *are* feeling more cheerful, aren’t you—and you look so much brighter. Ah, what a mercy of God’s you were spared to me!—you know you became my walking-stick when you were a very little boy—I could hardly go far without you now, my son.”

“Yes, sir—thank you—I’ve just been recalling some of the older religions—Nancy and I had quite a talk about the old Christian faith.”

“I’m glad indeed. I had sometimes been led to suspect that Nancy was the least bit—-well, frivolous—but I am an old man, and doubtless the things that seem best to me are those I see afar off, their colour subdued through the years.”

“Nancy wasn’t a bit frivolous this morning—on the contrary, she seemed for some reason to consider me the frivolous one. She looked shocked at me more than once. Now, about the old Christian faith, you know—their god was content with one sacrifice, instead of one each year, though he insisted on having the body eaten and the blood drunk perpetually. Yet I suppose, sir, that the Christian god, in this limiting of the human sacrifice to one person, may be said to show a distinct advance over the god of the Bakairi, though he seems to have been equally a tribal god, whose chief function it was to make war upon neighbouring tribes.”

“Yes, my boy—quite so,” replied the old man most soothingly. He stepped gently to the door. Halfway down the hall Allan was about to turn into his room. He came, beckoned by the old man, who said, in tones too low for Bernal to hear:

“Go quickly for Dr. Merritt. He’s out of his head again.”

CHAPTER II

FURTHER DISTRESSING FANTASIES OF A CLOUDED MIND

When young Dr. Merritt came, flushed and important-looking, greatly concerned by the reported relapse, he found his patient with normal pulse and temperature—rational and joyous at his discovery that the secret of reading Roman letters was still his.

“I was almost afraid to test it, Doctor,” he confessed, smilingly, when the little thermometer had been taken from between his lips, “but it’s all right—I didn’t find a single strange letter—every last one of them meant something—and I know figures, too—and now I’m as hungry for print as I am for baked potatoes. You know, never in my life again, after I’m my own master, shall I neglect to eat the skin of my baked potato. When I think of those I let go in my careless days of plenty, I grow heart-sick.”

“A little at a time, young man. If they let you gorge as you’d like to there would be no more use sending for me; you’d be a goner—that’s what you’d be! Head feel all right?”

“Fine!—I’ve settled down to a pleasant reading of Holy Writ. This Old Testament is mighty interesting to me, though doubtless I’ve read it all before.”

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“It’s a very complicated case, but I think he’s coming on all right,” the doctor assured the alarmed old man outside the door. “He may be a little flighty now and then, but don’t pay any attention to him; just soothe him over. He’s getting back to himself—stronger every hour. We often have these things to contend with.”

And the doctor, outwardly confident, went away to puzzle over the case.

Again the following morning, when Bernal had leaned his difficult way down to the couch in the study, the old man was dismayed by his almost unspeakable aberrations. With no sign of fever, with a cool brow and placid pulse, in level tones, he spoke the words of the mad.

“You know, grandad,” he began easily, looking up at the once more placid old man who sat beside him, “I am just now recalling matters that were puzzling me much before the sickness began to spin my head about so fast on my shoulders. The harder I thought, the faster my head went around, until it sent my mind all to little spatters in a circle about me. One thing I happened to be puzzling over was how the impression first became current that this god of the Jews was a being of goodness. Such an impression seems to have been tacitly accepted for some centuries after the iniquities so typical of him had been discountenanced by society—long after human sacrifice was abhorred, and even after the sacrificing of animals was held to be degrading. It’s a point that escapes me, owing to my addled brain; doubtless you can set me right. At present I can’t conceive how the notion could ever have occurred to any one. I now remember this book well enough to know that not only is little good ever recorded of him, but he is so continually barbarous, and so atrociously cruel in his barbarities. And he was thought to be all-powerful when he is so pitifully ineffectual, with all his crude power—-the poor old fellow was forever bungling—then bungling again in his efforts to patch up his errors. Indeed, he would be rather a pathetic figure if he were not so monstrous! Still, there is a kind of heathen grandeur about him at times. He drowns his world full of people because his first two circumvented him; then he saves another pair, but things go still worse, so he has to keep smiting the world right and left, dumb beasts as well as men; and at last he picks out one tribe, in whose behalf he works a series of miracles, that devastated a wide area. How he did love to turn a city over to destruction! And from the cloud’s centre he was constantly boasting of his awful power, and scaring people into butchering lambs and things in his honour. Yet, doubtless, that heathen tribe found its god ‘good,’ and other people formed the habit of calling him good, without thinking much about it. They must have felt queer when they woke up to the fact that they were calling infinitely good a god who was not good, even when judged by their poor human standards.”

Remembering the physician’s instructions to soothe the patient, the distressed old man timidly began—

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"'For God so loved the world'"—but he was interrupted by the vivacious one on the couch.

"That's it—I remember that tradition. He was even crude enough to beget a son for human sacrifice, giving that son power to condemn thereafter those who should not detect his godship through his human envelope! That was a rather subtler bit of baseness than those he first perpetrated—to send this saving son in such guise that the majority of his creatures would inevitably reject him! Oh! he was bound to have his failures and his tortures, wasn't he? You know, I dare say the ancient Christians called him good because they were afraid to call him bad. Doubtless the one great spiritual advance that we have made since the Christian faith prevailed is, that we now worship without fearing what we worship."

Once more the distressed old man had risen to stand with assumed carelessness by the door, having writhed miserably in his chair until he could no longer endure the profane flood.

"But, truly, that god was, after all, a pathetic figure. Imagine him amid the ruins of his plan, desolate, always foiled by his creatures—meeting failure after failure from Eden to Calvary—for even the bloody expedient of sending his son to be sacrificed did not avail to save his own chosen people. They unanimously rejected the son, if I remember, and so he had to be content with a handful of the despised Gentiles. A sorrowful old figure of futility he is—a fine figure for a big epic, it seems to me. By the way, what was the date that this religion was laughed away. I can remember perfectly the downfall of the Homeric deities—how many years there were when the common people believed in the divine origin of the Odyssey, while the educated classes were more or less discreetly heretical, until at last the whole Olympian outfit became poetic myths. But strangely enough I do not recall just the date when *we* began to demand a god of dignity and morality."

The old man had been loath to leave the sufferer. He still stood by the open door to call to the first passer-by. Now, shudderingly wishful to stem the torrent of blasphemies, innocent though they were, he ventured cautiously:

"There was Sinai—you forget the tables—the moral law—the ten commandments."

"Sinai, to be sure. Christians used to regard that as an occasion of considerable dignity, didn't they? The time when he gave directions about slavery and divorce and polygamy—he was beautifully broad-minded in all those matters, and to kill witches and to stone an ox that gored any one, and how to disembowel the lambs used for sacrifice, and what colours to use in the tabernacle."

But the horrified old man had fled. Half an hour later he returned with Dr. Merritt, relieving Clytie, who had watched outside the door and who reported that there had been no signs of violence within.

Again they found a normal pulse and temperature, and an appetite clamouring for delicacies of strong meat. Young Dr. Merritt was greatly puzzled.

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“I understand the case perfectly,” he said to the old man; “he needs rest and plenty of good nursing—and quiet. We often have these cases. Your head feels all right, doesn’t it?” he asked Bernal.

“Fine, Doctor!”

“I thought so.” He looked shrewdly at the old man. “Your grandfather had an idea you might be—perhaps a bit excited.”

“No—not a bit. We’ve had a fine morning chatting over some of the primitive religions, haven’t we, old man?” and he smiled affectionately up to his grandfather. “Hello, Nance, come and sit by me.”

The girl had paused in the doorway while he spoke, and came now to take his hand, after a look of inquiry at the two men. The latter withdrew, the eyes of the old man sadly beseeching the eyes of the physician for some definite sign of hope.

Inside, the sufferer lay holding a hand of Nancy between his cheek and the pillow—with intervals of silence and blithe speech. His disordered mind, it appeared, was still pursuing its unfortunate tangent.

“The first ideas are all funny, aren’t they, Nance? Genesis in that Christian mythology we were discussing isn’t the only funny one. There was the old northern couple who danced on the bones of the earth nine times and made nine pairs of men and women; and there were the Greek and his wife who threw stones out of their ark that changed to men; and the Hindu that saved the life of a fish, and whom the fish then saved by fastening his ship to his horn; and the South Sea fisherman who caught his hook in the water-god’s hair and made him so angry that he drowned all the world except the offending fisherman. Aren’t they nearly as funny as the god who made one of his pair out of clay and one from a rib, and then became so angry with them that he must beget a son for them to sacrifice before he would forgive them? Let’s think of the pleasanter ones. Do you know that hymn of the Veda?—’If I go along trembling like a cloud, have mercy, Almighty, have mercy!’

“’Through want of strength, thou strong and bright God, have I gone wrong. Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy!’

“And Buddha was a pleasant soul, Nance—with stuff in him, too—born a prince, yet leaving his palace to be poor and to study the ways of wisdom, until enlightenment came to him sitting under his Bo tree. He said faith was the best wealth here. And, ’Not to commit any sin, to do good and to purify one’s mind, that is the teaching of the awakened’; ’not hating those who hate us,’ ‘free from greed among the greedy.’ They must have been glad of Buddhism in their day, teaching them to honour their parents, to be kind to the sick and poor and sorrowing, to forgive their enemies and return good for

evil. And there was funny old Confucius with his ’Coarse rice for food, water to drink, the bended arm for a pillow—happiness may be enjoyed even with these; but without virtue, both riches and honour seem to me like the passing cloud.’ Another one of his is ’In the book of Poetry are three hundred pieces—but the designs of them all mean, “Have no depraved thoughts.'” Rather good for a Chinaman, wasn’t it?

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“And there was old Zoroaster saying to his Ormuzd, ’I believe thee, O God! to be the best thing of all!’ and asking for guidance. Ormuzd tells him to be pure in thought, word and deed; to be temperate, chaste and truthful—and this Ormuzd would have no lambs sacrificed to him. Life, being his gift, was dear to him. And don’t forget Mohammed, Nance, that fine old barbarian with the heart of a passionate child, counselling men to live a good life and to strive after the mercy of God by fasting, charity and prayer, calling this the ‘Key of Paradise.’ He went after a poor blind man whom he had at first rebuffed, saying ’He is thrice welcome on whose account my Lord hath reprimanded me.’ He was a fine, stubborn old believer, Nance. I wonder if it’s not true that the Christians once studied these old chaps to take the taste of their own cruder God out of their minds. What a cruel people they must have been to make so cruel a God!

“But let’s talk of you, Nance—that’s it—light the chandeliers in your eyes.”

He spoke drowsily now, and lay quiet, patting one of her hands. But presently he was on one elbow to study her again.

“Nance, the Egyptians worshipped Nature, the Greeks worshipped Beauty, the Northern chaps worshipped Courage, and the Christians feared—well, the hereafter, you know—-but I’m a Catholic when you smile.”

CHAPTER III

REASON IS AGAIN ENTHRONED

Slowly the days brought new life to the convalescent, despite his occasional attacks of theological astigmatism. And these attacks grew less frequent and less marked as the poor bones once more involved themselves in firm flesh—to the glad relief of a harried and scandalised old gentleman whose black forebodings had daily moved him to visions of the mad-house for his best-loved descendant.

Yet there were still dreadful times when the young man on the couch blasphemed placidly by the hour, with an insane air of assuming that those about him held the same opinions; as if the Christian religion were a pricked bubble the adherents of which had long since vanished.

If left by himself he could often be heard chuckling and muttering between chuckles: “I will get me honour upon Pharaoh and all his host. I have hardened his heart and the heart of his host that I might show these my signs before him.”

Entering the room, the old gentleman might be met with:

“I certainly agree with you, sir, in every respect—Christianity was an invertebrate materialism of separation—crude, mechanical separation—less spiritual, less ethical,

than almost any of the Oriental faiths. Affirming the brotherhood of man, yet separating us into a heaven and a hell. Christians cowering before a being of divided power, half-god and half-devil. Indeed, I remember no religion so non-moral—none that is so baldly a mere mechanical device for meeting the primitive mind's need to set its own tribe apart from all others—or in the later growth to separate the sheep from the goats, by reason of the opinion formed of certain evidence. Even schoolboys nowadays know that no moral value inheres in any opinion formed upon evidence. Yet, I dare say it was doubtless for a long period an excellent religion for marauding nations."

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Or, again, after a long period of apparently rational talk, the unfortunate young man would break out with, “And how childish its wonder-tales were, of iron made to swim, of a rod turned to a serpent, of a coin found in a fish’s mouth, of devils asking to go into swine, of a fig-tree cursed to death because it did not bear fruit out of season—how childish that tale of a virgin mother, who conceived ‘without sin,’ as it is somewhere naively put—an ideal of absolutely flawless falsity. Even the great old painters were helpless before it. They were driven to make mindless Madonnas, stupid bits of fleshy animality. It’s not easy to idealise mere physical motherhood. You see, that was the wrong, perverted idea of motherhood—’conceiving without sin.’ It’s an unclean dogma in its implications. I knew somewhere once a man named Milo Barrus—a sort of cheap village atheist, I remember, but one thing I recall hearing him say seems now to have a certain crude truth in it. He said: ’There’s my old mother, seventy-eight this spring, bent, gray, and wasted with the work of raising us seven children; she’s slaved so hard for fifty years that she’s worn her wedding-ring to a fine thread, and her hands look as if they had a thousand knuckles and joints in them. But she smiles like a girl of sixteen, she was never cross or bitter to one of us hounds, and I believe she never even *wanted* to complain in all her days. And there’s a look of noble capacity in her face, of soul dignity, that you never saw in any Madonna’s. I tell you no “virgin mother” could be as beautiful as my mother, who bore seven children for love of my father and for love of the thought of us.’ Isn’t it queer, sir, that I remember that—for it seemed only grotesque at the time I heard it.”

It was after this extraordinary speech, uttered with every sign of physical soundness, that young Dr. Merritt confided to the old man when they had left the study:

“He’s coming on fine, Mr. Delcher. He’ll eat himself into shape now in no time; but—I don’t know—seems to me you stand a lot better show of making a preacher out of his brother. Of course, I may be mistaken—we doctors often are.” Then the young physician became loftily humble: “But it doesn’t strike me he’ll ever get his ideas exactly into Presbyterian shape again!”

“But, man, he’ll surely be rid of these devil’s hallucinations?”

“Well, well—perhaps, but I’m almost afraid they’re what we doctors call ‘fixed delusions.’”

“But I set my heart so long ago on his preaching the Word. Oh, I’ve looked forward to it so long—and so hard!”

“Well, all you can do now is to feed him and not excite him. We often have these cases.”

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The very last of Bernal's utterances that could have been reprobated in a well man was his telling Clytie in the old gentleman's presence that, whereas in his boyhood he had pictured the hand of God as a big black hand reaching down to "remove" people—"the way you weed an onion bed"—he now conceived it to be like her own—"the most beautiful fat, red hand in the world, always patting you or tucking you in, or reaching you something good or pointing to a jar of cookies." It was so dangerously close to irreverence that it made Clytemnestra look stiff and solemn as she arranged matters on the luncheon tray; yet it was so inoffensive, considering the past, that it made Grandfather Delcher quite hopeful.

Thereafter, instead of babbling blasphemies, the convalescent became silent for the most part, yet cheerful and beautifully rational when he did speak, so that fear came gradually to leave the old man's heart for longer and longer intervals. Indeed, one day when Bernal had long lain silent, he swept lingering doubts from the old man's mind by saying, with a curious little air of embarrassment, yet with a return of that old-time playful assumption of equality between them—"I'm afraid, old man, I may have been a little queer in my talk—back there."

The old man's heart leaped with hope at this, though the acknowledgment struck him as being inadequate to the circumstance it referred to.

"You *were* flighty, boy, now and then," he replied, in quite the same glossing strain of inadequacy.

"I can't tell you how queerly things came back to me—some bits of consciousness and memory came early and some came late—and they're still struggling along in that disorderly procession. Even yet I've not been able to take stock. Old man, I must have been an awful bore."

"Oh, no—not *that*, boy!" Then, in glad relief, he fell upon his knees beside the couch, praying, in discreetly veiled language, that the pure heart of a babbler might not be held guilty for the utterances of an irresponsible head.

Yet, after many days of sane quiet and ever-renewing strength—days of long walks in the summer woods or long readings in the hammock when the shadows lay east of the big house, there came to be observed in the young man a certain moody reticence. And when the time for his return to college was near, he came again to his disquieted grandfather one day, saying:

"I think there are some matters I should speak to you about, sir." Had he used the term "old man," instead of "sir," there might still have been no cause for alarm. As it was, the grandfather regarded him in a sudden, heart-hurried fear.

“Are the matters, boy, those—those about which you may have spoken during your sickness?”

“I believe so, sir.”

The old man winced again under the “sir,” when his heart longed for the other term of playful familiarity. But he quickly assumed a lightness of manner to hide the eagerness of his heart’s appeal:

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"*Don't* talk now, boy—be advised by me. It's not well for you—you are not strong. Please let me guide you now. Go back to your studies, put all these matters from your mind—study your studies and play your play. Play harder than you study—you need it more. Play out of doors—you must have a horse to ride. You have thought too much before your time for thinking. Put away the troublesome things, and live in the flesh as a healthy boy should. Trust me. When you come to—to those matters again, they will not trouble you."

In his eagerness, first one hand had gone to the boy's shoulder, then the other, and his tones grew warm with pleading, while the keen old eyes played as a searchlight over the troubled young face.

"I must tell you at least one thing, sir."

The old man forced a smile around his trembling mouth, and again assumed his little jaunty lightness.

"Come, come, boy—not 'sir.' Call me 'old man' and you shall say anything."

But the boy was constrained, plainly in discomfort. "I—I can't call you that—just now—-sir."

"Well, if you *must*, tell me one thing—but only one! only one, mind you, boy!" In fear, but smiling, he waited.

"Well, sir, it's a shock I suffered just before I was sick. It came to me one night when I sat down to dinner—fearfully hungry. I had a thick English chop on the plate before me; and a green salad, oily in its bowl, and crisp, browned potatoes, and a mug of creamy ale. I'd gone to the place for a treat. I'd been whetting my appetite with nibbles of bread and sips of ale until the other things came; and then, even when I put my knife to the chop—like a blade pushed very slowly into my heart came the thought: 'My father is burning in hell—screaming in agony for a drop of this water which I shall not touch because I have ale. He has been in this agony for years; he will be there forever.' That was enough, sir. I had to leave the little feast. I was hungry no longer, though a moment before it had seemed that I couldn't wait for it. I walked out into the cold, raw night—walked till near daylight, with the sweat running off me. And the thing I knew all the time was this: that if I were in hell and my father in heaven, he would blaspheme God to His face for a monster and come to hell to burn with me forever—come with a joke and a song, telling me never to mind, that we'd have a fine time there in hell in spite of everything! That was what I knew of my poor, cheap, fiddle-playing mountebank of a father. Just a moment more—this is what you must remember of me, in whatever I have to say hereafter, that after that night I never ceased to suffer all the hell my father could be suffering, and I suffered it until my mind went out in that sickness. But, listen now: whatever has happened—I'm not yet sure what it is—I no

longer suffer. Two things only I know: that our creed still has my godless, scoffing, unbaptised father in hell, and that my love for him—my absolute *oneness* with him—has not lessened.

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“I’ll stop there, if you wish, leaving you to divine what other change has taken place.”

“There, there,” soothed the old man, seizing the shoulders once more with his strong grip—“no more now, boy. It was a hard thing, I know. The consciousness of God’s majesty comes often in that way, and often it overwhelms the unprepared. It was hard, but it will leave you more a man; your soul and your faith will both survive. Do what I have told you—as if you were once more the puzzled little Bernal, who never could keep his hair neatly brushed like Allan, and would always moon in corners. Go finish your course. Another year, when your mind has new fortitude from your recreated body, we will talk these matters as much as you like. Yet I will tell you one thing to remember—just one, as you have told me one: You are in a world of law, of unvarying cause and effect; and the integrity of this law cannot be destroyed, nor even impaired, by any conceivable rebellion of yours. Yet this material world of law is but the shadow of the reality, and that reality is God—the moral law if you please, as relentless, as inexorable, as immutable in its succession of cause and effect as the physical laws more apparent to us; and as little to be overthrown as physical law by any rebellion of disordered sentiment. The word of this God and this Law is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, wherein is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

“Now,” continued the old man, more lightly, “each of us has something to remember—-and let each of us pray for the other. Go, be a good boy—but careless and happy—for a year.”

The old man had his way, and the two boys went presently back to their studies.

The girl, Nancy, remembered them well for the things each had said to her.

Allan, who, though he constantly praised her, had always the effect of leaving her small to herself. “Really, Nance,” he said, “without any joking, I believe you have a capacity for living life in its larger aspects.”

And on the last day, Bernal had said, “Nance, you remember when we were both sorry you couldn’t be born again—a boy? Well, from what the old gentleman says, one learns in time to bow to the ways of an inscrutable Providence. I dare say he’s right. I can see reasons now, my girl, why it was well that you were not allowed to meddle with Heaven’s allotment of your sex. I’m glad you had to remain a girl.”

One compliment pleased her. The other made her tremble, though she laughed at it.

CHAPTER IV

A FEW LETTERS

(From Bernal Linford to the Reverend Allan Delcher.)

Dear Grandfather: The college year soon ends; also my course. I think you hoped I wouldn't want again to talk of those matters. But it isn't so. I am primed and waiting, and even you, old man, must listen to reason. The world of thought has made many revolutions since you shut yourself into that study with your weekly church paper. So be ready to hear me.

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Affectionately,
BERNAL LINFORD.

(From the Reverend Allan Delcher to Bernal Linford.)

“Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” I am sending you a little book.

GRANDFATHER.

(From Bernal Linford to the Reverend Allan Delcher.)

Dear Old Man: How am I going to thank you for the “little book”—for Butler’s Analogy? Or rather, how shall I forgive you for keeping it from me all these years? I see that you acquired it in 1863—and I never knew! I must tell you that I looked upon it with suspicion when I unwrapped it—a suspicion that the title did not allay. For I recalled the last time you gave me a book—the year before I came here. That book, my friend, was “Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.” I began it with deep respect for you. I finished with a profound distrust of all Abyssinians and an overwhelming grief for the untimely demise of Mrs. Johnson—for you had told me that the good doctor wrote this book to get money to bury her. How the circle of mourners for that estimable woman must have widened as Rasselas made its way out into the world! Oh, Grandad, if only they had been able to keep her going some way until he needn’t have done it! If only she could have been spared until her son got in a little money from the Dictionary or something!

All of which is why I viewed with unfriendly distrust your latest gift, the Analogy of Joseph Butler, late Lord Bishop of Durham. But, honestly, old man, did you know how funny it was when you sent it? It’s funnier than any of the books of Moses, without being bloody. What a dear, innocent old soul the Bishop is! How sincerely he believes he is reasoning when he is merely doing a roguish two-step down the grim corridor of the eternal verities—with a little jig here and there, and a pause to flirt his frock airily in the face of some graven image of Fact. Ah, he is so weirdly innocent. Even when his logical toes go blithely into the air, his dear old face is most resolutely solemn, and I believe he is never in the least aware of his frivolous caperings over the floor of induction. Indeed, his unconsciousness is what makes him an unfailing delight. He even makes his good old short-worded Saxon go in lilting waltz-time.

You will never know, Grandad, what this book has done for me. I am stimulated in the beginning by this: “From the vast extent of God’s dominion there must be some things beyond our comprehension, and the Christian scheme may be one of them.” And at the last I am soothed with this heart-rending *pas seul:* “Concluding remarks by which it is clearly shown that those men who can evade the force of arguments so probable for the

truth of Christianity undoubtedly possess dispositions to evil which would cause them to reject it, were it based on the most absolute demonstration." Is not that a pearl without price in this world of lawful conclusions?

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By the way, Grandad—recalling the text you quote in your last—did you know when you sent me to this university that the philosophy taught, in a general way, is that of Kant; that most university scholars smile pityingly at the Christian thesis? Did you know that belief in Genesis had been laughed away in an institution like this? With no intention of diverting you, but merely in order to acquaint you with the present state of popular opinion on a certain matter, I will tell you of a picture printed in a New York daily of yesterday. It's on the funny page. A certain weird but funny-looking beast stands before an equally funny-looking Adam, in a funny Eden, with a funny Eve and a funny Cain and Abel in the background. The animal says, "Say, Ad., what did you say my name was? I've forgotten it again." Our first male parent answers somewhat testily, as one who has been vexed by like inquiries: "Icthyosaurus, you darned fool! Can't you remember a little thing like that?"

In your youth this would doubtless have been punished as a crime. In mine it is laughed at by all classes. I tell you this to show you that the Church to-day is in the position of upholding a belief which has become meaningless because its foundation has been laughed away. Believing no longer in the god of Moses who cursed them, Christians yet assume to believe in their need of a Saviour to intercede between them and this exploded idol of terror. Unhappily, I am so made that I cannot occupy that position. To me it is not honest.

Old man, do you remember a certain saying of Squire Cumpston? It was this: "If you're going to cross the Rubicon, *cross* it! Don't wade out to the middle and stand there: you only get hell from both banks!"

And so I have crossed; I find the Squire was right about standing in the middle. Happily, or unhappily, I am compelled to believe my beliefs with all my head and all my heart. But I am confident my reasons will satisfy you when you hear them. You will see these matters *in a new light.*

Believe me, Grandad, with all love and respect,

Affectionately yours,
BERNAL LINFORD.

(From the Reverend Allan Delcher to Bernal Linford.)

My Boy: For one bitten with skepticism there is little argument—especially if he be still in youth, which is a time of raw and ready judgments and of great spiritual self-sufficiency. You wanted to go to Harvard. I wanted you to go to Princeton, because of its Presbyterianism and because, too, of Harvard's Unitarianism. We compromised on Yale—my own alma mater, as it was my father's. To my belief, this was still, especially as to its pulpit, the stronghold of orthodox Congregationalism. Was I a weak old man,

compromising with Satan? Are you to break my heart in these my broken years? For love of me, as for the love of your own soul, *pray*. Leave the God of

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Moses until your soul's stomach can take the strong meat of him—for he *is* strong meat—and come simply to Jesus, the meek and gentle—the Redeemer, who died that his blood might cleanse our sin-stained souls. Centre your aspirations upon Him, for He is the rock of our salvation, if we believe, *or the rock of our wrecking to endless torment if we disbelieve*. Do not deny our God who is Jesus, nor disown Jesus who is our God, nor yet question the inerrance of Holy Writ—yea, with its everlasting burnings. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

I am sad. I have lived too long.

GRANDFATHER.

(From Bernal Linford to the Reverend Allan Delcher.)

Grandad: It's all so plain, you must see it. I told you I had crossed to the farther bank. Here is what one finds there: Taking him as God, Jesus is ineffectual. Only as an obviously fallible human man does he become beautiful; only as a man is he dignified, worthy, great—or even plausible.

The instinct of the Jews did not mislead them. Jesus was too fine, too good, to have come from their tribal god; yet too humanly limited to have come from God, save as we all come from Him.

Since you insist that he be considered as God, I shall point out those things which make him small—as a God. I would rather consider him as a man and point out those things which make him great to me—things which I cannot read without wet eyes—but you will not consider him as man, so let him be a God, and let us see what we see. It is customary to speak of his "sacrifice." What was it? Our catechism says, "Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time."

As I write the words I wonder that the thing should ever have seemed to any one to be more than a wretched piece of God-jugglery, devoid of integrity. Are we to conceive God then as a being of carnal appetites, humiliated by being born into the family of an honest carpenter, instead of into the family of a King? This is the somewhat snobbish imputation.

Let us be done with gods playing at being human, or at being half god and half human. The time has come when, to prolong its usefulness, the Church must concede—nay, proclaim—the manhood of Jesus; must separate him from that atrocious scheme of

human sacrifice, the logical extension of a primitive Hebrew mythology—and take him in the only way that he commands attention: As a man, one of the world's great spiritual teachers. Insisting upon his godship can only make him preposterous to the modern mind. Jesus, born to a carpenter's wife of Nazareth, declares himself, one day about his thirtieth year, to be the Christ, the second person

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in the universe, who will come in a cloud of glory to judge the world. He will save into everlasting life those who believe him to be of divine origin. Yet he has been called meek! Surely never was a more arrogant character in history—never one less meek than this carpenter's son who ranks himself second only to God, with power to send into everlasting hell those who disbelieve him! He went abroad in fine arrogance, railing at lawyers and the rich, rebuking, reproving, hurling angry epithets, attacking what we to-day call "the decent element." He called the people constantly "Fools," "Blind Leaders of the Blind," "faithless and perverse," "a generation of vipers," "sinful," "evil and adulterous," "wicked," "hypocrites," "whited sepulchres."

As the god he worshipped was a tribal god, so he at first believed himself to be a tribal saviour. He directed his disciples thus: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—(who emphatically rejected and slew him for his pretensions). To the woman of Canaan whose daughter was vexed with a devil, he said: "It is not meet to take the children's bread to cast it to dogs." Imagine a God calling a woman a dog *because she was not of his own tribe!*

And the vital test of godhood he failed to meet: It is his own test, whereby he disproves his godship out of his own mouth. Compare these sayings of Jesus, each typical of him:

"Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Yet he said to his Twelve:

"And whosoever shall not receive you nor hear you, when you depart thence shake off the dust of your feet for a testimony against them."

Is that the consistency of a God or a man?

Again: "Blessed are the merciful," *but* "Verily I say unto you it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." Is this the mercy which he tells us is blessed?

Again: "And as ye would that men should do to you do ye also to them likewise." Another: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida ... and thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell." Is not this preaching the golden rule and practicing something else, as a man might?

Again: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” That, sir, is a sentiment that proves the claim of Jesus to be a teacher of morals. Here is one which, placed beside it, proves him to have been a man.

“*Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the son of man also confess before the angels of God*;

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"*but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father, which is in heaven.*"

Is it God speaking—or man? "*Do not even the publicans so?*"

Beside this very human contradiction, it is hardly worth while to hear him say "Resist not evil," yet make a scourge of cords to drive the money-changers from the temple in a fit of rage, human—but how ungodlike!

Believe me, the man Jesus is better than the god Jesus; the man is worth while, for all his inconsistencies, partly due to his creed and partly to his emotional nature. Indeed, we have not yet risen to the splendour of his ideal—even the preachers will not preach it.

And the miracles? We need say nothing of those, I think. If a man disprove his godship out of his own mouth, we shall not be convinced by a coin in a fish's mouth or by his raising Lazarus, four days dead. So long as he says, "I will confess him that confesseth me and deny him that denieth me," we should know him for one of us, though he rose from the dead before our eyes.

Then at the last you will say, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Well, sir, the fruits of Christianity are what one might expect. You will say it stands for the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. That it has always done the reverse is Christianity's fundamental defect, and its chief absurdity in this day when the popular unchurchly conception of God has come to be one of some dignity.

"That ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." There is the rock of separation upon which the Church builded; the rock upon which it will presently split. The god of the Jews set a difference between Israel and Egypt. So much for the fatherhood of God. The Son sets the same difference, dividing the sheep from the goats, according to the opinions they form of his claim to godship. So much for the brotherhood of man. Christianity merely caricatures both propositions. Nor do I see how we can attain any worthy ideal of human brotherhood while this Christianity prevails: We must be sheep and goats among ourselves, some in heaven, some in hell, still seeking out reasons "Why the Saints in Glory Should Rejoice at the Sufferings of the Damned." We shall be saints and sinners, sated and starving. A God who separates them in some future life will have children that separate themselves here upon His own very excellent authority. That is why one brother of us must work himself to death while another idles himself to death—because God has set a difference, and his Son after him, and the Church after that. The defect in social Christendom to-day, sir, is precisely this defect of the Christian faith—its separation, its failure to teach what it chiefly boasts of teaching. We have, in consequence, a society of thinly veneered predatoriness. And this, I believe, is why our society is quite as unstable today as the Church itself. They are both awakening to a new truth—which is *not* separation.

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The man who is proud of our Christian civilisation has ideals susceptible of immense elevation. Christianity has more souls in its hell and fewer in its heaven than any other religion whatsoever. Naturally, Christian society is one of extremes and of gross injustice—of oppression and indifference to suffering. And so it will be until this materialism of separation is repudiated: until we turn seriously to the belief that men are truly brothers, not one of whom can be long happy while any other suffers.

Come, Grandad, let us give up this God of Moses. Doubtless he was good enough for the early Jews, but man has always had to make God in his own image, and you and I need a better one, for we both surpass this one in all spiritual values—in love, in truth, in justice, in common decency—as much as Jesus surpassed the unrepentant thief at his side. Remember that an honest, fearless search for truth has led to all the progress we can measure over the brutes. Why must it lose the soul?

BERNAL.

(From the Reverend Allan Delcher to Bernal Linford.)

My boy, I shall not believe you are sane until I have seen you face to face. I cannot believe you have fallen a victim to Universalism, which is like the vale of Siddim, full of slime-pits. I am an old man, and my mind goes haltingly, yet that is what I seem to glean from your rambling screed. Come when you are through, for I must see you once more.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.”

Lastly—doubt in infinite things is often wise, but doubt of God must be blasphemy, else he would not be God, the all-perfect.

I pray it may be your mind is still sick—and recall to you these words of one I will not now name to you: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

ALLAN DELCHER.

CHAPTER V

“IS THE HAND OF THE LORD WAXED SHORT?”

A dismayed old man, eagerly trying to feel incredulous, awaited the home-coming of his grandsons at the beginning of that vacation.

Was the hand of the Lord waxed short, that so utter a blasphemer—unless, indeed, he were possessed of a devil—could walk in the eye of Jehovah, and no breach be made upon him? Even was the world itself so lax in these days that one speaking thus could go free? If so, then how could God longer refrain from drowning the world again? The human baseness of the blaspheming one and the divine toleration that permitted it were alike incredible.

A score of times the old man nerved himself to laugh away his fears. It could not be. The young mind was still disordered.

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On the night of the home-coming he greeted the youth quite as if all were serene within him, determined to be in no haste and to approach the thing lightly on the morrow—in the fond hope that a mere breath of authority might blow it away.

And when, the next morning, they both drifted to the study, the old man called up the smile that made his wrinkles sunny, and said in light tones, above the beating of an anxious heart:

“So it’s your theory, boy, that we must all be taken down with typhoid before we can be really wise in matters of faith?”

But the youth answered, quite earnestly:

“Yes, sir; I really believe nothing less than that would clear most minds—especially old ones. You see, the brain is a muscle and thought is its physical exercise. It learns certain thoughts—to go through certain exercises. These become a habit, and in time the muscle becomes stiff and incapable of learning any new movements—also incapable of leaving off the old. The religion of an old person is merely so much reflex nervous action. It is beyond the reach of reason. The individual’s mind can affect it as little as it can teach the other muscles of his body new suppleness.”

He spoke with a certain restrained nervousness that was not reassuring. But the old man would not yet be rebuffed from his manner of lightness.

“Then, wanting an epidemic of typhoid, we of the older generation must die in error.”

“Yes, sir—I doubt even the efficacy of typhoid in most cases; it’s as difficult for an old person to change a habit of thought as to take the wrinkles from his face. That is why what we very grandly call ’fighting for the truth’ or ‘fighting for the Lord’ is merely fighting for our own little notions; they have become so vital to us and we call them ‘truth.’”

The youth stopped, with a palpable air of defiance, before which the old man’s assumption of ease and lightness was at last beaten down. He had been standing erect by the table, still with the smile toning his haggardness. Now the smile died; the whole man sickened, lost life visibly, as if a dozen years of normal aging were condensed into the dozen seconds.

He let himself go into the big chair, almost as if falling, his head bowed, his eyes dulled to a look of absence, his arms falling weakly over the chair’s sides. A sigh that was almost a groan seemed to tell of pain both in body and mind.

Bernal stood awkwardly regarding him, then his face lighted with a sudden pity.

“But I thought *you* could understand, sir; I thought you were different; you have been like a chum to me. When I spoke of old persons it never occurred to me that you could

fall into that class! I never knew you to be unjust, or unkind, or—narrow—perhaps I should say, unsympathetic."

The other gave no sign of hearing.

"My body was breaking so fast—and you break my heart!"

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“There you are, sir,” began the youth, a little excitedly. “Your heart is breaking *not* because I’m not good, but because I form a different opinion from yours of a man rising from the dead, after he has been crucified to appease the anger of his father.”

“God help me! I’m so human. I *can’t* feel toward you as I should. Boy, I *won’t* believe you are sane.” He looked up in a sudden passion of hope. “I won’t believe Christ died in vain for my girl’s little boy. Bernal, boy, you are still sick of that fever!”

The other smiled, his youthful scorn for the moment overcoming his deeper feeling for his listener.

“Then I must talk more. Now, sir, for God’s sake let us have the plain truth of the crucifixion. Where was the sacrifice? Can you not picture the mob that would fight for the honour of crucifixion to-morrow, if it were known that the one chosen would sit at the right hand of God and judge all the world? I say there was no sacrifice, even if Christian dogma be literal truth. Why, sir, I could go into the street and find ten men in ten minutes who would be crucified a hundred times to save the souls of us from hell—*not* if they were to be rewarded with a seat on the throne of God where they could send into hell those who did not believe in them—but for no reward whatever—out of a sheer love for humanity. Don’t you see, sir, that we have magnified that crucifixion out of all proportion to the plainest truth of our lives? You know I would die on a cross to-day, not to redeem the world, but to redeem one poor soul—your own. If you deny that, at least you won’t dare deny that you would go on the cross to redeem *my* soul from hell—the soul of one man—and do you think you would demand a reward for doing it, beyond knowing that you had ransomed me from torment? Would it be necessary to your happiness that you also have the power to send into hell all those who were not able to believe you had actually died for me?

“One moment more, sir—” The thin, brown, old hand had been raised in trembling appeal, while the lips moved without sound.

“You see every day in the papers how men die for other men, for one man, for two, a dozen! Why, sir, you know you would die to save the lives of five little children—their bare carnal lives, mind you, to say nothing of their immortal souls. I believe I’d die myself to save two thousand—I *know* I would to save three—if their faces were clean and they looked funny enough and helpless. Here, in this morning’s paper, a negro labourer, going home from his work in New York yesterday, pushed into safety one of those babies that are always crawling around on railroad tracks. He had time to see that he could get the baby off but not himself, and then he went ahead. Doubtless it was a very common baby, and certainly he was a very common man. Why, I could go down to Sing Sing tomorrow, and I’ll stake my own soul that in the whole cageful of criminals there isn’t one who would not eagerly submit to crucifixion if he believed that he would thereby ransom the race from hell. And he wouldn’t want the power to damn the unbelievers, either. He would insist upon saving them with the others.”

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“Oh, God, forgive this insane passion in my boy!”

“It was passion, sir—” he spoke with a sudden relenting—“but try to remember that I’ve sought the truth honestly.”

“You degrade the Saviour.”

“No; I only raise man out of the muck of Christian belief about him. If common men all might live lives of greater sacrifice than Jesus did, without any pretensions to the supernatural, it only means that we need a new embodiment for our ideals. If we find it in man—in God’s creature—so much the better for man and so much the more glory to God, who has not then bungled so wretchedly as Christianity teaches.”

“God forgive you this tirade—I know it is the sickness.”

“I shall try to speak calmly, sir—but how much longer can an educated clergy keep a straight face to speak of this wretchedly impotent God? Christians of a truth have had to bind their sense of humour as the Chinese bound their women’s feet. But the laugh is gathering even now. Your religion is like a tree that has lain long dead in the forest—-firm wood to the eye but dust to the first blow. And this is how it will go—from a laugh—not through the solemn absurdities of the so-called higher criticism, the discussing of this or that miracle, the tracing of this or that myth of fall or deluge or immaculate conception or trinity to its pagan sources; not that way, when before the inquiring mind rises the sheer materialism of the Christian dogma, bristling with absurdities—its vain bungling God of one tribe who crowns his career of impotencies—in all but the art of slaughter—by instituting the sacrifice of a Son begotten of a human mother, to appease his wrath toward his own creatures; a God who even by this pitiful device can save but a few of us. Was ever god so powerless? Do you think we who grow up now do not detect it? Is it not time to demand a God of virtue, of integrity, of ethical dignity—a religion whose test shall be moral, and not the opinion one forms of certain alleged material phenomena?”

When he had first spoken the old man cowered low and lower in his chair, with little moans of protest at intervals, perhaps a quick, almost gasping, “God forgive him!” or a “Lord have mercy!” But as the talk went on he became slowly quieter, his face grew firmer, he sat up in his chair, and at the last he came to bend upon the speaker a look that made him falter confusedly and stop.

“I can say no more, sir; I should not have said so much. Oh, Grandad, I wouldn’t have hurt you for all the world, yet I had to let you know why I could not do what you had planned—and I was fool enough to think I could justify myself to you!”

The old eyes still blazed upon him with a look of sorrow and of horror that was yet, first of all, a look of power; the look of one who had mastered himself to speak calmly while enduring uttermost pain.

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“I am glad you have spoken. You were honest to do so. It was my error not to be convinced at first, and thus save myself a shock I could ill bear. But you have been sick, and I felt that I should not believe without seeing you. I had built so much—so many years—on your preaching the gospel of—of my Saviour. This hope has been all my life these last years—now it is gone. But I have no right to complain. You are free; I have no claim upon you; and I shall be glad to provide for you—to educate you further for any profession you may have chosen—to start you in any business—away from here—from this house—”

The young man flushed—wincing under this, but answered:

“Thank you, sir. I could hardly take anything further. I don’t know what I want to do, what I can do—I’m at sea now. But I will go. I’m sure only that I want to get out—away—I will take a small sum to go with—I know you would be hurt more if I didn’t; enough to get me away—far enough away.”

He went out, his head bowed under the old man’s stern gaze. But when the latter had stepped to the door and locked it, his fortitude was gone. Helplessly he fell upon his knees before the big chair—praying out his grief in hard, dry sobs that choked and shook his worn body.

When Clytie knocked at the door an hour later, he was dry-eyed and apparently serene, but busy with papers at his table.

“Is it something bad about Bernal, Mr. Delcher,” she asked, “that he’s going away so queer and sudden?”

“*You* pray for him, too, Clytie—you love him—but it’s nothing to talk of.”

But the alarm of Clytemnestra was not to be put down by this.

“Oh, Mr. Delcher—” a look of horror grew big in her eyes—“You don’t mean to say he’s gone and joined the Universalists?”

The old man shook his head.

“And he ain’t a *Unitarian*?”

“No, Clytie; but our boy has been to college and it has left him rather un—unconforming in some little matters—some details—doubtless his doctrine is sound at core.”

“But I supposed he’d learn everything off at that college, only I know he never got fed half enough. What with all its studies and football and clubs and things I thought it was as good as a liberal education.”

“Too liberal, sometimes! Pray for Bernal—and we won’t talk about it again, Clytie, if you please.”

Presently came Allan, who had heard the news.

“Bernal tells me he will not enter the ministry, sir; that he is going away.”

“We have decided that is best.”

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“You know, sir, I have suspected for some time that Bernal was not as sound doctrinally as you could wish. His mind, if I may say it, is a peculiarly literal one. He seems to lack a certain spiritual comprehensiveness—an enveloping intuition, so to say, of the spiritual value in a material fact. During that unhappy agitation for the revision of our creed, I have heard him, touching the future state of unbaptised infants, utter sentiments of a heterodoxy that was positively effeminate in its sentimentality—sentiments which I shall not pain you by repeating. He has often referred, moreover, with the same disordered sentimentality, to the sad fate of our father—about whose present estate no churchman can have any doubt. And then about our belief that even good works are an abomination before God if performed by the unregenerate, the things I have heard him —”

“Yes—yes—let us not talk of it further. Did you wish to see me especially, Allan?”

“Well, yes, sir, I *had* wished to, and perhaps now is the best moment. I wanted to ask you, sir, how you would regard my becoming an Episcopalian. I am really persuaded that its form of worship, translating as it does so *much* of the spiritual verity of life into visible symbols, is a form better calculated than the Presbyterian to appeal to the great throbbing heart of humanity. I hope I may even say, without offense, sir, that it affords a wider scope, a broader sweep, a more stimulating field of endeavour, to one who may have a capacity for the life of larger aspects. In short, sir, I believe there is a great future for me in that church.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if there was,” answered the old man, who had studied his face closely during the speech. Yet he spoke with an extreme dryness of tone that made the other look quickly up.

“It shall be as you wish,” he continued, after a meditative pause—“I believe you are better calculated for that church than for mine. Obey your call.”

CHAPTER VI

IN THE FOLLY OF HIS YOUTH

At early twilight Bernal, sore at heart for the pain he had been obliged to cause the old man, went to the study-door for a last word with him.

“I believe there is no one above whose forgiveness I need, sir—but I shall always be grieved if I can’t have yours. I *do* need that.”

The old man had stood by the open door as if meaning to cut short the interview.

“You have it. I forgive you any hurt you have done me; it was due quite as much to my limitations as to yours. For that other forgiveness, which you will one day know is more than mine—I—I shall always pray for that.”

He stopped, and the other waited awkwardly, his heart rushing out in ineffectual flood against the old man’s barrier of stern restraint. For a moment he made folds in his soft hat with a fastidious precision. Finally he nerved himself to say calmly:

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“I thank you, sir, for all you have done—all you have ever done for me and for Allan—-and, good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

Though there was no hint of unkindness in the old man’s voice, something formal in his manner had restrained the other from offering his hand. Still loath to go without it, he said again more warmly:

“Good-bye, sir!”

“Good-bye!”

This time he turned and went slowly down the dim hall, still making the careful folds in his hat, as if he might presently recall something that would take him back. At the foot of the stairs he stopped quickly to listen, believing he had heard a call from above; but nothing came and he went out. Still in the door upstairs was the old man—stern of face, save that far back in his eyes a kind spirit seemed to strive ineffectually.

Across the lawn from her hammock Nancy called to Bernal. He went slowly toward her, still suffering from the old man’s coldness—and for the hurts he had unwittingly put upon him.

The girl, as he went forward, stood to greet him, her gown, sleeveless, neckless, taking the bluish tinge that early twilight gives to snow, a tinge that deepened to dusk about her eyes and in her hair. She gave him her hand and at once he felt a balm poured into his tortured heart. After all, men were born to hurt and be hurt.

He sat in the rustic chair opposite the hammock, looking into Nancy’s black-lashed eyes of the Irish gray, noting that from nineteen to twenty her neck had broadened at the base the least one might discern, that her face was less full yet richer in suggestion—-her face of the odds and ends when she did not smile. At this moment she was not only unsmiling, but excited.

“Oh, Bernal, what is it? Tell me quick. Allan was so vague—though he said he’d always stand by you, no matter what you did. What *have* you done, Bernal? Is it a college scrape?”

“Oh, that’s only Allan’s big-hearted way of talking! He’s so generous and loyal I think he’s often been disappointed that I didn’t do something, so he *could* stand by me. No—no scrapes, Nance, honour bright!”

“But you’re leaving—”

“Well, in a way I have done something. I’ve found I couldn’t be a minister as Grandad had set his heart on my being—”

“But if you haven’t done anything wicked, why not?”

“Oh, I’m not a believer.”

“In what?”

“In anything, I think—except, well, in you and Grandad and—and Allan and Clytie—yes, and in myself, Nance. That’s a big point. I believe in myself.”

“And you’re going because you don’t believe in other things?”

“Yes, or because I believe too much—just as you like to put it. I demanded a better God of Grandad, Nance—one that didn’t create hell and men like me to fill it just for the sake of scaring a few timid mortals into heaven.”

“You know Aunt Bell is an unbeliever. She says no one with an open mind can live twenty years in Boston without being vastly broadened—’broadening into the higher unbelief,’ she calls it. She says she has passed through nearly every stage of unbelief there is, but that she feels the Lord is going to bring her back at last to rest in the shadow of the Cross.”

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As Aunt Bell could be heard creaking heavily in a willow rocker on the piazza near-by, the young man suppressed a comment that arose within him.

“Only, unbelievers are apt to be fatiguing” the girl continued, in a lower tone. “You know Aunt Bell’s husband, Uncle Chester—the meekest, dearest little man in the world, he was—well, once he disappeared and wasn’t heard of again for over four years—except that they knew his bank account was drawn on from time to time. Then, at last, his brother found him, living quietly under an assumed name in a little town outside of Boston—pretending that he hadn’t a relative in the world. He told his brother he was just beginning to feel rested. Aunt Bell said he was demented. While he was away she’d been all through psychometry, the planchette, clairvoyance, palmistry, astrology, and Unitarianism. What are you, Bernal?”

“Nothing, Nance—that’s the trouble.”

“But where are you going, and what for?”

“I don’t know either answer—but I can’t stay here, because I’m blasphemous—it seems—and I don’t want to stay, even if I weren’t sent. I want to be out—away. I feel as if I must be looking for something I haven’t found. I suspect it’s a fourth dimension to religion. They have three—even breadth—but they haven’t found faith yet—a faith that doesn’t demand arbitrary signs, parlour-magic, and bloody, weird tales in a book that becomes their idol.”

The girl looked at him long in silence, swaying a little in the hammock, a bare elbow in one hand, her meditative chin in the other, the curtains of her eyes half-drawn, as if to let him in a little at a time before her wonder. Then, at last:

“Why, you’re another Adam—being sent out of the garden for your sin. Now tell me—-honest—was the sin worth it? I’ve often wondered.” She gave an eager little laugh.

“Why, Nance, it’s worth so much that you want to go of your own accord. Do you suppose Adam could have stayed in that fat, lazy, silly garden after he became alive—-with no work, no knowledge, no adventure, no chance to do wrong? As for earning his bread—the only plausible hell I’ve ever been able to picture is one where there was nothing to do—no work, no puzzling, no chances to take, no necessity of thinking. Now, isn’t that an ideal hell? And is it my fault if it happens to be a description of what Christians look forward to as heaven? I tell you, Adam would have gone out of that garden from sheer boredom after a few days. The setting of the angel with the flaming sword to guard the gate shows that God still failed to understand the wonderful creature he had made.”

She smiled, meditative, wondering.

“I dare say, for my part, I’d have eaten that apple if the serpent had been at all persuasive. Bernal, I wonder—and wonder—and wonder—I’m never done. And Aunt Bell says I’ll never be a sweet and wholesome and stimulating companion to my husband, if I don’t stop being so vague and fantastic.”

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“What does she call being vague and fantastic?”

“Not wanting any husband.”

“Oh!”

“Bernal, it’s like the time that you ran off when you were a wee thing—to be bad.”

“And you cried because I wouldn’t take you with me.”

“I can feel the woe of it yet.”

“You’re dry-eyed now, Nance.”

“Yes—and the pink parasol and the buff shoes I meant to take with me are also things of the past. Mercy! The idea of going off with an unbeliever to be bad and—everything! ’The happy couple are said to look forward to a life of joyous wickedness, several interesting crimes having been planned for the coming season. For their honeymoon infamy they will perpetrate a series of bank-robberies along the Maine coast.’ There—-how would that sound?”

“You’re right, Nance—I wouldn’t take you this time either, even if you cried. And your little speech is funny and all that—but Nance, I believe, these last years, we’ve both thought of things now and then—things, you know—things to think of and not talk of—-and see here—The man was driven out of the garden—but not the woman. She isn’t mentioned. She could stay there—”

“Until she got tired of it herself?”

“Until the man came back for her.”

He thought her face was glowing duskily in the twilight.

“I wonder—wonder about so many things,” she said softly.

“I believe you’re a sleeping rebel yourself, Nance. If ever you do eat from that tree, there’ll be no holding you. You won’t wait to be driven forth!”

“And you are, a wicked young man—that kind never comes back in the stories.”

“That may be no jest, Nance. I should surely be wicked, if I thought it brings the happiness it’s said to. Under this big sky I am free from any moral law that doesn’t come from right here inside me. Can you realize that? Do I seem bad for saying it? What they call the laws of God are nothing. I suspect them all, and I’ll make every one of them find its authority in me before I obey it.”

“It sounds—well—unpromising, Bernal.”

“I told you it was serious, Nance. I see but one law clearly—I am bound to want happiness. Every man is bound always to want happiness, Nance. No man can possibly want anything else. That’s the only thing under heaven I’m sure of at this moment—the one universal law under which we all make our mistakes—good people and bad alike?”

“But, Bernal, you wouldn’t be bad—not really bad?”

“Well, Nance, I’ve a vague, loose sort of notion that one isn’t really compelled to be bad in order to be happy right here on earth. I know the Church rather intimates this, but I suspect that vice is not the delicious thing the Church implies it to be.”

“You make me afraid, Bernal—”

“But if I do come back, Nance, having toiled?”

“—and you make me wonder.”

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“I think that’s all either of us can do, Nance, and I must go. I have to say good-bye to Clytie yet. The poor soul is convinced that I have become a Unitarian and that there’s a conspiracy to keep the horrible truth from her. She says grandad evaded her questions about it. She doesn’t dream there are depths below Unitarianism. I must try to convince her that I’m not *that* bad—that I may have a weak head and a defective heart, but not that. Nance—girl!”

He sat forward in the chair, reaching toward her. She turned her face away, but their hands trembled toward each other, faltering fearfully, tremulously, into a clasp that became at once firm and knowing when it felt itself—as if it opened their blind eyes to a world of life and light without end, a world in which they two were the first to live.

Lingeringly, with slow, regretting fingers, the hands fell apart, to tighten eagerly again into the clasp that made them one flesh.

When at last they were put asunder both arose. The girl patted from her skirts the hammock’s little disarranging touches, while the youth again made the careful folds in his hat. Then they shook hands very stiffly, and went opposite ways out of a formal garden of farewell; the youth to sate that beautiful, crude young lust for living—too fierce to be tamed save by its own failures, hearing only the sagas of action, of form and colour and sound made one by heat—the song Nature sings unendingly—but heard only by young ears.

The girl went back to the Crealock piazza to hear of one better set in the grace of faith.

“That elder young Linford,” began Aunt Bell, ceasing to rock, “has a future. You know I talked to him about the Episcopal Church, strongly advising him to enter it. For all my broad views”—Aunt Bell sighed here—“I really and truly believe, child, that no one not an Episcopalian is ever thoroughly at ease in this world.”

Aunt Bell was beautifully, girlishly plump, with a sophisticated air of smartness—of coquetry, indeed—as to her exquisitely small hands and feet; and though a certain suggestion of melancholy in her tone harmonised with the carefully dressed gray hair and with her apparent years, she nevertheless breathed airs of perfect comfort.

“Of course this young chap could see at once,” she went on, “what immensely better form it is than Calvinism. *Dear* me! Imagine one being a Presbyterian in this day!” It seemed here that the soul of Aunt Bell poised a disdainful lorgnette before its eyes, through which to survey in a fitting manner the unmodish spectacle of Calvinism.

“And he tells me that he has his grandfather’s consent. Really, my dear, with his physique and voice and manner that fellow undoubtedly has a future in the Episcopal Church. I dare say he’ll be wearing the lawn sleeves and rochet of a bishop before he’s forty.”

“Did it ever occur to you, Aunt Bell, that he is—well, just the least trifle—I was going to say, vain of his appearance—but I’ll make it ’self-conscious’?”

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“Child, don’t you know that a young man, really beautiful without being effeminate, is bound to be conscious of it. But vain he is not. It mortifies him dreadfully, though he pretends to make light of it.”

“But why speak of it so often? He was telling me to-day of an elderly Englishman who addressed him on the train, telling him what a striking resemblance he bore to the Prince of Wales when he was a youth.”

“Quite so; and he told me yesterday of hearing a lady in the drug-store ask the clerk who ‘that handsome stranger’ was. But, my dear, he tells them as jokes on himself, and he’s so sheepish about it. And he’s such a splendid orator. I persuaded him to-day to read me one of his college papers. I don’t seem to recall much of the substance, but it was full of the most beautiful expressions. One, I remember, begins, ’Oh, of all the flowers that swing their golden censers in the parterre of the human heart, none so rich, so rare as this one flower of—’ you know I’ve forgotten what it was—Civilisation or Truth or something. Anyway, whatever it was, it had like a giant engine rolled the car of Civilisation out from the maze of antiquity, where she now waits to be freighted with the precious fruits of living genius, and so on.”

“That seems impressive and—mixed, perhaps?”

“Of course I can’t remember things in their order, but it was about the essential nature of man being gregarious, and truth is a potent factor in civilisation, and something would be a tear on the world’s cold cheek to make it burn forever—isn’t that striking? And Greece had her Athens and her Corinth, but where now is Greece with her proud cities? And Rome, Imperial Rome, with all her pomp and splendour. Of course I can’t recall his words. There was a beautiful reference to America, I remember, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the lakes of the frozen North to the ever-tepid waters of the sunny South—and a perfectly splendid passage about the world is and ever has been illiberal. Witness the lonely lamp of Erasmus, the cell of Galileo, the dying bed of Pascal, the scaffold of Sidney—Sidney who, I wonder?”

“Has it taken you that way, Aunt Bell?”

“And France, the saddest example of a nation without a God, and succeeding generations will only add a new lustre to our present resplendent glory, bound together by the most sacred ties of goodwill; independent, yet acknowledging the sovereignty of Omnipotence, and it was fraught with vital interest to every thinking man—”

“Spare me, Aunt Bell—it’s like Coney Island, with all those carrousels going around and five bands playing at once!”

“But his peroration! I can’t pretend to give you any idea of its beauties—”

“Don’t!”

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“Get him to declaim it for you. It begins in the most impressive language about his standing on top of the Rocky Mountains one day and placing his feet upon a solid rock, he saw a tempest gathering in the valley far below. So he watches the storm—in his own language, of course—while all around him is sunshine. And such should be our aim in life, to plant our feet on the solid rock of—how provoking! I can’t remember what the rock was—anyway, we are to bid those in the valley below to cease their bickerings and come up to the rock—I think it was Intellectual Greatness—No!—Unselfishness—-that’s it. And the title of the paper was a sermon in itself—’The Temporal Advantage of the Individual No Norm of Morality.’ Isn’t that a beautiful thought in itself? Nancy, that chap will waste himself until he has a city parish.”

There was silence for a little time before Aunt Bell asked, as one having returned to baser matters:

“I wonder if the jacket of my gray suit came back from that clumsy tailor. I forgot to ask Ellen if an express package came.”

And Nancy, whose look was bent far into the dusk, answered:

“Oh, I wonder if he will come back!”

BOOK THREE

The Age of Faith

[Illustration]

CHAPTER I

THE PERVERSE BEHAVIOUR OF AN OLD MAN AND A YOUNG MAN

When old Allan Delcher slept with his fathers—being so found in the big chair, with the worn, leather-bound Bible open in his lap—the revived but still tender faith of Aunt Bell Hardwick was bitten as by frost. And this though the Bible had lain open at that psalm in which David is said to describe the corruption of a natural man—a psalm beginning, “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

For it straightway appeared that the dead man had in life done a perverse and inexplicable thing, to the bitter amazement of those who had learned to trust him. On the day after he sent a blasphemous grandson from his door he had called for Squire Cumpston, announcing to the family his intention to make an entirely new will—a thing for which there seemed to be a certain sad necessity.

When he could no longer be reproached it transpired that he had left “to Allan Delcher Linford, son of one Clayton Linford,” a beggarly pittance of five thousand dollars; and “to my beloved grandson, Bernal Linford, I give, devise and bequeath the residue of my estate, both real and personal.”

Though the husband of her niece wore publicly a look of faith unimpaired, and was thereby an example to her, Aunt Bell declared herself to be once more on the verge of believing that the proofs of an overseeing Providence, all-wise and all-loving, were by no means overwhelming; that they were, indeed, of so frail a validity that she could not wonder at people falling away from the Church. It was a trying time for

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Aunt Bell. She felt that her return to the shadow of the cross was not being made enough of by the One above. After years of running after strange gods, the Episcopal service as administered by Allan had prevailed over her seasoned skepticism: through its fascinating leaven of romance—with faint and, as it seemed to her, wholly reverent hints of physical culture—the spirit may be said to have blandished her. And now this turpitude in a man of God came to disturb the first tender rootlings of her new faith.

The husband of her niece had loyally endeavoured to dissuade her from this too human reaction.

“God has chosen to try me for a purpose, Aunt Bell,” he said very simply. “I ought to be proud of it—eager for any test—and I am. True, in these last years I had looked upon grandfather’s fortune as mine—not only by implied promise, but by all standards of right—even of integrity. For surely a man could not more nearly forfeit his own rights, in every moral aspect, than poor Bernal has—though I meant always to stand by him. So you see, I must conclude that God means to distinguish me by a test. He may even subject me to others; but I shall not wince. I shall welcome His trials. He turned upon her the face of simple faith.”

“Did you speak to that lawyer about the possibility of a contest—of proving unsound mind?”

“I did, but he saw no chance whatever.”

Aunt Bell hereupon surveyed her beautifully dimpled knuckles minutely, with an affectionate pride—a pride not uncritical, yet wholly convinced.

“Of course,” added Allan after a moment’s reflection, “there’s no sense in believing that every bit of one’s hard luck is sent by God to test one. One must in all reverence take every precaution to prove that the disaster is not humanly remediable. And this, I may say, I have done with thoroughness—with great thoroughness.”

“Bernal may be dead,” suggested Aunt Bell, brightening now from an impartial admiring of the toes of her small, plump slippers.

“God forbid that he should be cut off in his unbelief—but then, God’s will be done. If that be true, of course, the matter is different. Meantime we are advertising.”

“I wish I had your superb faith, Allan. I wish Nancy had it....”

Her niece’s husband turned his head and shoulders until she had the three-quarters view of his face.

“I have faith, Aunt Bell. God knows my unworthiness, even as you know it and I know it—but I have faith!”

The golden specks in his hazel eyes blazed with humility, and a flush of the same virtue mantled his perfect brow.

Such news of Bernal Linford as had come back to Edom, though meagre and fragmentary, was of a character to confirm the worst fears of those who loved him. The first report came within a year after his going, and caused a shaking of many heads.

An estimable farmer, one Caleb Webster, living on the outskirts of Edom, had, in a blameless spirit of adventure, toured the Far West, at excursion rates said to be astounding for cheapness. He had met the unfortunate young man in one of the newer mining towns along his exciting route.

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“He was kind of nursin’ a feller that had the consumption,” ran the gossip of Mr. Webster, “some one he’d fell in with out in them parts, that had gone there to git cured. But, High Mighty! the way them two carried on at all hours wasn’t goin’ to cure no one of nothin’! Specially gamblin’, which was done right in public, you might say, though the sharpers never skinned me none, I’ll say that! But these two was at it every night, and finally they done just like I told the young fools they’d do—they lost all they had. They come into the Commercial House one night where I was settin’ lookin’ over a time-table, both seemin’ down in the mouth. And all to once this sick young man—Mr. Hoover, his name was—bust out cryin’—him bein’ weak or mebbe in liquor or somethin’.

“‘Every cent lost!’ he says, the tears runnin’ down those yellow, sunk cheeks of his. But Bernal seems to git chipper again when he sees how Mr. Hoover is takin’ it, so he says, ’Haven’t you got a cent left, Hoover? Haven’t you got anythin’ at all left? Just think,’ he says, ’what I stood to win on that last turn, if it’d come my way—at four to one,’ he says, or somethin’ like that; them gamblin’ terms is too much for me. ‘Hain’t you got nothin’ at all left?’ he says.

“Then this Hoover—still cryin’, mind you—he says, ’Not a cent in the world except forty dollars in my trunk upstairs that I saved out to bury me with—and they won’t send me another cent,’ he says, ’because I tried ‘em.’

“It sounded awful to hear him talkin’ like that about his own buryin’, but it didn’t phase Bernal none.

“‘Forty dollars!’ he says, kind of sniffy like. ’Why, man, what could you do for forty dollars? Don’t you know such things are very outrageous in price here? Forty *dollars* —why,’ he says, ’the very best you could do would be one of these plain pine things with black cloth tacked on to it, and pewter trimmin’s if *any*,’ he says. ’Think of *pewter* trimmin’s!’

“‘Say,’ he says, when Hoover begun to look up at him, ’you run and dig up your old forty and I’ll go back right now and win you out a full satin-lined, silver-trimmed one, polished mahogany and gold name-plate, and there’ll be enough for a clock of immortelles with the hands stopped at just the hour it happens,’ he says. ‘And you want to hurry,’ he says, ‘it ought to be done right away—with that cough of yours.’

“Me? Gosh, I felt awful—I wanted to drop right through the floor, but this Hoover, he says all at once, still snufflin’, mind you: ’Say, that’s all right,’ he says. ‘If I’m goin’ to do it at all, I ought to do it right for the credit of my folks. I ought to give this town a flash of the right thing,’ he says.

“Then he goes upstairs, leaning on the balusters, and gets his four ten-dollar bills that had been folded away all neat at the bottom of his trunk, and before I could think of anythin’ wholesome to say—I was that scandalised—they was goin’ off across the street

to the Horseshoe Gamin' Parlour, this feller Hoover seemin' very sanguine and asking Bernal whether he was sure they was a party in town could do it up right after they'd went and won the money for it.

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“Well, sir, I jest set there thinkin’ how this boy Bernal Linford was brought up for a preacher, and ‘Jest look at him now!’ I says to myself—and I guess it was mebbe an hour later I seen ’em comin’ out of the swingin’ blinds in the door of this place, and a laffin’ fit to kill themselves. ‘High Mighty! they done it!’ I says, watchin’ ’em laff and slap each other on the back till Hoover had to stop in the middle of the street to cough. Well, they come into the Commercial office where I am and I says, ‘Well, boys, how much did you fellers win?’ and Hoover says, ‘Not a cent! We lost our roll,’ he says. ’It’s the blamedest funniest thing I ever heard of,’ he says, just like that, laffin’ again fit to choke.

“‘*I* don’t see anythin’ to laff at,’ I says. ‘How you goin’ to live?’

“‘How’s he goin’ to die?’ says Bernal, ‘without a cent to do it on?’

“‘That’s the funny part of it,’ says Hoover. ’Linford thought of it first. How *can* I die now? It wouldn’t be square,’ he says—’me without a cent!’

“Then they both began to laugh—but me, I couldn’t see nothin’ funny about it.

“Wal, I left early next mornin’, not wantin’ to have to refuse ’em a loan.”

CHAPTER II

HOW A BROTHER WAS DIFFERENT

In contrast with this regrettable performance of Bernal’s, which, alas! bore internal evidence of being a type of many, was the flawless career of Allan, the dutiful and earnest. Not only did he complete his course at the General Theological Seminary with great honour, but he was ordained into the Episcopal ministry under circumstances entirely auspicious. Aunt Bell confided to Nancy that his superior presence quite dwarfed the bishop who ordained him.

His ordination sermon, moreover, which his grandfather had been persuaded into journeying to hear, was held by many to be a triumph of pulpit oratory no less than an able yet not unpoetic handling of his text, which was from John—“The Truth shall make you free.”

Truth, he declared, was the crowning glory in the diadem of man’s attributes, and a subject fraught with vital interest to every thinking man. The essential nature of man being gregarious, how important that the leader of men should hold Truth to be like a diamond, made only the brighter by friction. The world is and ever has been illiberal. Witness the lonely lamp of Erasmus, the cell of Galileo, the dying bed of Pascal, the scaffold of Sidney—all fighters for truth against the masses who cannot think for themselves.

Truth was, indeed, a potent factor in civilisation. If only all truth-lovers could feel bound together by the sacred ties of fraternal good-will, independent yet acknowledging the sovereignty of Omnipotence, succeeding ages could but add a new lustre to their present resplendent glory.

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Truth, triumphant out of oppression, is a tear falling on the world's cold cheek to make it burn forever. Why fear the revelation of truth? Greece had her Athens and her Corinth, but where is Greece to-day? Rome, too, Imperial Rome, with all her pomp and polish! They were, but they are not—for want of Truth. But might not we hope for a land where Truth would reign—from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the lakes of the frozen North to the ever-tepid waters of the sunny South?

Truth is the grand motor-power which, like a giant engine, has rolled the car of civilisation out from the maze of antiquity where it now waits to be freighted with the precious fruits of living genius.

The young man's final flight was observed by Aunt Bell to impress visibly even the bishop—a personage whom she had begun to suspect was the least bit cynical, perhaps from having listened to many first sermons.

"Standing one day," it began, "near the summit of one of the grand old Rocky Mountains that in primeval ages was elevated from ocean's depths and now towers its snow-capped peak heavenward touching the azure blue, I witnessed a scene which, for beauty of illustration of the thought in hand, the world cannot surpass. Placing my feet upon a solid rock, I saw, far down in the valley below, the tempest gathering. Soon the low-muttered thunder and vivid flashes of lightning gave token of increasing turbulence with Nature's elements. Thus the storm raged far below while all around me and above glittered the pure sunlight of heaven, where I mingled in the blue serene; until at last the thought came electric-like, as half-divine, here is exemplified in Nature's own impressive language the simple grandeurs of Truth. While we are in the valley below, we have ebullitions of discontent and murmurings of strife; but as we near the summit of Truth our thought becomes elevated. Then placing our feet on the solid Rock of Ages, we call to those in the valley below to cease their bickerings and come up higher.

"Truth! Oh, of all the flowers that swing their golden censers in the parterre of the human heart, none so rich, so rare, as this one flower of Truth. Other flowers there may be that yield as rich perfume, but they must be crushed in order that their fragrance become perceptible. But the soul of this flower courses its way down the garden walk, out through the deep, dark dell, over the burning plain, up the mountain-side, *up* and ever UP it rises into the beautiful blue; all along the cloudy corridors of the day, *up* along the misty pathway to the skies, till it touches the beautiful shore and mingles with the breath of angels!"

Yet a perverse old man had sat stonily under this sermon—had, even after so effective a baptism, neglected to undo that which he should never have done. Moreover, even on the day of this notable sermon, he was known to have referred to the young man, within the hearing of a discreet housekeeper, as "the son of his father"—which was an invidious circumlocution, amounting almost to an epithet. And he had most weakly

continued to grieve for the wayward lost son of his daughter—the godless boy whom he had driven from his door.

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Not even the other bit of news that came a little later had sufficed to make him repair his injustice; and this, though the report came by the Reverend Arthur Pelham Gridley, incumbent of the Presbyterian pulpit at Edom, who could preach sermons the old man liked.

Mr. Gridley, returning from a certain gathering of the brethren at Denver, had brought this news: That Bernal Linford had been last seen walking south from Denver, like a common tramp, in the company of a poor half-witted creature who had aroused some local excitement by declaring himself to be the son of God, speaking familiarly of the Deity as “Father.”

As this impious person had been of a very simple mind and behaved inoffensively, rather shrinking from publicity than courting it, he had at first attracted little attention. It appeared, however, that he had presently begun an absurd pretence of healing the sick and the lame; and, like all charlatans, he so cunningly worked upon the imaginations of his dupes that a remarkable number of them believed that they actually had been healed by him. In fact, the nuisance of his operations had grown to an extent so alarming that thousands of people stood in line from early morning until dusk awaiting their turn to be blessed and “healed” by the impostor. Just as several of the clergy, said Mr. Gridley, were on the point of denouncing this creature as anti-Christ and thus exploding his pretensions; and when the city authorities, indeed, appealed to by the local physicians, were on the point of suppressing him for disorderly conduct, and a menace to the public health, since he was encouraging the people to forsake their family physicians; and just as the news came that a long train-load of the variously suffering was on its way from Omaha, the wretched impostor had himself solved the difficulty by quietly disappearing. As he had refused to take money from the thousands of his dupes who had pressed it upon him in their fancied relief from pain, it was known that he could not be far off, and some curiosity was at first felt as to his whereabouts—-particularly by those superstitious ones who continued to believe he had healed them of their infirmities, not a few of whom, it appeared, were disposed to credit his blasphemous claim to have been sent by God.

According to the lookout thus kept for this person, it was reported that he had been seen to pass on foot through towns lying south of Denver, meanly dressed and accompanied by a young man named Linford. To all inquiries he answered that he was on his way to fast in the desert as his “Father” had commanded. His companion was even less communicative, saying somewhat irritably that his goings and comings were nobody’s business but his own.

Some six months later the remains of the unfortunate person were found in a wild place far to the south, with his Bible and his blanket. It was supposed that he had starved. Of Linford no further trace had been discovered.

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The most absurd tales were now told, said Mr. Gridley, of the miracles of healing wrought by this person—told, moreover, by persons of intelligence whom in ordinary matters one would not hesitate to trust. There had even been a story started, which was widely believed, that he had raised the dead; moreover, many of those who had been deluded into believing themselves healed, looked forward confidently to his own resurrection.

Mr. Gridley ventured the opinion that we should be thankful to the daily press which now disseminates the news of such things promptly, instead of allowing it to travel slowly by word of mouth, as it did in less advanced times—a process in which a little truth becomes very shortly a mighty untruth. Even between Denver and Omaha he had observed that the wonder-tales of this person grew apace, thus proving the inaccuracy of the human mind as a reporter of fact. Without the check of an unemotional daily press Mr. Gridley suspected that the poor creature's performances would have been magnified by credulous gossip until he became the founder of a new religion—a thing especially to be dreaded in a day when the people were crazed for any new thing—as Paul found them in Athens.

Mr. Gridley mentioned further that the person had suffered from what the alienists called "morbid delusions of grandeur"—believing, indeed, that but One other in the universe was greater than himself; that he would sit at the right hand of Power to judge all the world. His most puerile pretension, however, was that he meant to live, even if the work required a thousand years, until such time as he could save all persons into heaven, so that hell need have no occupants.

But this distressing tale did not move old Allan Delcher to reconsider his perverse decision, though there had been ample time for reparation. Placidly he dropped off one day, a little while after he had cautioned Clytie to keep the house ready for Bernal's coming; and to have always on hand one of those fig layer-cakes of which he was so fond, since as likely as not he would ask for this the first thing, just as he used to do. It must seem homelike to him when he did come.

Having betrayed the trust reposed in him by an unsuspecting grandson, it seemed fitting that he should fall asleep over that very psalm wherein David describeth the corruption of the natural man.

CHAPTER III

HOW EDOM WAS FAVOURED OF GOD AND MAMMON

In the years gone, the village of Edom had matured, even as little boys wax to manhood. Time was when all but two trains daily sped by it so fast that from their windows its name over the station door was naught but a blur. Now all was changed.

Many trains stopped, and people of the city mien descended from or entered smart traps, yellow depot-wagons or immaculate victorias, drawn by short-tailed, sophisticated steeds managed by liveried persons whose scraped faces were at once impassive and alert.

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In its outlying parts, moreover, stately villas now stood in the midst of grounds hedged, levelled, sprayed, shaven, trimmed and garnished—grounds cherished sacredly with a reverence like unto that once accorded the Front Room in this same village. Edom, indeed, had outgrown its villagehood as a country boy in the city will often outgrow his home ways. That is, it was still a village in its inmost heart; but outwardly, at its edges, the distinctions and graces of urban worldliness had come upon it.

All this from the happy circumstance that Edom lay in a dale of beauty not too far from the blessed centre of things requisite. First, one by one, then by families, then by groups of families, then by cliques, the invaders had come to promote Edom's importance; one being brought by the gracious falling of its little hills; one by its narrow valleys where the quick little waters come down; one by the clearness of its air; and one by the cheapness with which simple old farms might be bought and converted into the most city-like of country homes.

The old stock of Edom had early learned not to part with any massive claw-footed sideboard with glass knobs, or any mahogany four-poster, or tall clock, or high-boy, except after feigning a distressed reluctance. It had learned also to hide its consternation at the prices which this behaviour would eventually induce the newcomers to pay for such junk. Indeed, it learned very soon to be a shrewd valuer of old mahogany, pewter, and china; even to suspect that the buyers might perceive beauties in it that justified the prices they paid.

Old Edom, too, has its own opinion of the relative joys of master and servant, the latter being always debonair, their employers stiff, formal and concerned. It conceives that the employers, indeed, have but one pleasure: to stand beholding with anxious solemnity—quite as if it were the performance of a religious rite—the serious-visaged men who daily barber the lawns and hedges. It is suspected by old Edomites that the menials, finding themselves watched at this delicate task, strive to copy in face and demeanour the solemnity of the observing employer—clipping the box hedge one more fraction of an inch with the wariest caution—maintaining outwardly, in short, a most reverent seriousness which in their secret hearts they do not feel.

Let this be so or not. The point is that Edom had gone beyond its three churches of Calvin, Wesley and Luther—to say nothing of one poor little frame structure with a cross at the peak, where a handful of benighted Romanists had long been known to perform their idolatrous rites. Now, indeed, as became a smartened village, there was a perfect little Episcopal church of redstone, stained glass and painted shingles, with a macadam driveway leading under its dainty *porte-cochere*, and at the base of whose stern little tower an eager ivy already aspired; a toy-like, yet suggestively imposing edifice, quite in the manner of smart suburban churches—a manner that for want of accurate knowledge one might call confectioner's gothic.

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It was here, in his old home, that the Reverend Allan Delcher Linford found his first pastorate. Here from the very beginning he rendered apparent those gifts that were to make him a power among men. It was with a lofty but trembling hope that the young novice began his first service that June morning, before a congregation known to be hypercritical, composed as it was of seasoned city communicants, hardened listeners and watchers, who would appraise his vestments, voice, manner, appearance, and sermon, in the light of a ripe experience.

Yet his success was instant. He knew it long before the service ended—felt it infallibly all at once in the midst of his sermon on Faith. From the reading of his text, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed therein might not perish, but have everlasting life," the worldly people before him were held as by invisible wires running from him to each of them. He felt them sway in obedience to his tones; they warmed with him and cooled with him; aspired with him, questioned, agreed, and glowed with him. They were his—one with him. Their eyes saw a young man in the splendour of his early prime, of a faultless, but truly masculine beauty, delicate yet manfully rugged, square-chinned, straight-mouthed, with tawny hair and hazel eyes full of glittering golden points when his eloquence mounted; clear-skinned, brilliant, warm-voiced, yet always simple, direct, earnest; a storehouse of power, yet ornate; a source of refreshment both physical and spiritual to all within the field of his magnetism.

So agreed those who listened to that first sermon on Faith, in which that virtue was said be like the diamond, made only the brighter by friction. Motionless his listeners sat while he likened Faith to the giant engine that has rolled the car of Religion out from the maze of antiquity into the light of the present day, where it now waits to be freighted with the precious fruits of living genius, then to speed on to that hoped-for golden era when truth shall come forth as a new and blazing star to light the splendid pageantry of earth, bound together in one law of universal brotherhood, independent, yet acknowledging the sovereignty of Omnipotence.

Rapt were they when, with rare verbal felicity and unstudied eloquence, the young man pictured himself standing upon a lofty sunlit mountain, while a storm raged in the valley below, calling passionately to those far down in the ebullition to come up to him and mingle in the blue serene of Faith. Faith was, indeed, a tear dropped on the world's cold cheek of Doubt to make it burn forever.

Even those long since *blase* to pulpit oratory thrilled at the simple beauty of his peroration, which ran: "*Faith!* Oh, of all the flowers that swing their golden censers in the parterre of the human heart, none so rich, so rare, as this one flower of Faith. Other flowers there may be that yield as rich perfume, but they must be crushed in order that their fragrance become perceptible. But this flower—"

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In spite of this triumph, it had taken him still another year to prevail over one of his hearers. True, she had met him after that first triumphant ordination sermon with her black lashes but half-veiling the admiration that shone warm in the gray of her eyes; and his low assurance, “Nance, you *please* me! Really you do!” as his yellow eyes lingered down her rounded slenderness from summer bonnet to hem of summer gown, rippled her face with a colour she had to laugh away.

Yet she had been obstinate and wondering. There had to be a year in which she knew that one she dreamed of would come back; another in which she believed he might; another in which she hoped he would—and yet another in which she realised that dreams and hopes alike were vain—vain, though there were times in which she seemed to feel again the tingling life of that last hand-clasp; times when he called to her; times when she had the absurd consciousness that his mind pressed upon hers. There had been so many years and so much wonder—and no one came. It had been foolish indeed. And then came a year of wondering at the other. The old wonder concerning this one, excited by a certain fashion of rendering his head in unison with his shoulders—as might the statue of Perfect Beauty turn upon its pedestal—with its baser residue of suspicion, had been happily allayed by a closer acquaintance with Allan. One must learn, it seemed, to distrust those lightning-strokes of prejudice that flash but once at the first contact between human clouds.

Yet in the last year there had come another wonder that excited a suspicion whose troubling-power was absurdly out of all true proportion.

It was in the matter of seeing things—that is, funny things.

Doubtless she had told him a few things more or less funny that had seemed to move him to doubt or perplexity, or to mere seriousness; but, indeed, they had seemed less funny to her after that. For example, she had told Aunt Bell the anecdote of the British lady of title who says to her curate, concerning a worthy relative by marriage lately passed away, toward whom she has felt kindly despite his inferior station: “Of course I *couldn’t* know him here—but we shall meet in heaven.” Aunt Bell had been edified by this, remarking earnestly that such differences would indeed be wiped out in heaven. Yet when Nancy went to Allan in a certain bubbling condition over the anecdote itself and Aunt Bell’s comment thereon, he made her repeat it slowly, after the first hurried telling, and had laughed but awkwardly with her, rather as if it were expected of him—-with an eye vacant of all but wonder—like a traveller not sure he had done right to take the left-hand turn at the last cross-roads.

Again, the bishop who ordained him had, in a relaxed and social moment after the ceremony, related that little classic of Bishop Meade, who, during the fight over a certain disestablishment measure, was asked by a lobbyist how he would vote. The dignified prelate had replied that he would vote for the bill, for he held that every man should have the right to choose his own way to heaven. None the less, he would continue to

be certain that a gentleman would always take the Episcopal way. To Nancy Allan retold this, adding,

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“You know, I’m going to use it in a sermon some time.”

“Yes—it’s very funny,” she answered, a little uncertainly.

“Funny?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think so?”

“Of course—I’ve heard the bishop tell it myself—and I know *he* thinks it funny.”

“Well—then I’ll use it as a funny story. Of course, it *is* funny—I only thought”—what it was he only thought Nancy never knew.

Small bits of things to wonder at, these were, and the wonder brought no illumination. She only knew there were times when they two seemed of different worlds, bereft of power to communicate; and at these times his superbly assured wooing left her slightly dazed.

But there were other times, and different—and slowly she became used to the idea of him—persuaded both by his own court and by the spirited encomiums that he evoked from Aunt Bell.

Aunt Bell was at that time only half persuaded by Allan to re-enter the church of her blameless infancy. She was still minded to seek a little longer outside the fold that *rapport* with the Universal Mind which she had never ceased to crave. In this process she had lately discarded Esoteric Buddhism for Subliminal Monitions induced by Psychic Breathing and correct breakfast-food. For all that, she felt competent to declare that Allan was the only possible husband for her niece, and her niece came to suspect that this might be so.

When at last she had wondered herself into a state of inward readiness—a state still governed by her outward habit of resistance, this last was beaten down by a letter from Mrs. Tednick, who had been a school friend as Clara Tremaine, and was now married, apparently with results not too desirable.

“Never, my dear,” ran the letter to Nancy, “permit yourself to think of marrying a man who has not a sense of humour. Do I seem flippant? Don’t think it. I am conveying to you the inestimable benefits of a trained observation. Humour saves a man from being impossible in any number of ways—from boring you to beating you. (You may live to realise that the tragedy of *the first* is not less poignant than that of the second.) Whisper, dear!—All men are equally vain—at least in their ways with a woman—but humour assuredly preserves many unto death from betraying it egregiously. Beware of him if he lack it. He has power to crucify you daily, and yet be in honest ignorance of your

tortures. Don't think I am cynical—and indeed, my own husband is one of the best and dearest of souls in the world, *the biggest heart*—but be sure you marry no man without humour. Don't think a man has it merely because he tells funny stories; the humour I mean is a kind of sense of the fitness of things that keeps a man from forgetting himself. And if he hasn't humour, don't think he can make you happy, even if his vanity doesn't show. He can't—after the expiration of that brief period in which the vanity of each is a holy joy to the other. Remember now!"

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Curiously enough this well-intended homily had the effect of arousing in Nancy an instant sense of loyalty to Allan. She suffered little flashes of resentment at the thought that Clara Tremaine should seem to depreciate one toward whom she felt herself turning with a sudden defensive tenderness. And this, though it was clear to the level eye of reason that Clara must have been generalising on observations made far from Edom. But her loyal spirit was not less eager to resent an affront because it might seem to have been aimless.

And thereafter, though never ceasing to wonder, Nancy was won. Her consent, at length, went to him in her own volume of Browning, a pink rose shut in upon "A Woman's Last Word"—its petals bruised against the verses:

"What so false as truth is,
  False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is,
  Shun the tree.

"Where the apple reddens,
  Never pry—
Lest we lose our Edens,
  Eve and I.

"Be a god and hold me
  With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
  With thine arm!"

That was a moment of sweetness, of utter rest, of joyous peace—fighting no longer.

A little while and he was before her, proud as a conquerer may be—glad as a lover should.

"I always knew it, Nance—you *had* to give in."

Then as she drooped in his arms, a mere fragrant, pulsing, glad submission—

"You have *always* pleased me, Nancy. I know I shall never regret my choice."

And Nancy, scarce hearing, wondered happily on his breast.

CHAPTER IV

THE WINNING OF BROWETT

A thoughtful Pagan once reported dignity to consist not in possessing honours, but in the consciousness that we deserve them. It is a theory fit to console multitudes. Edom's young rector was not only consoled by it, he was stimulated. To his ardent nature, the consciousness of deserving honour was the first vital step toward gaining it. Those things that he believed himself to deserve he forthwith subjected to the magnetic rays of his desire: Knowing with the inborn certainty of the successful, that they must finally yield to such silent, coercing influence and soon or late gravitate toward him in obedience to the same law that draws the apple to the earth's lap. In this manner had the young man won his prizes for oratory; so had he won his wife; so had he won his first pastorate; so now would he win that prize he was conscious of meriting next—a city parish—a rectorate in the chief seat of his church in America, where was all wealth and power as well as the great among men, to be swayed by his eloquence and brought at last to the Master's feet. And here, again, would his future enlarge to prospects now but mistily surmised—prospects to be moved upon anon with triumphant tread. Infinite aspiration opening ever beyond itself—this was his. Meantime, step by step, with zealous care for the accuracy of each, with eyes always ahead, leaving nothing undone—he was forever fashioning the moulds into which the Spirit should materialise his benefits.

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The first step was the winning of Browett—old Cyrus Browett, whose villa, in the fashion of an English manor-house, was a feature of remark even to the Edom summer dwellers—a villa whose wide grounds were so swept, garnished, trimly flowered, hedge-bordered and shrub-upholstered that, to old Edom, they were like stately parlours built foolishly out of doors.

Months had the rector of tiny St. Anne's waited for Browett to come to him, knowing that Browett must come in the end. One less instinctively wise would have made the mistake of going to Browett. Not this one, whose good spirit warned him that his puissance lay rather with groups of men than with individuals. From back of the chancel railing he could sway the crowd and make it all his own; whereas, taking that same crowd singly, and beyond his sacerdotal functions, he might be at the mercy of each man composing it. He knew, in short, that Cyrus Browett as one of his congregation on a Sabbath morning would be a mere atom in the plastic cosmos below him; whereas Browett by himself, with the granite hardness of his crag-like face, his cool little green eyes—unemotional as two algebraic x's—would be a matter fearfully different. Even his white moustache, close-clipped as his own hedges, and guarding a stiff, chilled mouth, was a thing grimly repressed, telling that the man was quite invulnerable to his own vanity. A human Browett would have permitted that moustache to mitigate its surroundings with some flowing grace. He was, indeed, no adversary to meet alone in the open field—for one who could make him in a crowd a mere string of many to his harp.

The morning so long awaited came on a second Sunday after Trinity. Cyrus Browett, in whose keeping was the very ark of the money covenant, alighted from his coupe under the *porte-cochere* of candied Gothic and humbly took seat in his pew like a mere worshipper of God.

As such—a man among men—the young rector looked calmly down upon him, letting him sink into the crowd-entity which always became subject to him.

His rare, vibrant tones—tones that somehow carried the subdued light and warmth of stained glass—rolled out in moving volume:

"The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

Then, still as a mere worshipper of God, that Prince of the power of Mammon down in front knelt humbly to say after the young rector above him that he had erred and strayed like a lost sheep, followed too much the devices of his own heart, leaving undone those things he ought to have done, and doing those things which he ought not to have done; that there was no health in him; yet praying that he might, thereafter, lead a godly, righteous and sober life to the glory of God's holy name. Even to Allan there was something affecting in this—a sort of sardonic absurdity in Browett's actually speaking thus.

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The kneeling financier was indeed a gracious and lovely spectacle to the young clergyman, and in his next words, above the still-bended congregation, his tones grew warmly moist with an unction that thrilled his hearers as never before. Movingly, indeed, upon the authority that God hath given to his ministers, did he declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins. Wonderful, in truth, had it been if his hearers did not thrill, for the minister himself was thrilled as never before. He, Allan Delcher Linford, was absolving and remitting the sins of a man whose millions were counted by the hundred, a god of money and of power—who yet cringed before him out there like one who feared and worshipped.

Nor did he here make the mistake that many another would have made. Instead of preaching to Cyrus Browett alone—preaching at him—he preached as usual to his congregation. If his glance fell, now and then, upon the face of Browett, he saw it only through the haze of his own fervour—a patch of granite-gray holding two pricking points of light. Not once was Browett permitted to feel himself more than one of a crowd; not once was he permitted to rise above his mere atomship, nor feel that he received more attention than the humblest worshipper in arrears for pew-rent. Yet, though the young rector regarded Browett as but one of many, he knew infallibly the instant that invisible wire was strung between them, and felt, thereafter, every tug of opposition or signal of agreement that flashed from Browett's mind, knowing in the end, without a look, that he had won Browett's approval and even excited his interest.

For the sermon had been strangely, wonderfully suited to Browett's peculiar tastes. Hardly could a sermon have been better planned to win him. The choice of the text itself: "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise and perverteth the words of the righteous," was perfect art.

The plea was for intellectual honesty, for academic freedom, for fearless independence, which were said to be the crowning glories in the diadem of man's attributes. Fearlessly, then, did the speaker depreciate both the dogmatism of religion and the dogmatism of science. "Much of what we call religion," he said, "is only the superstition of the past; much of what we call science is but the superstition of the present." He pleaded that religion might be an ever-living growth in the human heart, not a dead formulary of dogmatic origin. True, organisation was necessary, but in the realm of spiritual essentials a creed drawn up in the fourth century should not be treated as if it were the final expression of the religious consciousness *in secula seculorum*. One should, indeed, be prepared for the perpetual restatement of religious truth, fearlessly submitting the most cherished convictions to the light of each succeeding age.

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Yet, especially, should it not be forgotten in an age of ultra-physicism, of social and economic heterodoxies, that there must ever be in human society, according to the blessed ordinance of God, princes and subjects, masters and proletariat, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, nobles and plebeians—yet all united in the bonds of love to help one another attain their moral welfare on earth and their last end in heaven;—all united in the bonds of fraternal good-will, independent yet acknowledging the sovereignty of Omnipotence.

He closed with these words of Voltaire: "We must love our country whatever injustice we suffer in it, as we must love and serve the Supreme Being, notwithstanding the superstitions and fanaticism which so often dishonour His worship."

The sermon was no marked achievement in coherence, but neither was Browett a coherent personality. It was, however, a swift, vivid sermon—a short and a busy one, with a reason for each of its parts, incoherent though the parts were. For Browett was a cynic doubter of his own faith; at once an admirer of Voltaire and a believer in the Established Order of Things; despising a radical and a conservative equally, but, hating more than either, a clumsy compromiser. He must be preached to as one not yet brought into that flock purchased by God with the blood of His Son; and at the same time, as one who had always been of that flock and was now inalienable from it. In a word, Browett's doubt and his belief had both to be fed from the same spoon, a fact that all young preachers of God's word would not have fathomed.

Thus our young rector proved his power. His future rolled visibly toward him. During the rest of that service there sounded in his ears an undertone from out the golden centre of that future: "*Reverend Father in God, we present unto you this godly and well-learned man to be ordained and consecrated Bishop*—"

Rewarded, indeed, was he for the trouble he had taken long months before to build that particular sermon to fit Browett, after specifications confided to him by an obliging parishioner—keeping it ready to use at a second's notice, on the first morning that Browett should appear.

How diminished would be that envious railing at Success could we but know the hidden pains by which alone its victories of seeming ease are won!

The young minister could now meet Browett as man to man, having established a prestige.

It had been said by those who would fain have branded him with the stigma of disrepute that Browett's ethics were inferior to those of the prairie wolf; meaning, perhaps, that he might kill more sheep than he could possibly devour.

Browett had views of his own in this matter. As a tentative evolutionist he looked upon his survival as unimpeachable evidence of his fitness,—as the eagle is fitter than the lamb it may fasten upon. Again, as a believer in Revealed Religion, he accepted human society according to the ordinance of God, deeming himself as Master to be but the rightful, divinely-instituted complement of his humblest servant—the two of them necessary poles in the world spiritual.

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One of the few fads of Browett being the memorial window, it was also said by enviers that if he would begin to erect a window to every small competitor his Trust had squeezed to death there would be an unprecedented flurry in stained glass. But Browett knew, as an evolutionist, that the eagle has a divine right to the lamb if it can come safely off with it; as a Christian, that one carries out the will of God as indubitably in preserving the established order of prince and subject, of noble and plebeian, as in giving of his abundance to relieve the necessitous—or in endowing universities which should teach the perpetual sacredness of the established order of things in Church and State.

In short, he derived comfort from both poles of his belief—one the God of Moses, a somewhat emotional god, not entirely uncarnal—the other the god of Spencer, an unemotional and unimaginative god of Law.

It followed that he was much taken with a preacher who could answer so appositely to the needs of his soul as did this impressive young man in a chance sermon of unstudied eloquence.

There were social meetings in which Browett dispassionately confirmed these early impressions gained under the spell of a matchless oratory, and in due time there followed an invitation to the young rector of St. Anne's of Edom to preach at the Church of St. Antipas, which was Browett's city church.

CHAPTER V

A BELATED MARTYRDOM

The rectory at Edom was hot with the fever of preparation. The invitation to preach at St. Antipas meant an offer of that parish should the preaching be approved. It was a most desirable parish—Browett's city church being as smart as one of his steam yachts or his private train (for nothing less than a train sufficed him now—though there were those of the green eyes who pretended to remember, with heavy sarcasm, the humbler day when he had but a beggarly private car, coupled to the rear of a common Limited). It was, moreover, a high church, its last rector having been put away for the narrowness of refusing to "enrich the service." This was the church and this the patron above all others that the Reverend Allan Delcher Linford would have chosen, and earnestly did he pray that God in His wisdom impart to him the grace to please Browett and those whom Browett permitted to have a nominal voice in the control of St. Antipas.

Both Aunt Bell and Nancy came to feel the strain of it all. The former promised to "go into the silence" each day and "hold the thought of success," thereby drawing psychic power for him from the Reservoir of the Eternal.

Nancy could only encourage by wifely sympathy, being devoid of those psychic powers that distinguished Aunt Bell. Tenderly she hovered about Allan the morning he began to write the first of the three sermons he was to preach.

As for him, though heavy with the possibilities of the moment, he was yet cool and centred; resigned to what might be, yet hopeful; his manner was determined, yet gentle, almost sweet—the manner of one who has committed all to God and will now put no cup from him, how bitter soever.

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“I am so hopeful, dearest, for your sake,” his wife said, softly, wishing to reveal her sympathy yet fearful lest she might obtrude it. He was arranging many sheets of notes before him.

“What will the first one be?” she asked. He straightened in his chair.

“I’ve made up my mind, Nance! It’s a wealthy congregation—one of the wealthiest in the city—but I shall preach first from the parable of Dives and Lazarus.”

“Isn’t that—a little—wouldn’t something else do as well—something that wouldn’t seem quite so personal?”

He smiled up with fond indulgence. “That’s the woman of it—concession for temporal advantage.” Then more seriously he added, “I wouldn’t be true to myself, Nance, if I went down there in any spirit of truckling to wealth. Public approval is a most desirable luxury, I grant you—wealth and ease are desirable luxuries, and the favour of those in power—but they’re only luxuries. And I know in this matter but one real necessity: my own self-approval. If consciously I preached a polite sermon there, my own soul would accuse me and I should be as a leaf in the wind for power. No, Nance—never urge me to be untrue to that divine Christ-self within me! If I cannot be my best self before God, I am nothing. I must preach Christ and Him crucified, whether it be to the wealthy of St. Antipas or only to believing poverty.”

Stung with contrition, she was quick to say, “Oh, my dearest, I didn’t mean you to be untrue! Only it seemed unnecessary to affront them in your very first sermon.”

“I have been divinely guided, Nance. No considerations of expediency can deflect me now. This *had* to be! I admit that I had my hour of temptation—but that has gone, and thank God my integrity survives it.”

“Oh, how much bigger you are than I am, dearest!” She looked down at him proudly as she stood close to his side, smoothing the tawny hair. Then she laid one finger along his lips and made the least little kissing noise with her own lips—a trick of affection learned in the early days of their love. After a little she stole from his side, leaving him with head bent in prayerful study—to be herself alone with her new assurance.

It was moments like this that she had come to long for and to feed her love upon. Nor need it be concealed that there had not been one such for many months. The situation had been graver than she was willing to acknowledge to herself. Not only had she not ceased to wonder since the first days of her marriage, but she had begun to smile in her wonder, fancying from time to time that certain plain answers came to it—and not at all realising that a certain kind of smile is love’s unforgivable blasphemy; conscious only that the smile left a strange hurt in her heart.

For a little hour she stayed alone with her joy, fondly turning the light of her newly fed faith upon an idol whose clearness of line and purity of tint had become blurred in a dusk of wondering—an idol that had begun, she now realised with a shudder, to bulk almost grotesquely through that deepening gloom of doubt.

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Now all was well again. In this new light the dear idol might even at times show a dual personality—one kneeling beside her very earnestly to worship the other with her. Why not, since the other showed itself truly worthy of adoration? With faith made new in her husband—and, therefore, in God—she went to Aunt Bell.

She found that lady in touch with the cosmic forces, over her book, "The Beautiful Within," her particular chapter being headed, "Psychology of Rest: Rhythms and Sub-rhythms of Activity and Repose; their Synchronism with Subliminal Spontaneity." Over this frank revelation of hidden truths Aunt Bell's handsome head was, for the moment, nodding in sub-rhythms of psychic placidity—a state from which Nancy's animated entrance sufficed to arouse her. As the proud wife spoke, she divested herself of the psychic restraint with something very like a carnal yawn behind her book.

"Oh, Aunt Bell! Isn't Allan *fine*! Of course, in a way, it's too bad—doubtless he'll spoil his chances for the thing I know he's set his heart upon—and he knows it, too—but he's going calmly ahead as if the day for martyrs to the truth hadn't long since gone by. Oh, dear, martyrs are *so* dowdy and out-of-date—but there he is, a great, noble, beautiful soul, with a sense of integrity and independence that is stunning!"

"What has Allan been saying now?" asked Aunt Bell, curiously unmoved.

"*Said?* It's what he's *doing!* The dear, big, stupid thing is going down there to preach the very first Sunday about Dives and Lazarus—the poor beggar in Abraham's bosom and the rich man down below, you remember?" she added, as Aunt Bell seemed still to hover about the centre of psychic repose.

"Well?"

"Well, think of preaching that primitive doctrine to *any one* in this age—then think of a young minister talking it to a church of rich men and expecting to receive a call from them!"

Aunt Bell surveyed the plump and dimpled whiteness of her small hands with more than her usual studious complacence. "My dear," she said at last, "no one has a greater admiration for Allan than I have—but I've observed that he usually knows what he's about."

"Indeed, he knows what he's about now, Aunt Bell!" There was a swift little warmth in her tones—"but he says he can't do otherwise. He's going deliberately to spoil his chances for a call to St. Antipas by a piece of mere early-Christian quixotism. And you must see how *great* he is, Aunt Bell. Do you know—there have been times when I've misjudged Allan. I didn't know his simple genuineness. He wants that church, yet he will not, as so many in his place would do, make the least concession to its people."

Aunt Bell now brought a coldly critical scrutiny to bear upon one small foot which she thrust absently out until its profile could be seen.

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“Perhaps he will have his reward,” she said. “Although it is many years since I broadened into what I may call the higher unbelief, I have never once suspected, my dear, that merit fails of its reward. And above all, I have faith in Allan, in his—well, his psychic nature is so perfectly attuned with the Universal that Allan simply *cannot* harm himself. Even when he seems deliberately to invite misfortune, fortune comes instead. So cheer up, and above all, practise going into the silence and holding the thought of success for him. I think Allan will attend very acceptably to the mere details.”

CHAPTER VI

THE WALLS OF ST. ANTIPAS FALL AT THE THIRD BLAST

On that dreaded morning a few weeks later, when the young minister faced a thronged St. Antipas at eleven o’clock service, his wife looked up at him from Aunt Bell’s side in a pew well forward—the pew of Cyrus Browett—looked up at him in trembling, loving wonder. Then a little tender half-smile of perfect faith went dreaming along her just-parted lips. Let the many prototypes of Dives in St. Antipas—she could see the relentless profile of their chief at her right—be offended by his rugged speech: he should find atoning comfort in her new love. Like Luther, he must stand there to say out the soul of him, and she was prostrate before his brave greatness.

When, at last, he came to read the biting verses of the parable, her heart beat as if it would be out to him, her face paled and hardened with the strain of his ordeal.

> “And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom; the rich man also died and was buried.
>
> “And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom.
>
> “And he cried and said, ’Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’
>
> “But Abraham said, ’Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.’”

The sermon began. Unflinchingly the preacher pointed out that Dives, apparently, lay in hell for no other reason than that he had been a rich man; no sin was imputed to him; not even unbelief; he had not only transgressed no law, but was doubtless a respectable, God-fearing man of irreproachable morals—sent to hell for his wealth.

And Lazarus appeared to have won heaven merely by reason of his poverty. No virtue, no active good conduct, was accredited to him.

Reading with the eye of common understanding, Jesus taught that the rich merited eternal torment by reason of their riches, and the poor merited eternal life by reason of their poverty, a belief that one might hear declared even to-day. Nor was this view attested solely by this parable. Jesus railed constantly at those in high places, at the rich and at lawyers, and the chief priests and elders and those in authority—declaring that he had been sent, not to them, but to the poor who needed a physician.

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But was there not a seeming inconsistency here in the teachings of the Master? If the poor achieved heaven automatically by their mere poverty, *why were they still needing a physician?* Under that view, why were not the rich those who needed a physician—-according to the literal words of Jesus?

Up to the close of this passage the orator's manner had been one of glacial severity—of a sternness apparently checked by rare self-control from breaking into a denunciation of the modern Dives. Then all was changed. His face softened and lighted; the broad shoulders seemed to relax from their uncompromising squareness; he stood more easily upon his feet; he glowed with a certain encouraging companionableness.

Was that, indeed, the teaching of Jesus—as if in New York to-day he might say, "I have come to Third Avenue rather than to Fifth?" Can this crudely literal reading of his words prevail? Does it not carry its own refutation—the extreme absurdity of supposing that Jesus would come to the squalid Jews of the East Side and denounce the better elements that maintain a church like St. Antipas?

The fallacy were easily probed. A modern intelligence can scarcely prefigure heaven or hell as a reward or punishment for mere carnal comfort or discomfort—as many literal-minded persons believe that Jesus taught. The Son of Man was too subtle a philosopher to teach that a rich man is lost by his wealth and a poor man saved by his poverty, though primitive minds took this to be his meaning. Some primitive minds still believe this—witness the frequent attempts to read a literal meaning into certain other words of Jesus: the command, for example, that a man should give up his cloak also, if he be sued for his coat. Little acumen is required to see that no society could protect itself against the depredations of the lawless under such a system of non-resistance; and we may be sure that Jesus had no intention of tearing down the social structure or destroying vested rights. Those who demand a literal construction of the parable of Dives and Lazarus must look for it in the Bowery melodrama, wherein the wealthy only are vicious and poverty alone is virtuous.

We have only to consider the rawness of this conception to perceive that Jesus is not to be taken literally.

Who, then, is the rich man and who the poor—who is the Dives and who the Lazarus of this intensely dramatic parable?

Dives is but the type of the spiritually rich man who has not charity for his spiritually poor brother; of the man rich in faith who will not trouble to counsel the doubting; of the one rich in humility who will yet not seek to save his neighbour from arrogance; of him rich in charity who indifferently views his uncharitable brethren; of the man rich in hope who will not strive to make hopeful the despairing; of the one rich in graces of the Holy Ghost who will not seek to reclaim the unsanctified beggar at his gate.

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And who is Lazarus but a type of the aspiring—the soul-hungry, whether he be a millionaire or a poor clerk—the determined seeker whose eye is single and whose whole body is full of light? In this view, surely more creditable to the intellect of our Saviour, mere material wealth ceases to signify; the Dives of spiritual reality may be the actual beggar rich in faith yet indifferent to the soul-hunger of the faithless; while poor Lazarus may be the millionaire, thirsting, hungering, aspiring, day after day, for crumbs of spiritual comfort that the beggar, out of the abundance of his faith, would never miss.

Christianity has suffered much from our failure to give the Saviour due credit for subtlety. So far as money—mere wealth—is a soul-factor at all, it must be held to increase rather than to diminish its possessor's chances of salvation, but not in merely providing the refinements of culture and the elegances of modern luxury and good taste, important though these are to the spirit's growth. The true value of wealth to the soul—-a value difficult to over-estimate—is that it provides opportunity for, and encourages the cultivation of, that virtue which is "the greatest of all these"; that virtue which "suffereth long and is kind; which vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up"—Charity, in short. While not denying the simple joys of penury, nor forgetting the Saviour's promises to the poor and meek and lowly, it is still easy to understand that charity is less likely to be a vigorous soul-growth in a poor man than in a rich. The poor man may possess it as a germ, a seed; but the rich man is, through superior prowess in the struggle for existence, in a position to cultivate this virtue; and who will say that he has not cultivated it? Certainly no one acquainted with the efforts of our wealthy men to uplift the worthy poor. A certain modern sentimentality demands that poverty be abolished—ignoring those pregnant words of Jesus—"the poor ye have *always* with you"—forgetting, indeed, that human society is composed of unequal parts, even as the human body; that equality exists among the social members only in this: that all men have their origin in God the Creator, have sinned in Adam, and have been, by the sacrificial blood of God's only begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, equally redeemed into eternal life, if they will but accept Christ as their only true Saviour;—forgetting indeed that to abolish poverty would at once prevent all manifestations of human nature's most beauteous trait and virtue—Charity.

Present echoes from the business world indicate that the poor man to-day, with his vicious discontent, his preposterous hopes of trades-unionism, and his impracticable and very *un-Christian* dreams of an industrial millennium, is the true and veritable Dives, rich in arrogance and poor in that charity of judgment which the millionaire has so abundantly shown himself to possess.

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The remedy was for the world to come up higher. Standing upon one of the grand old peaks of the Rocky Mountains, the speaker had once witnessed a scene in the valley below which, for beauty of illustration of the thought in hand, the world could not surpass. He told his hearers what the scene was. And he besought them to come up to the rock of Charity and mingle in the blue serene. Charity—a tear dropped on the world's cold cheek of intolerance to make it burn forever! Or it was the grand motor-power which, like a giant engine, has rolled the car of civilisation out from the maze of antiquity into the light of the present day where it now waits to be freighted with the precious fruits of living genius, then to speed on to that hoped-for golden era when truth shall rise as a new and blazing star to light the splendid pageantry of earth, bound together in one law of universal brotherhood, independent, yet acknowledging the sovereignty of Omnipotence. Charity indeed was what Voltaire meant to inculcate when he declared: "Atheism and fanaticism are the two poles of a universe of confusion and horror. The narrow zone of virtue is between these two. March with a firm step in that path; believe in a good God and do good."

The peroration was beautifully simple, thrilling the vast throng with a sudden deeper conviction of the speaker's earnestness: "*Charity!* Oh, of all the flowers that have swung their golden censers in the parterre of the human heart, none so rich, so rare as this one flower of charity. Other flowers there may be that yield as rich perfume, but they must be crushed before their fragrance becomes perceptible; but *this* flower at early morn, at burning noon and when the dew of eve is on the flowers, has coursed its way down the garden walk, out through the deep, dark dell, over the burning plain, and up the mountain side—*up*, ever UP it rises into the beautiful blue—up along the cloudy corridors of the day, up along the misty pathway to the skies till it touches the beautiful shore and mingles with the breath of angels."

Hardly was there a dissenting voice in all St. Antipas that Sabbath upon the proposal that this powerful young preacher be called to its pulpit. The few who warily suggested that he might be too visionary, not sufficiently in touch with the present day, were quieted the following Sabbath by a very different sermon on certain flaws in the fashionable drama.

The one and only possible immorality in this world, contended the speaker, was untruth. A sermon was as immoral as any stage play if the soul of it was not Truth; and a stage play became as moral as a sermon if its soul was truth. The special form of untruth he attacked was what he styled "the drama of the glorified wanton." Warmly and ably did he denounce the pernicious effect of those plays, that take the wanton for a heroine and sentimentalise her into a morbid attractiveness. The stage should show life, and the wanton, being of life, might be portrayed; but let it be with ruthless fidelity. She must not be falsified into a creature of fine sensibilities and lofty emotions—a thing of dangerous plausibility to the innocent.

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The last doubter succumbed on the third Sabbath, when he preached from the warning of Jesus that many would come after him, performing in his name wonders that might deceive, were it possible, even the very elect. The sermon likened this generation to the people Paul found in Athens, running curiously after any new god; after Christian Science—which he took the liberty of remarking was neither Christian nor scientific—or mental science, spiritism, theosophy, clairvoyance, all black arts, straying from the fold of truth into outer darkness—forgetting that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed therein might not perish, but have everlasting life." As this was the sole means of salvation that God had provided, the time was, obviously, one fraught with vital interest to every thinking man.

As a sagacious member of the Board of Trustees remarked, it would hardly have been possible to preach three sermons better calculated, each in its way, to win the approval of St. Antipas.

The call came and was accepted after the signs of due and prayerful consideration. But as for Nancy, she had left off certain of her wonderings forever.

CHAPTER VII

THERE ENTERETH THE SERPENT OF INAPPRECIATION

For the young rector of St. Antipas there followed swift, rich, high-coloured days—days in which he might have framed more than one triumphant reply to that poet who questioned why the spirit of mortal should be proud, intimating that it should not be.

Also was the handsome young rector's parish proud of him; proud of his executive ability as shown in the management of its many organised activities, religious and secular; its Brotherhood of St. Bartholomew, its Men's Club, Women's Missionary Association, Guild and Visiting Society, King's Daughters, Sewing School, Poor Fund, and still others; proud of his decorative personality, his impressive oratory and the modern note in his preaching; proud that its ushers must each Sabbath morning turn away many late-comers. Indeed, the whole parish had been born to a new spiritual life since that day when the worship at St. Antipas had been kept simple to bareness by a stubborn and perverse reactionary. In this happier day St. Antipas was known for its advanced ritual, for a service so beautifully enriched that a new spiritual warmth pervaded the entire parish. The doctrine of the Real Presence was not timidly minced, but preached unequivocally, with dignified boldness. Also there was a confessional, and the gracious burning of incense. In short, St. Antipas throve, and the grace of the Holy Ghost palpably took possession of its worshippers. The church was become the smartest church in the diocese, and its communicants were held to have a tone.

And to these communicants their rector of the flawless pulchritude was a gracious spectacle, not only in the performance of his sacerdotal offices, but on the thoroughfares of the city, where his distinction was not less apparent than back of the chancel rail.

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A certain popular avenue runs between rows of once splendid mansions now struggling a little awkwardly into trade on their lowest floors, like impoverished but courageous gentlefolk. To these little tragedies, however, the pedestrian throng is obtuse—blind to the pathos of those still haughty upper floors, silent and reserved, behind drawn curtains, while the lower two floors are degraded into shops. In so far as the throng is not busied with itself, its attention is upon the roadway, where is ever passing a festival procession of Success, its floats of Worth Rewarded being the costliest and shiniest of the carriage-maker's craft—eloquent of true dignity and fineness even in the swift silence of their rubber tires. This is a spectacle to be viewed seriously; to be mocked at only by the flippant, though the moving pedestrian mass on the sidewalk is gayer of colour, more sentient—more companionable, more understandably human.

It was in this weaving mass on the walk that the communicants of St. Antipas were often refreshed by the vision of their rector on pleasant afternoons. Here the Reverend Doctor Linford loved to walk in God's sunlight out of sheer simple joy in living—happily undismayed by any possible consciousness that his progress turned all faces to regard him, as inevitably as one would turn the spokes of an endless succession of turnstyles.

Habited with an obviously loving attention to detail, yet with tasteful restraint, a precise and frankly confessed, yet never obtrusive, elegance, bowing with a manner to those of his flock favoured by heaven to meet him, superbly, masculinely handsome, he was far more than a mere justification of the pride St. Antipas felt in him. He was a splendid inspiration to belief in God and man.

Nor was he of the type Pharasaic—the type to profess love for its kind, yet stay scrupulously aloof from the vanquished and court only the victors. Indeed, this was not so.

In the full tide of his progress—it was indeed a progress and never a mere walk—he would stop to address a few words of simple cheer to the aged female mendicant—-perhaps to make a joke with her—some pleasantry not unbefitting his station, his mien denoting a tender chivalry which has been agreeably subdued though not impaired by the experience inevitable to a man of the world. When he dropped the coin into the withered palm, he did it with a certain lingering hurriedness, as one frankly unable to repress a human weakness, though nervously striving to have it over quickly and by stealth.

Young Rigby Reeves, generalising, as it later appeared, from inadequate data, swore once that the rector of St. Antipas kept always an eye ahead for the female mendicant in the tattered shawl and the bonnet of inferior modishness; that, if the Avenue was crowded enough to make it seem worth while, he would even cross from one side to the other for the sake of speaking to her publicly.

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While the fact so declared may have been a fact, the young man's corollary that the rector of St. Antipas sought this experience for the sake of its mere publicity came from a prejudice which closer acquaintance with Dr. Linford happily dissolved from his mind. As reasonably might he have averred, as did another cynic, that the rector of St. Antipas was actuated by the instincts of a mountebank when he selected his evening papers each day—deliberately and with kind words—from the stock of a newswoman at a certain conspicuous and ever-crowded crossing. As reasonable was the imputation of this other cynic, that in greeting friends upon the thronged avenue, the rector never failed to use some word or phrase that would identify him to those passing, giving the person addressed an unpleasant sense of being placed in a lime-light, yet reducing him to an insignificance just this side the line of obliteration.

"You say, 'Ah, Doctor!' and shake hands, you know," said this hypercritical observer, "and, ten to one, he says something about St. Antipas directly, you know, or—'Tell him to call on Dr. Linford at the rectory adjoining St. Antipas—I'm always there at eleven,' or 'Yes, quite true, the bishop said to me, "My dear Linford, we depend on you in this matter,"' or telling how Mrs. General Somebody-Something, you know—I never could remember names—took him down dreadfully by calling him the most dangerously fascinating man in New York. And there you are, you know! It never fails, on my word! And all the time people are passing and turning to stare and listen, you know, so that it's quite rowdy—saying 'Yes—that's Linford—there he is,' quite as if they were on one of those coaches seeing New York; and you feel, by Jove, I give you my word, like the solemn ass who goes up on the stage to help the fellow do his tricks, you know, when he calls for 'some kind gentleman from the audience.'"

It may be told that this other person was of a cynicism hopelessly indurated. Not so with Rigby Reeves, even after Reeves alleged the other discoveries that the rector of St. Antipas had "a walk that would be a strut, by gad! if he was as short as I am"; also that he "walked like a parade," which, as expounded by Mr. Reeves, meant that his air in walking was that of one conscious always of leading a triumphal procession in his own honour; and again, that one might read in his eyes a keenly sensuous enjoyment in the tones of his own voice; that he coloured these with a certain unction corresponding to the flourishes with which people of a certain obliquity of mind love to ornament their chirography; still again that he, Reeves, was "ready to lay a bet that the fellow would continue to pose even at the foot of the Great White Throne."

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Happily this young man was won out of his carping attitude by closer acquaintance with the rector of St. Antipas, and learned to regard those things as no more than the inseparable antennae of a nature unusually endowed with human warmth and richness—mere meaningless projections from a personality simple, rugged, genuine, never subtle, and entirely likable. He came to feel that, while the rector himself was unaffectedly impressed by that profusion of gifts with which it had pleased heaven to distinguish him, he was yet constantly annoyed and embarrassed by the fact that he was thus made so salient a man. Young Reeves found him an appreciative person, moreover, one who betrayed a sensible interest in a fellow's own achievements, finding many reasons to be impressed by a few little things in the way of athletics, travel, and sport that had never seemed at all to impress the many—not even the members of one's own family. Rigby Reeves, indeed, became an ardent partisan of Dr. Linford, attending services religiously with his mother and sisters—and nearly making a row in the club cafe one afternoon when the other and more obdurate cynic declared, with a fine assumption of the judicial, that Linford was "the best actor in New York—on the stage or off!"

It was concerning this habit of the daily stroll that Aunt Bell and her niece also disagreed one afternoon. They were in the little dark-wooded, red-walled library of the rectory, Aunt Bell with her book of devotion, Nancy at her desk, writing.

From her low chair near the window, Aunt Bell had just beheld the Doctor's erect head, its hat of flawless gloss, and his beautifully squared shoulders, progress at a moderate speed across her narrow field of vision. In so stiffly a level line had they passed that a profane thought seized her unawares: the fancy that the rector of St. Antipas had been pulled by the window on rollers. But this was at once atoned for. She observed that Allan was one of the few men who walk always like those born to rule. Then she spoke:

"Nancy, why do you never walk with Allan in the afternoon? Nothing would please him better—the boy is positively proud to have you."

"Oh, I had to finish this letter to Clara," Nancy answered abstractedly, as if still intent upon her writing, debating a word with narrowed eyes and pen-tip at her teeth.

But Aunt Bell was neither to be misunderstood nor insufficiently answered.

"Not this afternoon, especially—*any* afternoon. I can't remember when you've walked with him. So many times I've heard you refuse—and I dare say it doesn't please him, you know."

"Oh, he has often told me so."

"Well?"

“Aunt Bell—I—Oh, *you’ve* walked on the street with Allan!”

“To be sure I have!”

“Well!”

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“Well—of course—that *is* true in a way—Allan *does* attract attention the moment he reaches the pavement—and of course every one stares at one—but it isn’t the poor fellow’s fault. At least, if the boy were at all conscious of it he might in very little ways here and there prevent the very tiniest bit of it—but, my dear, your husband is a man of most striking appearance—especially in the clerical garb—even on that avenue over there where striking persons abound—and it’s not to be helped. And I can’t wonder he’s not pleased with you when it gives him such pleasure to have a modish and handsome young woman at his side. I met him the other day walking down from Forty-second Street with that stunning-looking Mrs. Wyeth, and he looked as happy and bubbling as a schoolboy.”

“Oh—Aunt Bell—but of course, if you don’t see, I couldn’t possibly tell you.” She turned suddenly to her letter, as if to dismiss the hopeless task.

Now Aunt Bell, being entirely human, would not keep silence under an intimation that her powers of discernment were less than phenomenal. The tone of her reply, therefore, hinted of much.

“My child—I may see and gather and understand much more than I give any sign of.”

It was a wretchedly empty boast. Doubtless it had never been true of Aunt Bell at any time in her life, but she was nettled now: one must present frowning fortifications at a point where one is attacked, even if they be only of pasteboard. Then, too, a random claim to possess hidden fruits of observation is often productive. Much reticence goes down before it.

Nancy turned to her again with a kind of relief in her face.

“Oh, Aunt Bell, I was sure of it—I couldn’t tell you, but I was sure you must see!” Her pen was thrown aside and she drooped in her chair, her hands listless in her lap.

Aunt Bell looked sympathetically voluble but wisely refrained from speech.

“I wonder,” continued the girl, “if you knew at the time, the time when my eyes seemed to open—when I was deceived by his pretension into thinking—you remember that first sermon, Aunt Bell—how independent and noble I thought it was going to be. Oh, Aunt Bell—what a slump in my faith that day! I think its foundations all went, and then naturally the rest of it just seemed to topple. Did you realise it all the time?”

So it was religious doubt—a loss of faith—heterodoxy? Having listened until she gathered this much, Aunt Bell broke in—“My dear, you must let me guide you in this. You know what I’ve been through. Study the higher criticism, reverently, if you will—-even broaden into the higher unbelief. Times have changed since my youth; one may broaden into almost anything now and still be orthodox, especially in our church. But

beware of the literal mind, the material view of things. Remember that the essentials of Christianity are spiritually historic even if they aren't materially historic—facts

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in the human consciousness if not in the world of matter. You need not pretend to understand how God can be one in essence and three in person—I grant you that is only a reversion to polytheism and is so regarded by the best Biblical scholars—but never surrender your belief in the atoning blood of the Son whom He sent a ransom for many—at least as a spiritual fact. I myself have dismissed the Trinity as one of those mysteries to be adoringly believed on earth and comprehended only in heaven—but that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son—Child, do you think I could look forward without fear to facing God, if I did not believe that the blood of his only begotten Son had washed from my soul that guilt of the sin I committed in Adam? Cling to these simple essentials, and otherwise broaden even into the higher unbelief, if you like—"

"But, Aunt Bell, it *isn't* that! I never trouble about those things—though you have divined truly that I have doubted them lately—but the doubts don't distress me. Actually, Aunt Bell, for a woman to lose faith in her God seems a small matter beside losing faith in her husband. You can doubt and reason and speculate and argue about the first—it's fashionable—people rather respect unbelievers nowadays—but Oh, Aunt Bell, how the other hurts!"

"But, my child—my preposterous child! How can you have lost faith in that husband of yours? What nonsense! Do you mean you have taken seriously those harmless jesting little sallies of his about the snares and pitfalls of a clergyman's life, or his tales of how this or that silly woman has allowed him to detect in her that pure reverence which most women do feel for a clergyman, whether he's handsome or not? Take Mrs. Wyeth, for example—"

"Oh, Aunt Bell—no, no—how can you think—"

"I admit Allan is the least bit—er—redundant of those anecdotes—perhaps just the least bit insistent about the snares and pitfalls that beset an attractive man in his position. But really, my dear—I know men—and you need never feel a twinge of jealousy. For one thing, Allan would be held in bounds by fear of the world, even if his love for you were inadequate to hold him."

"It's no use trying to make you understand, Aunt Bell—you *can't!*"

Whereupon Aunt Bell neglected her former device of pretending that she did, indeed, understand, and bluntly asked:

"Well, what is it, child?"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing, Aunt Bell—it's only what he *is*."

"What he *is*? A handsome, agreeable, healthy, good-tempered, loyal, upright, irreproachable—"

"Aunt Bell, he's *killing* me. I seem to want to laugh when I tell you, because it's so funny that he should have the power to—but I tell you he's killing out all the good in me—a little bit every day. I can't even *want* to be good. Oh, how stupid to think you could see—that any one could see! Sometimes I do forget and laugh all at once. It's as grotesque and unreal as an imaginary monster I used to be afraid of—then I'm sick, for I remember we are bound together by the laws of God and man. Of course, you can't see, Aunt Bell—the fire hasn't eaten through yet—but I tell you it's burning inside day and night."

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She laughed a little, as if to reassure her puzzled listener.

“A fire eating away inside, Aunt Bell—burning out my goodness—if the firemen would only come with engines and axes and hooks and things, and water—I’d submit to being torn apart as meekly as any old house—it hurts so!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE APPLE OF DOUBT IS NIBBLED

The rector of St. Antipas came from preaching his Easter sermon. He was elated. Of the sermons delivered in New York that morning, he suspected that his would be found not the least ingenious. Telling excerpts would doubtless appear in the next day’s papers, and at least one paper would reprint his favourite likeness over the caption, “Dr. Allan Delcher Linford, the Handsome and Up-to-Date Rector of St. Antipas.” Under this would be head-lines: “The Resurrection Proved; a Literal Fact in History not less than a Spiritual Fact in the Human Consciousness. An Unbroken Chain of Living Witnesses.”

He even worded scraps of the article on his way from the church to his study:

“An unusually rich Easter service was held at fashionable St. Antipas yesterday morning. The sermon by its able and handsome young rector, the Reverend Dr. Linford, was fraught with vital interest to every thinking man. The Resurrection he declares to be a fact as well attested as the Brooklyn Bridge is to thousands who have never seen it—yet who are convinced of its existence upon the testimony of those who have. Thus one who has never seen this bridge may be as certain of its existence as a man who crosses it twice a day. In the same way, a witness to the risen Christ tells the glorious truth to his son, a lad of fifteen, who at eighty tells it to his grandson. ‘Do you realise,’ said the magnetic young preacher, ’that the assurance of the Resurrection comes to you this morning by word of mouth through a scant three thousand witnesses—a living chain of less than three thousand links by which we may trace our steps back to the presence of the first witness—so that, in effect, we have the Resurrection on the word of a man who beheld the living Saviour this very morning? Nay; further, in effect we ourselves stand trembling before that stone rolled away from the empty but forever hallowed tomb. As certainly as thousands know that a structure called the Brooklyn Bridge exists, so upon testimony of the same validity do we know that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed on him might not perish but have everlasting life.” God has not expected us to trust blindly: he has presented tangible and compelling evidence of his glorious scheme of salvation.’ The speaker, who is always imbued with the magnetism of a striking personality, was more than usually effective on this occasion, and visibly moved the throng of fashionable worshippers that—”

“Allan, you outdid yourself!” Aunt Bell had come in and, in the mirror over the dining-room mantel, was bestowing glances of unaffected but strictly impartial admiration upon the bonnet of lilac blossoms that rested above the lustrous puffs of her plenteous gray hair.

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The young man looked up from his meditative pacing of the room.

“Aunt Bell, I think I may say that I pleased myself this morning—and you know that’s not easy for me.”

“It’s too bad Nance wasn’t there!”

“Nancy is not pleasing me,” began her husband, in gentle tones.

“I didn’t feel equal to it, Allan,” his wife called from the library.

“Oh, you’re there! My dear, you give up too easily to little indispositions that another woman would make nothing of. I’ve repeated that to you so often that, really, your further ignoring it appears dangerously like perverseness—”

“Is she crying?” he asked Aunt Bell, as they both listened.

“Laughing!” replied that lady.

“My dear, may I ask if you are laughing at me?”

“Dear, no!—only at something I happened to think of.” She came into the dining-room, a morning paper in her hand. “Besides, in to-morrow’s paper I shall read all about what the handsome rector of St. Antipas said, in his handsome voice, to his handsome hearers—”

He had frowned at first, but now smiled indulgently, as they sat down to luncheon. “You *will* have your joke about my appearance, Nance! That reminds me—that poor romantic little Mrs. Eversley—sister of Mrs. Wyeth, you know—said to me after service this morning, ’Oh, Dr. Linford, if I could only believe in Christian dogma as I believe in *you* as a man!’ You know, she’s such a painfully emotional, impulsive creature, and then Colonel Godwin who stood by had to have *his* joke: ‘The symbol will serve you for worship, Madam!’ he says; ’I’m sure no woman’s soul would ever be lost if all clergymen were as good to look upon as our friend here!’ Those things always make me feel so awkward—they are said so bluntly—but what could I do?”

“Mr. Browett’s sister and her son were out with him this morning,” began Aunt Bell, charitably entering another channel of conversation from the intuition that her niece was wincing. But, as not infrequently happened, the seeming outlet merely gave again into the main channel.

“And there’s Browett,” continued the Doctor. “Now I am said to have great influence over women—women trust me, believe me—I may even say look up to me—but I pledge you my word I am conscious of wielding an immensely greater influence over men. There seems to be in my *ego* the power to prevail. Take Browett—most men are

afraid of him—not physical fear, but their inner selves, their *egos*, go down before him. Yet from the moment I first saw that man I dominated him. It's all in having an *ego* that means mastery, Aunt Bell. Browett has it himself, but I have a greater one. Every time Browett's eyes meet mine he knows in his soul that I'm his master—his *ego* prostrates itself before mine—and yet that man"—he concluded in a tone of distinguishable awe—-"is worth all the way from two to three hundred millions!"

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“Mrs. Eversley is an unlucky little woman, from what I hear,” began Aunt Bell, once more with altruistic aims.

“That reminds me,” said the Doctor, recalling himself from a downward look at the grovelling Browett, “she made me promise to be in at four o’clock. Really I couldn’t evade her—it was either four o’clock to-day or the first possible day. What could I do? Aunt Bell, I won’t pretend that this being looked up to and sought out is always disagreeable. Contrary to the Pharisee, I say ‘Thank God I *am* as other men are!’ I have my human moments, but mostly it bores me, and especially these half-religious, half-sentimental confidences of emotional women who imagine their lives are tragedies. Now this woman believes her marriage is unhappy—”

“Indeed, it is!” Aunt Bell broke in—this time effectually, for she proceeded to relate of one Morris Upton Eversley a catalogue of inelegancies that, if authoritative, left him, considered as a husband, undesirable, not to say impracticable. His demerits, indeed, served to bring the meal to a blithe and chatty close.

Aunt Bell’s practice each day after luncheon was, in her own terminology, to “go into the silence and concentrate upon the thought of the All-Good.” She was recalled from the psychic state on this afternoon, though happily not before a good half-hour, by Nancy’s knock at her door.

She came in, cheerful, a small sheaf of papers in her hand. Aunt Bell, finding herself restored and amiable, sat up to listen.

Nancy threw herself on the couch, with the air of a woman about to chat confidentially from the softness of many gay pillows, dropping into the attitude of tranquil relaxation that may yet bristle with eager mental quills.

“The drollest thing, Aunt Bell! This morning instead of hearing Allan, I went up to that trunk-room and rummaged through the chest that has all those old papers and things of Grandfather Delcher’s. And would you believe it? For an hour or more there, I was reading bits of his old sermons.”

“But he was a Presbyterian!” In her tone and inflection Aunt Bell ably conveyed an exposition of the old gentleman’s impossibility—lucidly allotting him to spiritual fellowship with the head-hunters of Borneo.

“I know it, but, Aunt Bell, those old sermons really did me good; all full of fire they were, too, but you felt a *man* back of them—a good man, a real man. You liked him, and it didn’t matter that his terminology was at times a little eccentric. Grandfather’s theology fitted the last days of his life about as crinoline and hoop-skirts would fit over there on the avenue to-day—but he always made me feel religious. It seemed sweet and good to be a Christian when he talked. With all his antiquated beliefs he never made me

doubt as—as I doubt to-day. But it was another thing I wanted to show you—something I found—some old compositions of Bernal's that his grandfather must have kept. Here's one about birds—'jingle-birds, squeak-birds and clatter-birds.' No?—you wouldn't care for that?—well—listen to this."

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She read the youthful Bernal's effort to rehabilitate the much-blemished reputation of Judas—a paper that had been curiously preserved by the old man.

"Poor Judas, indeed!" The novelty was not lost upon Aunt Bell, expert that she was in all obliquities from accepted tradition.

"The funny boy! Very ingenious, I'm sure. I dare say no one ever before said a good word for Judas since the day of his death, and this lad would canonise him out of hand. Think of it—St. Judas!"

Nancy lay back among the cushions, talking idly, inconsequently.

"You see, there was at least one man created, Aunt Bell, who could by no chance be saved—one man who had to betray the Son of Man—one man to be forever left out of the Christian scheme of salvation, even if every other in the world were saved. There had to be one man to disbelieve, to betray and to lie in hell for it, or the whole plan would have been frustrated. There was a theme for Dante, Aunt Bell—not the one soul in hell, but the other souls in heaven slowly awakening to the suffering of that one soul—to the knowledge that he was suffering in order that they might be saved. Do you think they would find heaven to be real heaven if they knew he was burning? And don't you think a poet could make some interesting talk between this solitary soul predestined to hell, and the God who planned the scheme?"

Aunt Bell looked bored and uttered a swift, low phrase that might have been "Fiddlesticks!"

"My dear, no one believes in hell nowadays."

"Does any one believe in anything?"

"Belief in the essentials of Christianity was never more apparent."

It was a treasured phrase from the morning's sermon.

"What are the essentials?"

"Belief that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son—you know as well as I, child—belief in the atoning blood of the Christ."

"Wouldn't it be awful, Aunt Bell, if you didn't believe in it, and had to be in hell because the serpent persuaded Eve and Eve persuaded Adam to eat the apple—that's the essential foundation of Christianity, isn't it?"

"Why, certainly—you must believe in original sin—"

“I see—here’s a note in Bernal’s hand, on one of these old papers—evidently written much later than the other: ’The old gentleman says Christmas is losing its deeper significance. What is it? That the Babe of Bethlehem was begotten by his Father to be a sacrifice to its Father—that its blood might atone for the sin of his first pair—and so save from eternal torment the offspring of that pair. God will no longer be appeased by the blood of lambs; nothing but the blood of his son will now atone for the sin of his own creatures. It seems to me the sooner Christmas loses this deeper significance the better. Poor old loving human nature gives it a much more beautiful significance.’”

“My dear,” began Aunt Bell, “before I broadened into what I have called the higher unbelief, I should have considered that that young man had a positive genius for blasphemy; now that I have again come into the shadow of the cross, it seems to me that he merely lacks imagination.”

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“Poor Bernal! Yet he made me believe, though he seemed to believe in nothing himself. He makes me believe *now*. He *calls* to me, Aunt Bell—or is it myself calling to him that I hear?

“And blasphemy—even the word is ridiculous, Aunt Bell. I was at the day-nursery yesterday when all those babies were brought in to their dinner. They are strictly forbidden to coo or to make any noise, and they really behaved finely for two-and three-year-olds—though I did see one outlaw reach over before the signal was given and lovingly pat the big fat cookie beside its plate—thinking its insubordination would be overlooked—but, Aunt Bell, do you suppose one of those fifty-two babies could blaspheme you?”

“Don’t be silly!”

“But can you imagine one of them capable of any disrespect to you that would merit—-say, burning or something severe like that?”

“Of course not!”

“Well, don’t you really believe that God is farther beyond you or me or the foolish boy that wrote this, than we are beyond those babies—with a greater, bigger point of view, a fuller love? Imagine the God that made everything—the worlds and birds and flowers and butterflies and babies and mountains—imagine him feeling insulted because one of his wretched little John Smiths or Bernal Linfords babbles little human words about him, or even worries his poor little human heart with doubts of His existence!”

“My child, yours is but a finite mind, unable to limit or define the Infinite. What is it, anyway—is it Christian Science taking hold of you, or that chap who preaches that they have the Messiah re-incarnated and now living in Syria—Babbists, aren’t they—or is it theosophy—or are you simply dissatisfied with Allan?” A sudden shrewd glance from Aunt Bell’s baby-blue eyes went with this last.

Nancy laughed, then grew serious. “I think the last is it, Aunt Bell. A woman seems to doubt God and everything else after she begins to doubt the husband she has loved. Really, I find myself questioning everything—every moral standard.”

“Nance, you are an ungrateful woman to speak like that of Allan!”

“I never should have done it, dear, if you hadn’t made me believe you knew. I should have thought it out all by myself, and then acted, if I found I could with any conscience.”

“Eh? Mercy! You couldn’t. The *idea!* And there’s Allan, now. Come!”

The Doctor was on the threshold. “So here you are! Well, I’ve just sent Mrs. Eversley away in tears.”

He dropped into an arm-chair with a little half-humorous moan of fatigue.

“It’s a relief, sometimes, to know you can relax and let your whole weight absolutely down on to the broad earth!” he declared.

“Mrs. Eversley?” suggested Aunt Bell.

“Well, the short of it is, she told me her woes and begged me to give my sanction to her securing a divorce!”

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Nancy sat up from her pillows. “Oh—and you *did?*”

“*Nancy!*” It was low, but clear, quick-spoken, stern, and hurt. “You forget yourself. At least you forget my view and the view of my Church. Even were I out of the Church, I should still regard marriage as a sacrament—indissoluble except by death. The very words—’Whom God hath joined’”—he became almost oratorical in his warmth—“Surely you would not expect me to use my influence in this parish to undermine the sanctity of the home—to attack our emblem of Christ’s union with His Church!”

With reproach in his eyes—a reproach that in some way seemed to be bland and mellow, yet with a hurt droop to his handsome head, he went from the room. Nancy looked after him, longingly, wonderingly.

“The maddening thing is, Aunt Bell, that sometimes he actually has the power to make me believe in him. But, oh, doesn’t Christ’s union with his Church have some ghastly symbols!”

CHAPTER IX

SINFUL PERVERSENESS OF THE NATURAL WOMAN

Two months later a certain tension in the rectory of St. Antipas was temporarily relieved. Like the spring of a watch wound too tightly, it snapped one day at Nancy’s declaration that she would go to Edom for a time—would go, moreover, without a reason—without so much as a woman’s easy “because.” This circumstance, while it froze in the bud every available objection to her course, quelled none of the displeasure that was felt at her woman’s perversity.

Her decision was announced one morning after a sleepless night, and after she had behaved unaccountably for three days.

“You are not pleasing Allan,” was Aunt Bell’s masterly way of putting the situation. Nancy laughed from out of the puzzling reserve into which she had lately settled.

“So he tells me, Aunt Bell. He utters it with the air of telling me something necessarily to my discredit—yet I wonder whose fault it really is.”

“Well, of all things!” Aunt Bell made no effort to conceal her amazement.

“It isn’t necessarily mine, you know.” Before the mirror she brought the veil nicely about the edge of her hat, with the strained and solemn absorption of a woman in this shriving of her reflection so that it may go out in peace.

“My failure to please Allan, you know, may as easily be due to his defects as to mine. I said so, but he only answered, ’Really, you’re not pleasing me.’ And, as he often says of his own predicaments—’What could I do?’ But I’m glad he persists in it.”

“Why, if you resent it so?”

“Because, Aunt Bell, I must be quite—*quite* certain that Allan is funny. It would be dreadful to make a mistake. If only I could be certain—positive—convinced—sure—that Allan is the funniest thing in all the world—”

“It never occurred to me that Allan is funny.” Aunt Bell paused for an instant’s retrospect. “Now, he doesn’t joke much.”

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“One doesn’t have to joke to be a joke, Aunt Bell.”

“But what if he were funny? Why is that so important?”

“Oh, it’s important because of the other thing that you know you know when you know that.”

“Mercy! Child, you should have a cup of cocoa or something before you start off—really—”

The last long hatpin seemingly pierced the head of Nancy and she turned from the glass to fumble on her gloves.

“Aunt Bell, if Allan tells me once more in that hurt, gentle tone that I don’t please him, I believe I shall be the freest of free women—ready to live.”

She paused to look vacantly into the wall. “Sometimes, you know, I seem to wake up with a clear mind—but the day clouds it. We shouldn’t believe so many falsities, Aunt Bell, if they didn’t pinch our brains into it at a tender age. I should know Allan through and through at a glance to-day, if I met him for the first time; but he kneaded my poor girl’s brain this way and that, till I’d have been done for, Aunt Bell, if some one else hadn’t kneaded and patted it into other ways, so that little memories come back and stay with me—little bits of sweetness and genuineness—of *realness*, Aunt Bell.”

“Nance, you are morbid—and I think you’re wrong to go up there to be alone with your sick fancies—why are you going, Nance?”

“Aunt Bell, can I really trust you not to betray me? Will you promise to keep the secret if I actually tell you?”

Aunt Bell looked at once important and trustworthy, yet of an incorruptible propriety.

“I’m sure, my dear, you would not ask me to keep secret anything that your husband would be—”

“Dear, no! You can keep mum with a spotless conscience.”

“Of course; I was sure of that!”

“What a fraud you are, Aunt Bell—you weren’t sure at all—but I shall disappoint you. Now my reason—” She came close and spoke low—“My reason for going to Edom, whatever it is, is so utterly silly that I haven’t even dared to tell myself—so, you see—my *real* reason for going is simply to find out what my reason really is. I’m dying to know. There! Now never say I didn’t trust you.”

In the first shock of this fall from her anticipations Aunt Bell neglected to remember that All is Good. Yet she was presently far enough mollified to accompany her niece to the station.

Returning from thence after she had watched Nancy through the gate to the 3:05 Edom local, Aunt Bell lingered at the open study door of the rector of St. Antipas. He looked up cordially.

“You know, Allan, it may do the child good, after all, to be alone a little while.”

“Nancy—has—not—pleased—me!” The words were clean-cut, with an illuminating pause after each, so that Aunt Bell might by no chance mistake their import, yet the tone was low and not without a quality of winning sweetness—the tone of the injured good.

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“I’ve seen that, Allan. Nance undoubtedly has a vein of selfishness. Instead of striving to please her husband, she—well, she has practically intimated to me that a wife has the right to please herself. Of course, she didn’t say it brutally in just those words, but—”

“It’s the modern spirit, Aunt Bell—the spirit of unbelief. It has made what we call the ’new woman’—that noxious flower on the stalk of scientific materialism.”

He turned and wrote this phrase rapidly on a pad at his elbow, while Aunt Bell waited expectantly for more.

“There’s a sermon that writes itself, Aunt Bell. ’Woman’s deterioration under Modern Infidelity to God.’ As truly as you live, this thing called the ‘new woman’ has grown up side by side with the thing called the higher criticism. And it’s natural. Take away God’s word as revealed in the Scriptures and you make woman a law unto herself. Man’s state is then wretched enough, but contemplate woman’s! Having put aside Christ’s authority, she naturally puts aside *man’s*, hence we have the creature who mannishly desires the suffrage and attends club meetings and argues, and has views—*views*, Aunt Bell, on the questions of the day—the woman who, as you have just succinctly said of your niece, ’believes she has a right to please herself!’ There is the keynote of the modern divorce evil, Aunt Bell—she has a right to please herself. Believing no longer in God, she no longer feels bound by His commandment: ’Wives be subject to your husbands!’ Why, Aunt Bell, if you can imagine Christianity shorn of all its other glories, it would still be the greatest religion the world has ever known, because it holds woman sternly in her sphere and maintains the sanctity of the home. Now, I know nothing of the real state of Nancy’s faith, but the fact that she believes she has a right to please herself is enough to convince me. I would stake my right arm this moment, upon just this evidence, that Nancy has become an unbeliever. When I let her know as plainly as English words can express it that she is not pleasing me, she looks either sullen or flippant—thus showing distinctly a loss of religious faith.”

“You ought to make a stunning sermon of that, Allan. I think society needs it.”

“It does, Aunt Bell, it does! And we are going from bad to worse. I foresee the time in this very age of ours when no woman will continue to be wife to a man except by the dictates of her own lawless and corrupt nature—when a wife will make so-called love her only rule—when she will brazenly disregard the law of God and the word of his only begotten crucified Son, unless she can continue to feel what she calls ’love and respect’ for the husband who chose her. We prize liberty, Aunt Bell, but liberty with woman has become license since she lost faith in the word of God that holds her subject to man. We should be thankful that the mother Church still stands firm on that rock—the rock of woman’s

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subjection to man. Our own Church has quibbled, Aunt Bell, but look at the fine consistency of the Church of Rome. As truly as you live, the Catholic Church will one day hold the only women who subject themselves to their husbands in all things because of God's command—regardless of their anarchistic desire to 'please themselves.' There is the only Christian Church left that knows woman is a creature to be ruled with an iron hand—and has the courage to send them to hell for 'pleasing themselves.'"

He glowed in meditation a moment, then, in a burst of confidence, continued:

"This is not to be repeated, Aunt Bell, but I have more than once questioned if I should always allow the Anglo-Catholic Church to modify my true Catholicism. I have talked freely with Father Riley of St. Clements at our weekly ministers' meetings—there's a bright chap for you—and really, Aunt Bell, as to mere universality, the Church of Rome has about the only claim worth considering. Mind you, this is not to be repeated, but I am often so much troubled that I have to fall back on my simple childish faith in the love of the Father earned of him for me by the Son's death on the cross. But what if I err in making my faith too simple? Even now I am almost persuaded that a priest ordained into the Episcopal Church cannot consecrate the elements of the Eucharist in a sacrificial sense. Doubts like these are tragedies to an honest man, Aunt Bell—they try his soul—they bring him each day to the foot of that cross whereon the Son of God suffers his agony in order to ransom our souls from God's wrath with us—and there are times, Aunt Bell, when I find myself gazing longingly, like a little tired child, at the open arms of the mother Church—on whose loving bosom of authority a man may lay all his doubts and be never again troubled in his mind."

Aunt Bell sighed cheerfully.

"After all," she said briskly, "isn't Christianity the most fascinating of all beliefs, if one comes into it from the higher unbelief? Isn't it fine, Allan—doesn't the very thought excite you—that not only the souls of thousands now living, but thousands yet unborn, will be affected through all eternity for good or bad, by the clearness with which you, here at this moment, perceive and reason out these spiritual values—and the honesty with which you act upon your conclusions. How truly God has made us responsible for the souls of one another!"

The rector of St. Antipas shrugged modestly at this bald wording of his responsibility; then he sighed and bent his head as one honestly conscious of the situation's gravity.

CHAPTER X

THE REASON OF A WOMAN WHO HAD NO REASON

It was not a jest—Nancy's telling Aunt Bell that her reason for going to Edom was too foolish to give even to herself. At least such reticence to self is often sincerely and plausibly asserted by the very inner woman. Yet no sooner had her train started than her secret within a secret began to tell itself: at first in whispers, then low like a voice overheard through leafy trees; then loud and louder until all the noise of the train did no more than confuse the words so that only she could hear them.

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When the exciting time of this listening had gone and she stepped from the train into the lazy spring silence of the village, her own heart spelled the thing in quick, loud, hammering beats—a thing which, now that she faced it, was so wildly impossible that her cheeks burned at the first second of actual realisation of its enormity; and her knees weakened in a deathly tremble, quite as if they might bend embarrassingly in either direction.

Then in the outer spaces of her mind there grew, to save her, a sense of her crass fatuity. She was quickly in a carriage, eager to avoid any acquaintance, glad the driver was no village familiar who might amiably seek to regale her with gossip. They went swiftly up the western road through its greening elms to where Clytie kept the big house—her own home while she lived, and the home of the family when they chose to go there.

At last, the silent, cool house with its secretive green shutters rose above her; the wheels made their little crisping over the fine metal of the driveway. She hastily paid the man and was at the side door that opened into the sitting-room. As she put her hand to the knob she was conscious of Clytie passing the window to open the door.

Then they were face to face over the threshold—Clytemnestra, of a matronly circumference, yet with a certain prim consciousness of herself, which despite the gray hair and the excellent maturity of her face, was unmistakably maidenish—Clytie of the eyes always wise to another's needs and beaming with that fine wisdom.

She started back from the doorway by way of being playfully dramatic—her hands on her hips, her head to one side at an astounded angle. Yet little more than a second did she let herself simulate this welcoming incredulity—this stupefaction of cordiality. There must be quick speech—especially as to Nancy's face—which seemed strangely unfamiliar, set, suppressed, breathless, unaccountably young—and there had to be the splendid announcement of another matter.

"Why, child, is it you or your ghost?"

Nancy could only nod her head.

"My suz! what ails the child?"

Here the other managed a shake of the head and a made smile.

"And of all things!—you'll never, never, never guess!—"

"There—there!—yes, yes—yes! I know—know all about it—knew it—knew it last night—"

She had put out a hand toward Clytie and now reached the other from her side, easing herself to the doorpost against which she leaned and laughed, weakly, vacantly.

“Some one told you—on the way up?”

“Yes—I knew it, I tell you—that’s what makes it so funny and foolish—why I came, you know—” She had now gained a little in coherence, and with it came a final doubt. She steadied herself in the doorway to ask—“When did Bernal come?”

And Clytie, somewhat relieved, became voluble.

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“Night before last on the six-fifteen, and me getting home late from the Epworth meeting—fire out—not a stick of kindling-wood in—only two cakes in the buttery, neither of them a layer—not a frying-size chicken on the place—thank goodness he didn’t have the appetite he used to—though in another way it’s just downright heartbreaking to see a person you care for not be a ready eater—but I had some of the plum jell he used to like, and the good half of an apple-John which I at once het up—and I sent Mehitty Lykins down for some chops—”

“Where is he?”

There had seemed to be a choking in the question. Clytie regarded her curiously.

“He was lying down up in the study a while ago—kicking one foot up in the air against the wall, with his head nearly off the sofy onto the floor, just like he used to—there—-that’s his step—”

“I can’t see him now! Here—let me go into your room till I freshen and rest a bit—quick—”

Once more the indecisive knees seemed about to bend either way under their burden. With an effort of will she drew the amazed Clytie toward the open door of the latter’s bedroom, then closed it quickly, and stood facing her in the dusk of the curtained room.

“Clytie—I’m weak—it’s so strange—actually weak—I shake so—Oh, Clytie—I’ve got to cry!”

There was a mutual opening of arms and a head on Clytie’s shoulder, wet eyes close in a corner that had once been the good woman’s neck—and stifling sobs that seemed one moment to contract her body rigidly from head to foot—the next to leave it limp and falling. From the nursing shoulder she was helped to the bed, though she could not yet relax her arms from that desperate grip of Clytie’s neck. Long she held her so, even after the fit of weeping passed, clasping her with arms in which there was almost a savage intensity—arms that locked themselves more fiercely at any little stirring of the prisoned one.

At last, when she had lain quiet a long time, the grasp was suddenly loosened and Clytie was privileged to ease her aching neck and cramped shoulders. Then, even as she looked down, she heard from Nancy the measured soft breathing of sleep. She drew a curtain to shut out one last ray of light, and went softly from the room.

Two hours later, as Clytemnestra attained ultimate perfection in the arrangement of four glass dishes of preserves and three varieties of cake upon her table—for she still kept to the sinfully complex fare of the good old simple days—Nancy came out. Clytie stood erect to peer anxiously over the lamp at her.

“I’m all right—you were a dear to let me sleep. See how fresh I am.”

“You do look pearter, child—but you look different from when you came. My suz! you looked so excited and kind of young when I opened that door, it give me a start for a minute—I thought I’d woke out of a dream and you was a Miss in short skirts again. But now—let me see you closer.” She came around the table, then continued: “Well, you look fresh and sweet and some rested, and you look old and reasonable again—I mean as old as you had ought to look. I never did know you to act that way before, child. My neck ain’t got the crick out of it yet.”

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“Poor old Clytie—but you see yesterday all day I felt queer—very queer, and wrought up, and last night I couldn’t rest, and I lay awake and excited all night—and something seemed to give way when I saw you in the door. Of course it was nervousness, and I shall be all right now—”

She looked up and saw Bernal staring at her—standing in the doorway of the big room, his face shading into the dusk back of him. She went to him with both hands out and he kissed her.

“Is it Nance?”

“I don’t know—but it’s really Bernal.”

“Clytie says you knew I had come.”

“Clytie must have misunderstood. No one even intimated such a thing. I came up to-day—I had to come—because—if I had known you were here, wouldn’t I have brought Allan?”

“Of course I was going to let you know, and come down in a few days—there was some business to do here. Dear old Allan! I’m aching to get a stranglehold on him!”

“Yes—he’ll be so glad—there’s so much to say!”

“I didn’t know whom I should find here.”

“We’ve had Clytie look after both houses—sometimes we’ve rented mine—and almost every summer we’ve come here.”

“You know I didn’t dream I was rich until I got here. The lawyer says they’ve advertised, but I’ve been away from everything most of the time—not looking out for advertisements. I can’t understand the old gentleman, when I was such a reprobate and Allan was always such a thoroughly decent chap.”

“Oh, hardly a reprobate!”

“Worse, Nance—an ass—think of my talking to that dear old soul as I did—taking twenty minutes off to win him from his lifelong faith. I shudder when I remember it. And yet I honestly thought he might be made to see things my way.”

Their speech had been quick, and her eyes were fastened upon his with a look from the old days striving in her to bring back that big moment of their last parting—that singular moment when they blindly groped for each other but had perforce to be content with one poor, trembling handclasp! Had that trembling been a weakness or a strength? For all time since—and increasingly during the later years—secret memories of it had

wonderfully quickened a life that would otherwise have tended to fall dull, torpid, stubborn. It was not that their hands had met, but that they had trembled—those two strange hands that had both repelled and coerced each other—faltering at last into that long moment of triumphant certainty.

Under the first light words with Bernal this memory had welled up anew in her with a mighty power before which she was as a leaf in the wind. Then, all at once, she saw that they had become dazed and speechless above this present clasp—the yielding, yet opposing, of those all-knowing, never-forgetting hands. There followed one swift mutual look of bewilderment. Then their hands fell apart and with little awkward laughs they turned to Clytie.

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They were presently at table, Clytie in a trance of ecstatic watchfulness for emptied plates, broken only by reachings and urgings of this or that esteemed fleshpot.

Under the ready talk that flowed, Nancy had opportunity to observe the returned one. And now his strangeness vaguely hurt her. The voice and the face were not those that had come to secret life in her heart during the years of his absence. Here was not the laughing boy she had known, with his volatile, Lucifer-like charm of light-hearted recklessness in the face of destiny. Instead, a thinned, shy face rose before her, a face full of awkwardness and dreaming, troubled and absent; a face that one moment appealed by its defenseless forgetfulness, and the next, coerced by a look eloquent of tested strength.

As she watched him, there were two of her: one, the girl dreaming forward out of the past, receptive of one knew not what secrets from inner places; the other, the vivid, alert woman—listening, waiting, judging. She it was whose laugh came often to make of her face the perfect whole out of many little imperfections.

Later, when they sat in the early summer night, under a moon blurred to a phantom by the mist, when the changed lines of his face were no longer relentless and they two became little more than voices and remembered presences to each other, she began to find him indeed unchanged. Even his voice had in an hour curiously lost that hurting strangeness. As she listened she became absent, almost drowsy with memories of that far night when his voice was quite the same and their hands had trembled together—-with such prescience that through all the years her hand was to feel the groping of his.

Yet awkward enough was that first half-hour of their sitting side by side in the night, on the wide piazza of his old home. Before them the lawn stretched unbroken to the other big house, where Nancy had wondered her way to womanhood. Empty now it was, darkened as those years of her dreaming girlhood must be to the present. Should she enter it, she knew the house would murmur with echoes of other days; there would be the wraith of the girl she once was flitting as of old through its peopled rooms.

And out there actually before her was the stretch of lawn where she had played games of tragic pretense with the imperious, dreaming boy. Vividly there came back that late afternoon when the monster of Bernal's devising had frightened them for the last time—when in a sudden flash of insight they had laughed the thing away forever and faced each other with a certain half-joyous, half-foolish maturity of understanding. One day long after this she had humorously bewailed to Bernal the loss of their child's faith in the Gratcher. He had replied that, as an institution, the Gratcher was imperishable—that it was brute humanity's instinctive negation to the incredible perfections of life; that while the child's Gratcher was not the man's, the latter was yet of the same breed, however it might be refined by the subtleties of maturity: that the man, like the child, must fashion some monster of horror to deter him when he hears God's call to live.

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She had not been able to understand, nor did she now. She was looking out to the two trees where once her hammock had swung—to the rustic chair, now falling apart from age, from which Bernal had faced her that last evening. Then with a start she was back in the present. Nancy of the old days must be shut fat in the old house. There she might wander and wonder endlessly among the echoes and the half-seen faces, but never could she come forth; over the threshold there could pass only the wife of Allan Linford.

Quick upon this realisation came a sharp fear of the man beside her—a fear born of his hand's hold upon hers when they had met. She shrank under the memory of it, with a sudden instinct of the hunted. Then from her new covert of reserve she dared to peer cautiously at him, seeking to know how great was her peril—to learn what measure of defense would best insure her safety—recognising fearfully the traitor in her own heart.

Their first idle talk had died, and she noted with new alarm that they had been silent for many minutes. This could not safely be—this insidious, barrier-destroying silence. She seemed to hear his heart beating high from his own sense of peril. But would he help her? Would he not rather side with that wretched traitor within her, crying out for the old days—would he not still be the proud fool who would suffer no man's law but his own? She shivered at the thought of his nearness—of his momentous silence—of his treacherous ally.

She stirred in her chair to look in where Clytie bustled between kitchen and dining-room. Her movement aroused him from his own abstraction. For a breathless stretch of time she was frozen to inertness by sheer terror. Would that old lawless spirit utter new blasphemies, giving fearful point to them now? Would the old eager hand come again upon hers with a boy's pleading and a man's power? And what of her own secret guilt? She had cherished the memory of him and across space had responded to him through that imperious need of her heart. Swiftly in this significant moment she for the first time saw herself with critical eyes—saw that in her fancied security she had unwittingly enthroned the hidden traitor. More and more poignant grew her apprehension as she felt his eyes upon her and divined that he was about to speak. With a little steadying of the lips, with eyes that widened at him in the dim light, she waited for the sound of his voice—waited as one waits for something "terrible and dear"—the whirlwind that might destroy utterly, or pass—to leave her forever exulting in a new sense of power against elemental forces.

"Would you mind if I smoked, Nance?"

She stared stupidly. So tense had been her strain that the words were mere meaningless blows that left her quivering. He thought she had not heard.

"Would you mind my pipe—and this very mild mixture?"

She blessed him for the respite.

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“Smoke, of course!” she managed to say.

She watched him closely, still alert, as he stuffed the tobacco into his pipe-bowl from a rubber pouch. Then he struck the match and in that moment she suffered another shock. The little flame danced out of the darkness, and wavering, upward shadows played over a face of utter quietness. The relaxed shoulders drooped sideways in the chair, the body placidly sprawled, one crossed leg gently waving. The shaded eye surveyed some large and tranquil thought—and in that eye the soul sat remote, aloof from her as any star.

She sank back in her chair with a long, stealthy breath of relief—a relief as cold as stone. She had not felt before that there was a chill in the wide sweetness of the night. Now it wrapped her round and slowly, with a soft brutality, penetrated to her heart.

The silence grew too long. With a shrugging effort she surmounted herself and looked again toward the alien figure looming unconcerned in the gloom. A warm, super-personal sense of friendliness came upon her. Her intellect awoke to inquiries. She began to question him of his days away, and soon he was talking freely enough, between pulls of his pipe.

“You know, Nance, I was a prodigal—only when I awoke I had no father to go to. Poor grandad! What a brutal cub I was! That has always stuck in my mind. I was telling you about that cold wet night in Denver. I had found a lodging in the police station. There were others as forlorn—and Nance—did you ever realise the buoyancy of the human mind? It’s sublime. We rejected ones sat there, warming ourselves, chatting, and pretty soon one man found there were thirteen of us. You would have thought that none of them could fear bad luck—worse luck—none of them could have been more dismally situated. But, do you know? most of those fellows became nervous—as apprehensive of bad luck as if they had been pampered princes in a time of revolution. I was one of the two that volunteered to restore confidence by bringing in another man.

“We found an undersized, insignificant-looking chap toddling aimlessly along the street a few blocks away from the station. We grappled with him and hustled him back to the crowd. He slept with us on the floor, and no one paid any further attention to him, except to remark that he talked to himself a good bit. He and I awoke earliest next morning. I asked him if he was hungry and he said he was. So I bought two fair breakfasts with the money I’d saved for one good one, and we started out of town. This chap said he was going that way, and I had made up my mind to find a certain friend of mine—a chap named Hoover. The second day out I discovered that this queer man was the one who’d been turning Denver upside down for ten days, healing the halt and the blind. He was running away because he liked a quieter life.”

He stopped, laughing softly, as if in remembrance—until she prompted him.

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“Yes, he said, ‘Father’ had commanded him to go into the wilderness to fast. He was always talking familiarly with ‘Father,’ as we walked. So I stayed by him longer than I meant to—he seemed so helpless—and I happened at that time to be looking for the true God.”

“Did you find him, Bernal?”

“Oh, yes!”

“In this strange man?”

“In myself. It’s the same old secret, Nance, that people have been discovering for ages—but it is a secret only until after you learn it for yourself. The only true revelation from God is here in man—in the human heart. I had to be years alone to find it out, Nance—I’d had so much of that Bible mythology stuffed into me—but I mustn’t bore you with it.”

“Oh, but I must know, Bernal—you don’t dream how greatly I need at this moment to believe *something*—more than you ever did!”

“It’s simple, Nance. It’s the only revelation in which the God of yesterday gives willing place to the better God of to-day—only here does the God of to-day say, ’Thou shalt have no other God before me but the God of to-morrow who will be more Godlike than I. Only in this way can we keep our God growing always a little beyond us—so that to-morrow we shall not find ourselves surpassing him as the first man you would meet out there on the street surpasses the Christian God even in the common virtues. That was the fourth dimension of religion that I wanted, Nance—faith in a God that a fearless man could worship.”

He lighted his pipe again, and as the match blazed up she saw the absent look still in his eyes. By it she realised how far away from her he was—realised it with a little sharp sense of desolation. He smoked a while before speaking.

“Out there in the mountains, Nance, I thought about these things a long time—the years went before I knew it. At first I stayed with this healing chap, only after a while he started back to teach again and they found him dead. He believed he had a mission to save the world, and that he would live until he accomplished it. But there he was, dead for want of a little food. Then I stayed a long time alone—until I began to feel that I, too, had something for the world. It began to burn in my bones. I thought of him, dead and the world not caring that he hadn’t saved it—not even knowing it was lost. But I kept thinking—a man can be so much more than himself when he is alone—and it seemed to me that I saw at least two things the world needed to know—two things that would teach men to stop being cowards and leaners.”

Her sympathy was quick and ardent.

“Oh, Bernal,” she said warmly, “you made me believe when you believed nothing—and now, when I need it above all other times, you make me believe again! And you’ve come back with a message! How glorious!”

He smiled musingly.

“I started with one, Nance—one that had grown in me all those years till it filled my life and made me put away everything. I didn’t accept it at first. It found me rebellious—-wanting to live on the earth. Then there came a need to justify myself—to show that I was not the mere vicious unbeliever poor grandad thought me. And so I fought to give myself up—and I won. I found the peace of the lone places.”

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His voice grew dreamy—ceased, as if that peace were indeed too utter for words. Then with an effort he resumed:

“But after a while the world began to rumble in my ears. A man can’t cut himself off from it forever. God has well seen to that! As the message cleared in my mind, there grew a need to give it out. This seemed easy off there. The little puzzles that the world makes so much of solved themselves for me. I saw them to be puzzles of the world’s own creating—all artificial—all built up—fashioned clumsily enough from man’s brute fear of the half-God, half-devil he has always made in his own image.

“But now that I’m here, Nance, I find myself already a little bewildered. The solution of the puzzles is as simple as ever, but the puzzles themselves are more complex as I come closer to them—so complex that my simple answer will seem only a vague absurdity.”

He paused and she felt his eyes upon her—felt that he had turned from his abstractions to look at her more personally.

“Even since meeting you, Nance,” he went on with an odd, inward note in his voice, “I’ve been wondering if Hoover could by some chance have been right. When I left, Hoover said I was a fool—a certain common variety of fool.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’re not—at least, not the common kind. I dare say that a man must be a certain kind of fool to think he can put the world forward by leaps and bounds. I think he must be a fool to assume that the world wants truth when it wants only to be assured that it has already found the truth for itself. The man who tells it what it already believes is never called a fool—and perhaps he isn’t. Indeed, I’ve come to think he is less than a fool—that he’s a mere polite echo. But oh, Bernal, hold to your truth! Be the simple fool and worry the wise in the cages they have built around themselves.”

She was leaning eagerly forward, forgetful of all save that her starved need was feasting royally.

“Don’t give up; don’t parrot the commoner fool’s conceits back to him for the sake of his solemn approval. Let those of his kind give him what he wants, while you meet those who must have more. I’m one of them, Bernal. At this moment I honestly don’t know whether I’m a bad woman or a good one. And I’m frightened—I’m so defenseless! Some little soulless circumstance may make me decisively good or bad—and I don’t want to be bad! But give me what I want—I must have that, regardless of what it makes me.”

He was silent for a time, then at last spoke:

“I used to think you were a rebel, Nance. Your eyes betrayed it, and the corners of your mouth went up the least little bit, as if they’d go further up before they went down—as if you’d laugh away many solemn respectabilities. But that’s not bad. There are more things to laugh at than are dreamed of. That’s Hoover’s entire creed, by the way.”

She remembered the name from that old tale of Caleb Webster’s.

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“Is—is this friend of yours—Mr. Hoover—in good health?”

“Fine—weighs a hundred and eighty. He and I have a ranch on the Wimmenuche—only Hoover’s been doing most of the work while I thought about things. I see that. Hoover says one can’t do much for the world but laugh at it. He has a theory of his own. He maintains that God set this planet whirling, then turned away for a moment to start another universe or something. He says that when the Creator glances back at us again, to find this poor, scrubby little earth-family divided over its clod, the strong robbing the weak in the midst of plenty for all—enslaving them to starve and toil and fight, spending more for war than would keep the entire family in luxury; that when God looks closer, in his amazement, and finds that, next to greed, the matter of worshipping Him has made most of the war and other deviltry—the hatred and persecution and killing among all the little brothers—he will laugh aloud before he reflects, and this little ballful of funny, passionate insects will be blown to bits. He says if the world comes to an end in his lifetime, he will know God has happened to look this way, and perhaps overheard a bishop say something vastly important about Apostolic succession or the validity of the Anglican Orders or Transubstantiation or ‘communion in two kinds’ or something. He insists that a sense of humour is our only salvation—that only those will be saved who happen to be laughing for the same reason that God laughs when He looks at us—that the little Mohammedans and Christians and things will be burned for their blasphemy of believing God not wise and good enough to save them all, Mohammedan and Christian alike, though not thinking excessively well of either; that only those laughing at the whole gory nonsense will go into everlasting life by reason of their superior faith in God.”

“Of course that’s plausible, and yet it’s radical. Hoover’s father was a bishop, and I think Hoover is just a bit narrow from early training. He can’t see that lots of people who haven’t a vestige of humour are nevertheless worth saving. I admit that saving them will be a thankless task. God won’t be able to take very much pleasure in it, but in strict justice he will do it—even if Hoover does regard it as a piece of extravagant sentimentality.”

A little later she went in. She left him gazing far off into the night, filled with his message, dull to memory on the very scene that evoked in her own heart so much from the old days. And as she went she laughed inwardly at a certain consternation the woman of her could not wholly put down; for she had blindly hurled herself against a wall—the wall of his message. But it was funny, and the message chained her interest. She could, she thought, strengthen his resolution to give it out—help him in a thousand ways.

As she fell asleep the thought of him hovered and drifted on her heart softly, as darkness rests on tired eyes.

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CHAPTER XI

THE REMORSE OF WONDERING NANCY

She awoke to the sun, glad-hearted and made newly buoyant by one of those soundless black sleeping-nights that come only to the town-tired when they have first fled. She ran to the glass to know if the restoration she felt might also be seen. With unbiassed calculation the black-fringed lids drew apart and one hand pushed back of the temple, and held there, a tangled skein of hair that had thrown the dusk of a deep wood about her eyes. Then, as she looked, came the little dreaming smile that unfitted critic eyes for their office; a smile that wakened to a laugh as she looked—a little womanish chuckle of confident joy, as one alone speaking aloud in an overflowing moment.

An hour later she was greeting Bernal where the sun washed through the big room.

“Young life sings in me!” she said, and felt his lightening eyes upon her lips as she smiled.

There were three days of it—days in which, however, she grew to fear those eyes, lest they fall upon her in judgment. She now saw that his eyes had changed most. They gave the face its look of absence, of dreaming awkwardness. They had the depth of a hazy sky at times, then cleared to a coldly lucid glance that would see nothing ever to fear, within or without; that would hide no falseness nor yet be deceived by any—a deadly half-shut, appraising coolness that would know false from true, even though they mated amicably and distractingly in one mind.

The effect of this glance which she found upon herself from time to time was to make Nancy suspect herself—to question her motives and try her defenses. To her amazement she found these latter weak under Bernal’s gaze, and there grew in her a tender remorse for the injustice she had done her husband. From little pricking suspicions on the first day she came on the last to conviction. It seemed that being with Bernal had opened her eyes to Allan’s worth. She had narrowly, flippantly misjudged a good man—good in all essentials. She was contrite for her unwifely lack of abnegation. She began to see herself and Allan with Bernal’s eyes: she was less than she had thought—he was more. Bernal had proved these things to her all unconsciously. Now her heart was flooded with gratitude for his simple, ready, heartfelt praise of his brother—of his unfailing good-temper, his loyalty, his gifts, his modesty so often distressed by outspoken admiration of his personal graces. She listened and applauded with a heart that renewed itself in all good resolves of devotion. Even when Bernal talked of himself, he made her feel that she had been unjust to Allan.

Little by little she drew many things from him—the story of his journeyings and of his still more intricate mental wanderings. And it thrilled her to think he had come back with a message—even though he already doubted himself. Sometimes he would be jocular about it and again hot with a passion to express himself.

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“Nance,” he said on another night, “when you have a real faith in God a dead man is a miracle not less than a living—and a live man dying is quite as wondrous as a dead man living. Do you know, I was staggered one day by discovering that the earth didn’t give way when I stepped on it? The primitive man knowing little of physics doesn’t know that a child’s hand could move the earth through space—but for a certain mysterious resistance. That’s God. I felt him all that day, at every step, pushing the little globe back under me—counteracting me—resisting me—ever so gently. Those are times when you feel you must tell it, Nance—when the God-consciousness comes.”

“Oh, Bernal, if you could—if you could come back to do what your grandfather really wanted you to do—to preach something worth while!”

“I doubt the need for my message, Nance. I need for myself a God that could no more spare a Hottentot than a Pope—but I doubt if the world does. No one would listen to me—I’m only a dreamer. Once, when I was small they gave me a candy cane for Christmas. It was a thing I had long worshipped in shop-windows—actually worshipped as the primitive man worshipped his idol. I can remember how sad I was when no one else worshipped with me, or paid the least attention to my treasure. I suspect I shall meet the same indifference now. And I hope I’ll have the same philosophy. I remember I brought myself to eat the cane, which I suppose is the primary intention regarding them—and perhaps the fruits of one’s faith should be eaten quite as practically.”

They had sent no word to Allan, agreeing it were better fun to surprise him. When they took the train together on the third day, the wife not less than the brother looked forward to a joyous reunion with him. And now that Nancy had proved in her heart the perverse unwifeliness of her old attitude and was eager to begin the symbolic rites of her atonement, it came to her to wonder how Bernal would have judged her had she persisted in that first wild impulse of rebellion. She wanted to see from what degree of his reprobation she had saved herself. She would be circuitous in her approach.

“You remember, Bernal, that night you went away—how you said there was no moral law under the sky for you but your own?”

He smiled, and above the noise of the train his voice came to her as his voice of old came above the noise of the years.

“Yes—Nance—that was right. No moral law but mine. I carried out my threat to make them all find their authority in me.”

“Then you still believe yours is the only authority?”

“Yes; it sounds licentious and horrible, doesn’t it; but there are two queer things about it—the first is that man quite naturally *wishes* to be decent, and the second is that, when he does come to rely wholly upon the authority within himself, he finds it a stricter

disciplinarian than ever the decalogue was. One needs only ordinary good taste to keep the ten commandments—the moral ones. A man may observe them all and still be morally rotten! But it's no joke to live by one's own law, and yet that's all anybody has to keep him right, if we only knew it, Nance—barring a few human statutes against things like murder and keeping one's barber-shop open on the Sabbath—the ruder offenses which no gentleman ever wishes to commit.

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“And must poor woman be ruled by her own God, too?”

“Why not?”

“Well, it’s not so long ago that the fathers of the Church were debating in council whether she had a soul or not, charging her with bringing sin, sickness and death into the world.”

“Exactly. St. John Damascene called her ’a daughter of falsehood and a sentinel of hell’; St. Jerome came in with ’Woman is the gate of the devil, the road to iniquity, the sting of the scorpion’; St. Gregory, I believe, considered her to have no comprehension of goodness; pious old Tertullian complimented her with corrupting those whom Satan dare not attack; and then there was St. Chrysostom—really he was much more charitable than his fellow Saints—it always seemed to me he was not only more humane but more human—more interested, you might say. You know he said, ’Woman is a necessary evil, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, a painted ill.’ It always seemed to me St. Chrysostom had a past. But really, I think they all went too far. I don’t know woman very well, but I suspect she has to find her moral authority where man finds his—within herself.”

“You know what made me ask—a little woman in town came to see Allan not long ago to know if she mightn’t leave her husband—she had what seemed to her sufficient reason.”

“I imagine Allan said ‘no.’”

“He did. Would you have advised her differently?”

“Bless you, no. I’d advise her to obey her priest. The fact that she consulted him shows that she has no law of her own. St. Paul said this wise and deep thing: ’I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything unclean, to him it is unclean!’”

“Then it lay in her own view of it. If she had felt free to go, she would have done right to go.”

“Naturally.”

“Yet Allan talked to her about the sanctity of the home.”

“I doubt if the sanctity of the home is maintained by keeping unwilling mates together, Nance. I can imagine nothing less sanctified than a home of that sort—peopled by a couple held together against the desire of either or both. The willing mates need no compulsion, and they’re the ones, it seems to me, that have given the home its reputation for sanctity. I never thought much about divorce, but I can see that much at

once. Of course, Allan takes the Church's attitude, which survives from a time when a woman was bought and owned; when the God of Moses classed her with the ox and the ass as a thing one must not covet."

"You really think if a woman has made a failure of her marriage she has a right to break it."

"That seems sound as a general law, Nance—better for her to make a hundred failures, for that matter, than stay meekly in the first because of any superstition. But, mind you, if she suspects that the Church may, after all, have succeeded in tying up the infinite with red-tape and sealing-wax—believes that God is a large, dark notary-public who has recorded her marriage in a book—she will do better to stay. Doubtless the conceit of it will console her—that the God who looks after the planets has an eye on her, to see that she makes but one guess about so uncertain a thing as a man."

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“Then you would advise—”

“No, I wouldn’t. The woman who has to be advised should never take advice. I dare say divorce is quite as hazardous as marriage, though possibly most people divorce with a somewhat riper discretion than they marry with. But the point is that neither marriage nor divorce can be considered a royal road to happiness, and a woman ought to get her impetus in either case from her own inner consciousness. I should call divorcing by advice quite as silly as marrying by it.”

“But it comes at last to her own law in her own heart?”

“When she has awakened to it—when she honestly feels it. God’s law for woman is the same as for man—and he has but two laws for both that are universal and unchanging: The first is, they are bound at all times to desire happiness; the second is, that they can be happy only by being wise—which is what we sometimes mean when we say ‘good,’ but of course no one knows what wisdom is for all, nor what goodness is for all, because we are not mechanical dolls of the same pattern. That’s why I reverence God—the scheme is so ingenious—so productive of variety in goodness and wisdom. Probably an evil marriage is as hard to be quit of as any vice. People persist long after the sanctity has gone—because they lack moral courage. Hoover was quite that way with cigarettes. If some one could only have made Jim believe that God had joined him to cigarettes, and that he mustn’t quit them or he’d shatter the foundations of our domestic integrity—he’d have died in cheerful smoke—very soon after a time when he says I saved his life. All he wanted was some excuse to go on smoking. Most people are so—slothful-souled. But remember, don’t advise your friend in town. Her asking advice is a sign that she shouldn’t have it. She is not of the coterie that Paul describes—if you don’t mind Paul once more—’Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth.’”

There had come to the woman a vast influx of dignity—a joyous increase in the volume of that new feeling that called to her husband. She would have gone back, but one of the reasons would have been because she thought it “right”—because it was what the better world did! But now—ah! now—she was going unhampered by that compulsion which galls even the best. She was free to stay away, but of her own glad, loyal will she was going back to the husband she had treated unjustly, judged by too narrow a standard.

“Allan will be so astonished and delighted,” she said, when the coupe rolled out of the train-shed.

She remembered now with a sort of pride the fine, unflinching sternness with which he had condemned divorce. In a man of principles so staunch one might overlook many surface eccentricities.

CHAPTER XII

THE FLEXIBLE MIND OF A PLEASED HUSBAND

As they entered the little reception-room from the hall, the doors of the next room were pushed apart and they saw Allan bowing out Mrs. Talwin Covil, a meek, suppressed, neutral-tinted woman, the inevitable feminine corollary of such a man as Cyrus Browett, whose only sister she was.

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The eyes of Nancy, glad with a knowing gladness, were quick for Allan's face, resting fondly there during the seconds in which he was changing from the dead astonishment to live recognition at sight of Bernal. During the shouts, the graspings, pokings, nudgings, the pumping of each other's arms that followed, Nancy turned to greet Mrs. Covil, who had paused before her.

"Do sit down a moment and tell me things," she urged, "while those boys go back there to have it out!"

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Covil dropped into a chair, seeming not loath to tell those things she had, while Nancy leaned back and listened duteously for a perfunctory ten minutes. Her thoughts ran ahead to Allan—and to Bernal—as children will run little journeys ahead of a slow-moving elder.

Then suddenly something that the troubled little woman was saying fixed her attention, pulling up her wandering thoughts with a jerk.

"—and the Doctor asked me, my dear, to treat it quite confidentially, except to bother Cyrus. But, I'm sure he would wish you to know. Of course it is a delicate matter—I can readily understand, as he says, how the public would misconstrue the Doctor's words and apply them generally—forgetting that each case requires a different point of view. But with Harold it is really a perfectly flagrant and dreadful case of mismating—due entirely to the poor boy's thoughtless chivalry—barely twenty-eight, mind you—as if a man nowadays knows his mind at all well before thirty-five. Of course, divorce is an evil that, broadly speaking, threatens the sanctity of our home life—no one understands that better than your husband—and re-marriage after divorce is usually an outrageous scandal—one, indeed, altogether too common—sometimes I wonder what we're coming to, it seems to be done so thoughtlessly—but individual instances are different—-'exceptions prove the rule,' you know, as the old saying goes. Now Harold is ready to settle down, and the girl is of excellent family and all that—quite the social and moral brace he needs, in fact."

Nancy was attentive, yet a little puzzled.

"But—you speak of your son, Harold—is he not already married?"

"That's it, my dear. You know what a funny, bright, mischievous boy Harold is—even a little deliciously wild at times—doubtless you read of his marriage when it occurred—-how these newspapers do relish anything of the sort—she was a theatrical young woman—what they call a 'show girl,' I believe. Humph!—with reason, I *must* say! Of all the egregious and inveterate showiness! My dear, she is positively a creature! Oh, if they'd only invent a monocle that would let a young man pierce the glamour of the footlights. I pledge you my word, she's—but never mind that! Harold was a

thoughtless, restless boy—not bad, you know, but heedless. Why, he was quite the same about business. He began to speculate, and of course, being brother Cyrus's

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nephew, his advantage was considerable. But he suddenly declared he wouldn't be a broker any more—and you'd never guess his absurd reason: simply because some stock he held or didn't hold went up or down or something on a rumour in the street that Mr. Russell Sage was extremely ill! He said that this brought him to his senses. He says to me, 'Mater, I've not met Mr. Sage, you know, but from what I hear of him it would be irrational to place myself in a position where I should have to experience emotion of any sort at news of the old gentleman's taking-off. An event so agreeable to the natural order of God's providence, so plausible, so seemly, should not be endowed with any arbitrary and artificial significance, especially of a monetary character—one must be able to view it absolutely without emotion of any sort, either of regret or rejoicing—one must remain conscientiously indifferent as to when this excellent old gentleman passes on to the Golden Shore'—but you know the breezy way in which Harold will sometimes talk. Only now he seems really sobered by this new attachment—"

"But if he is already married—"

"Yes, yes—if you can call it married—a ceremony performed by one of those common magistrates—quite without the sanction of the Church—but all that is past, and he is now ready to marry one who can be a wife to him—only my conscience did hurt me a little, and brother Cyrus said to me, 'You see Linford and tell him I sent you. Linford is a man of remarkable breadth, of rare flexibility.'"

"Yes, and of course Allan was emphatically discouraging." Again she was recalling the fervour with which he had declared himself on this point on that last day when he actually made her believe in him.

"Oh, the Doctor is broad! He is what I should call adaptable. He said by all means to extricate Harold from this wretched predicament, not only on account of the property interests involved, but on account of his moral and spiritual welfare; that, while in spirit he holds deathlessly to the indissolubility of the marriage tie, still it is unreasonable to suppose that God ever joined Harold to a person so much his inferior, and that we may look forward to the real marriage—that on which the sanctity of the home is truly based—when the law has freed him from this boyish entanglement. Oh, my dear, I feel so relieved to know that my boy can have a wife from his own class—and still have it right up there—with Him, you know!" she concluded with an upward glance, as Nancy watched her with eyes grown strangely quiet, almost steely—watched her as one might watch an ant. She had the look of one whose will had been made suddenly to stand aside by some great inner tumult.

When her caller had gone she dropped back into the chair, absently pulling a glove through the fingers of one hand—her bag and parasol on the floor at her feet. One

might have thought her on the point of leaving instead of having just come. The shadows were deepening in the corners of the room and about her half-shut eyes.

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A long time she listened to the animated voices of the brothers. At last the doors were pushed apart and they came out, Allan with his hand on Bernal's shoulder.

"There's your bag—now hurry upstairs—the maid will show you where."

As Bernal went out, Nancy looked up at her husband with a manner curiously quiet.

"Well, Nance—" He stepped to the door to see if Bernal was out of hearing—"Bernal pleases me in the way he talks about the old gentleman's estate. Either he is most reasonable, or I have never known my true power over men."

Her face was inscrutable. Indeed, she only half heard.

"Mrs. Covil has been telling me some of your broader views on divorce."

The words shot from her lips with the crispness of an arrow, going straight to the bull's-eye.

He glanced quickly at her, the hint of a frown drawing about his eyes.

"Mrs. Covil should have been more discreet. The authority of a priest in these matters is a thing of delicate adjustment—the law for one may not be the law for all. These are not matters to gossip of."

"So it seems. I was thinking of your opposite counsel to Mrs. Eversley."

"There—really, you know I read minds, at times—somehow I knew that would be the next thing you'd speak of."

"Yes?"

"The circumstances are entirely different—I may add that—that any intimation of inconsistency will be very unpleasing to me—very!"

"I can see that the circumstances are different—the Eversleys are not what you would call 'important factors' in the Church—and besides—that is a case of a wife leaving her husband."

"Nance—I'm afraid you're *not* pleasing me—if I catch your drift. Must I point out the difference—the spiritual difference? That misguided woman wanted to desert her husband merely because he had hurt her pride—her vanity—by certain alleged attentions to other women, concerning the measure of which I had no knowledge. That was a case where the cross must be borne for the true refining of that dross of vanity from her soul. Her husband is of her class, and her life with him will chasten her. While here—what have we here?"

He began to pace the floor as he was wont to do when he prepared a sermon.

“Here we have a flagrant example of what is nothing less than spiritual miscegenation—that’s it!—why didn’t I think of that phrase before—spiritual miscegenation. A rattle-brained boy, with the connivance of a common magistrate, effects a certain kind of alliance with a person inferior to him in every point of view—birth, breeding, station, culture, wealth—a person, moreover, who will doubtless be glad to relinquish her so-called rights for a sum of money. Can that, I ask you, be called a *marriage?* Can we suppose an all-wise God to have joined two natures so ill-adapted, so mutually exclusive, so repellent to each other after

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that first glamour is past. Really, such a supposition is not only puerile but irreverent. It is the conventional supposition, I grant, and theoretically, the unvarying supposition of the Church; but God has given us reasoning powers to use fearlessly—not to be kept superstitiously in the shackles of any tradition whatsoever. Why, the very Church itself from its founding is an example of the wisdom of violating tradition when it shall seem meet—it has always had to do this."

"I see, Allan—every case must be judged by itself; every marriage requires a special ruling—"

"Well—er—exactly—only don't get to fancying that you could solve these problems. It's difficult enough for a priest."

"Oh, I'm positive a mere woman couldn't grapple with them—she hasn't the mind to! All she is capable of is to choose who shall think for her."

"And of course it would hardly do to announce that I had counselled a certain procedure of divorce and re-marriage—no matter how flagrant the abuse, nor how obvious the spiritual equity of the step. People at large are so little analytical."

"'Flexible,' Mr. Browett told his sister you were. He was right—you *are* flexible, Allan—-more so than I ever suspected."

"Nance—you *please* me—you are a good girl. Now I'm going up to Bernal. Bernal certainly pleases me. Of course I shall do the handsome thing by him if he acts along the lines our talk has indicated."

She still sat in the falling dusk, in the chair she had taken two hours before, when Aunt Bell came in, dressed for dinner.

"Mercy, child! Do you know how late it is?"

"What did you say, Aunt Bell?"

"I say do you know how late it is?"

"Oh—not too late!"

"Not too late—for what?"

There was a pause, then she said: "Aunt Bell, when a woman comes to make her very last effort at self-deception, why does she fling herself into it with such abandon—such pretentious flourishes of remorse—and things? Is it because some under layer of her

soul knows it will be the last and will have it a thorough test? I wonder how much of an arrant fraud a woman may really be to herself, even in her surest, happiest moments."

"There you are again, wondering, wondering—instead of accepting things and dressing for dinner. Have you seen Allan?"

"Oh, yes—I've been seeing him for three days—through a glass, darkly."

Aunt Bell flounced on into the library, trailing something perilously near a sniff.

Bernal came down the stairs and stood in the door.

"Well, Nance!" He went to stand before her and she looked up to him. There was still light enough to see his eyes—enough to see, also, that he was embarrassed.

"Well—I've had quite a talk with Allan." He laughed a little constrained, uneasy laugh, looking quickly at her to see if she might be observing him. "He's the same fine old chap, isn't he?" Quickly his eyes again sought her face. "Yes, indeed, he's the same old boy—a great old Allan—only he makes me feel that I have changed, Nance."

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She arose from her chair, feeling cramped and restless from sitting so long.

“I’m sure you haven’t changed, Bernal.”

“Oh, I must have!”

He was looking at her very closely through the dusk.

“Yes, we had an interesting talk,” he said again.

He reached out to take one of her hands, which he held an instant in both his own. “He’s a rare old Allan, Nance!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS OF THE GREAT MACHINE

For three days the brothers were inseparable. There were so many ancient matters to bring forward of which each could remember but a half; so many new ones, of which each must tell his own story. And there was a matter of finance between them that had been brought forward by Allan without any foolish delay. Each of them spoke to Nancy about it.

“Bernal has pleased me greatly,” said her husband. “He agrees that Grandfather Delcher could not have been himself when he made that will—being made as it was directly after he sent Bernal off. He finds it absurd that the old man, so firm a Christian, should have disinherited a Christian, one devoted to the ministry of Jesus, for an unbeliever like Bernal. It is true, I talked to him in this strain myself, and I cannot deny that I wield even a greater influence over men than over women. I dare say I could have brought Bernal around even had he been selfish and stubborn. By putting a proposition forward as a matter of course, one may often induce another to accept it as such, whereas he might dispute it if it were put forward as at all debatable. But as a matter of fact he required no talking to; he accepted my views readily. The boy doesn’t seem to know the value of money. I really believe he may decide to make over the whole of the property to me. That is what I call a beautiful unselfishness. But I shall do handsomely by him—probably he can use some money in that cattle business. I had thought first of ten thousand dollars, but doubtless half that will be wiser. I shall insist upon his taking at least half that. He will find that unselfishness is a game two can play at.”

Nancy had listened to this absently, without comment. Nor had Bernal moved her to speech when he said, “You know, Allan is such a sensitive old chap—you wouldn’t guess how sensitive. His feelings were actually hurt because I’d kept him out of grandad’s money all these years. He’d forgotten that I didn’t know I was doing it. Of

course the old boy was thinking what he'd have done in my place—but I think I can make it right with him—I'm sure now he knows I didn't mean to wrong him."

Yet during this speech he had shot furtive little questioning looks at her face, as if to read those thoughts he knew she would not put into words.

But she only smiled at Bernal. Her husband, however, found her more difficult than ever after communicating his news to her. He tried once to imagine her being dissatisfied with him for some reason. But this attempt he abandoned. Thereafter he attributed her coldness, aloofness, silence, and moodiness to some nervous malady peculiar to the modern woman. Bernal's presence kept him from noting how really pronounced and unwavering her aversion had become.

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Nor did Bernal note her attitude. Whatever he may have read in Allan at those times when the look of cold appraisement was turned full upon him, he had come to know of his brother's wife only that she was Nancy of the old days, strangely surviving to greet him and be silent with him, or to wonder with him when he came in out of that preposterous machine of many wheels that they called the town. No one but Nancy saw anything about it to wonder at.

To Bernal, after his years in the big empty places, it was a part of all the world and of all times compacted in a small space. One might see in it ancient Jerusalem, Syria, Persia, Rome and modern Babylon—with something still peculiar and unclassifiable that one would at length have to call New York. And to make it more absorbing, the figures were always moving. Where so many were pressed together each was weighted by a thousand others—the rich not less than the poor; each was stirred to quick life and each was being visibly worn down by the ceaseless friction.

When he had walked the streets for a week, he saw the city as a huge machine, a machine to which one might not even deliver a message without becoming a part of it—a wheel of it. It was a machine always readjusting, always perfecting, always repairing itself—casting out worn or weak parts and taking in others—ever replacing old wheels with new ones, and never disdaining any new wheel that found its place—that could give its cogs to the general efficiency, consenting to be worn down by the unceasing friction.

Looking down Broadway early one evening—a shining avenue of joy—he thought of the times when he had gazed across a certain valley of his West and dreamed of bringing a message to this spot.

Against the sky many electric signs flamed garishly. Beneath them were the little grinding wheels of the machine—satisfied, joyous, wisely sufficient unto themselves, needing no message—least of all the simple old truth he had to give. He tried to picture his message blazing against the sky among the other legends: from where he stood the three most salient were the names of a popular pugilist, a malt beverage and a theatre. The need of another message was not apparent.

So he laughed at himself and went down into the crowd foregathered in ways of pleasure, and there he drank of the beer whose name was flaunted to the simple stars. Truly a message to this people must be put into a sign of electric bulbs; into a phonograph to be listened to for a coin, with an automatic banjo accompaniment; or it must be put upon the stage to be acted or sung or danced! Otherwise he would be a wheel rejected—a wheel ground up in striving to become a part of the machine at a place where no wheel was needed.

For another experience cooling to his once warm hopes, the second day of his visit Allan had taken him to his weekly Ministers' Meeting—an affair less formidable than its title might imply.

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A dozen or so good fellows of the cloth had luncheon together each Tuesday at the house of one or another, or at a restaurant; and here they talked shop or not as they chose, the thing insisted upon being congeniality—that for once in the week they should be secure from bores.

Here Presbyterian and Unitarian met on common ground; Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Methodist—all became brothers over the soup. Weekly they found what was common and helpful to all in discussing details of church administration, matters of faith, methods of handling their charitable funds; or the latest heresy trial. They talked of these things amiably, often lightly. They were choice spirits relaxed, who might be grave or gay, as they listed.

Their vein was not too serious the day Bernal was his brother's guest, sitting between the very delightful Father Riley and the exciting Unitarian, one Whittaker. With tensest interest he listened to their talk.

At first there was a little of Delitzsch and his Babel-Bible addresses, brought up by Selmour, an amiable Presbyterian of shining bare pate and cheerful red beard, a man whom scandal had filliped ever so coyly with a repute of leanings toward Universalism.

This led to a brief discussion of the old and new theology—Princeton standing for the old with its definition of Christianity as "a piece of information given supernaturally and miraculously"; Andover standing for the new—so alleged Whittaker—with many polite and ingenious evasions of this proposition without actually repudiating it.

The Unitarian, however, was held to be the least bit too literal in his treatment of propositions not his own.

Then came Pleydell, another high-church Episcopalian who, over his chop and a modest glass of claret, declared earnest war upon the whole Hegel-Darwinian-Wellhausen school. His method of attack was to state baldly the destructive conclusions of that school—that most of the books of the Old Testament are literary frauds, intentionally misrepresenting the development of religion in Israel; that the whole Mosaic code is a later fabrication and its claim to have been given in the wilderness an historical falsehood. From this he deduced that a mere glance at the Bible, as the higher critics explain it, must convince the earnest Christian that he can have no share in their views. "Deprive Christianity of its supernatural basis," he said, "and you would have a mere speculative philosophy. Deny the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, and the Atonement becomes meaningless. If we have not incurred God's wrath through Adam's disobedience, we need no Saviour. That is the way to meet the higher criticism," he concluded earnestly.

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As the only rule of the association was that no man should talk long upon any matter, Floud, the fiery and aggressive little Baptist, hereupon savagely reviewed a late treatise on the ethnic Trinities, put out by a professor of ecclesiastical history in a New England theological seminary. Floud marvelled that this author could retain his orthodox standing, for he viewed the Bible as a purely human collection of imperfect writings, the wonder-stories concerning the birth and death of Jesus as deserving no credence, and denied to Christianity any supernatural foundation. Polytheism was shown to be the soil from which all trinitarian conceptions naturally spring—the Brahmanic, Zoroastrian, Homeric, Plotinian, as well as the Christian trinity—the latter being a Greek idea engrafted on a Jewish stalk. The author's conclusion, by which he reached "an undogmatic gospel of the spirit, independent of all creeds and forms—a gospel of love to God and man, with another Trinity of Love, Truth and Freedom," was particularly irritating to the disturbed Baptist, who spoke bitterly of the day having dawned when the Church's most dangerous enemies were those critical vipers whom she had warmed in her own bosom.

Suffield, the gaunt, dark, but twinkling-eyed Methodist, also sniffed at the conclusion of the ethnic-trinities person. "We have an age of substitutes," he remarked. "We have had substitutes for silk and sealskin—very creditable substitutes, so I have been assured by a lady in whom I have every confidence—substitutes for coffee, for diamonds—substitutes for breakfast which are widely advertised—substitutes for medicine—and now we are coming to have substitutes for religion—even a substitute for hell!"

Hereupon he told of a book he had read, also written by an orthodox professor of theology, in which the argument, advanced upon scriptural evidence, was that the wicked do not go into endless torment, but ultimately shrivel and sink into a state of practical unconsciousness. Yet the author had been unable to find any foundation for universalism. This writer, Suffield explained, holds that the curtain falls after the judgment on a lost world. Nor is there probation for the soul after the body dies. The Scriptures teach the ruin of the final rejecters of Christ; Christ teaches plainly that they who reject the Gospel will perish in the endless darkness of night. But eternal punishment does not necessarily mean eternal suffering; hence the hypothesis of the soul gradually shrivelling for the sin of its unbelief.

The amiable Presbyterian sniffed at this as a sentimental quibble. Punishment ceases to be punishment when it is not felt—one cannot punish a tree or an unconscious soul. But this was the spirit of the age. With the fires out in hell, no wonder we have an age of sugar-candy morality and cheap sentimentalism.

But here the Unitarian wickedly interrupted, to remind his Presbyterian brother that his own church had quenched those very certain fires that once burned under the pit in which lay the souls of infants unbaptised.

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The amiable Presbyterian, not relishing this, still amiably threw the gauntlet down to Father Riley, demanding the Catholic view of the future of unbaptised children.

The speech of the latter was a mellow joy—a south breeze of liquid consonants and lilting vowels finely articulated. Perhaps it was not a little owing to the good man's love for what he called "oiling the rusty hinges of the King's English with a wee drop of the brogue"; but, if so, the oil was so deftly spread that no one word betrayed its presence. Rather was his whole speech pervaded by this soft delight, especially when his cherubic face, his pink cheeks glistening in certain lights with a faint silvery stubble of beard, mellowed with his gentle smile. It was so now, even when he spoke of God's penalties for the souls of reprobate infants.

"All theologians of the Mother Church are agreed," replied the gracious father, "first, that infants dying unbaptised are excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven. Second, that they will not enjoy the beatific vision outside of heaven. Third, that they will arise with adults and be assembled for judgment on the last day. And, fourth, that after the last day there will be but two states, namely: a state of supernatural and supreme felicity and a state of what, in a wide sense, we may call damnation."

Purlingly the good man went on to explain that damnation is a state admitting of many degrees; and that the unbaptised infant would not suffer in that state the same punishment as the adult reprobate. While the latter would suffer positive pains of mind and body for his sins, the unfortunate infant would doubtless suffer no pain of sense whatever. As to their being exempt from the pain of loss, grieving over their exclusion from the sight of God and the glories of His Kingdom, it is more commonly held that they do not suffer even this; that even if they know others are happier than themselves, they are perfectly resigned to God's will and suffer no pain of loss in regard to happiness not suited to their condition.

The Presbyterian called upon them to witness that his church was thus not unique in attaining this sentimentality regarding reprobate infants.

Then little Floud cited the case of still another heretic within the church, a professor in a western Methodist university, who declared that biblical infallibility is a superstitious and hurtful tradition; that all the miracles are mere poetic fancies, incredible and untrue—-even irreverent; and that all spiritual truth comes to man through his brain and conscience. Modern preaching, according to the book of this heretic, lacks power because so many churches cling to the tradition that the Bible is infallible. It is the golden calf of their worship; the palpable lie that gives the ring of insincerity to all their moral exhortations.

So the talk flowed on until the good men agreed that a peculiarity of the time lay in this: that large numbers of ministers within the church were publishing the most revolutionary heresies while still clinging to some shred of their tattered orthodoxy.

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Also they decided that it would not be without interest to know what belief is held by the man of common education and intelligence—the man who behaves correctly but will not go to church.

Here Father Riley sweetly reminded them—“No questions are asked in the Mother Church, gentlemen, that may not be answered with authority. In your churches, without an authority superior to mere reason, destructive questions will be asked more and more frequently.”

Gravely they agreed that the church was losing its hold on the people. That but for its social and charitable activities, its state would be alarming.

“Your churches!” Father Riley corrected with suave persistence. “No church can endure without an infallible head.”

Again and again during the meal Bernal had been tempted to speak. But each time he had been restrained by a sense of his aloofness. These men, too, were wheels within the machine, each revolving as he must. They would simply pity him, or be amused.

More and more acutely was he coming to feel the futility, the crass, absurd presumption of what he had come back to undertake. From the lucid quiet of his mountain haunts he had descended into a vale where antiquated cymbals clashed in wild discordance above the confusing clatter of an intricate machinery—machinery too complicated to be readjusted by a passing dreamer. In his years of solitude he had grown to believe that the teachers of the world were no longer dominated by that ancient superstition of a superhumanly malignant God. He had been prepared to find that the world-ideal had grown more lofty in his absence, been purified by many eliminations into a God who, as he had once said to Nance, could no more spare the soul of a Hottentot than the soul of a pope. Yet here was a high type of the priest of the Mother Church, gentle, Godly, learned, who gravely and as one having authority told how God would blight forever the soul of a child unbaptised, thus imputing to Deity a regard for mechanical rites that would constitute even a poor human father an incredible monster.

Yet the marvel of it seemed to him to lie in this: that the priest himself lived actually a life of loving devotion and sacrifice in marked opposition to this doctrine of formal cruelty; that his church, more successfully than any other in Christendom, had met the needs of humanity, coming closer to men in their sin and sickness, ministering to them with a deeper knowledge, a more affectionate intimacy, than any other. That all these men of God should hold formally to dogmas belying the humaneness of their actual practise—here was the puzzling anomaly that might well give pause to any casual message-bringer. Struggle as he might, it was like a tangling mesh cast over him—this growing sense of his own futility.

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Along with this conviction of his powerlessness there came to him a new sense of reliance upon Nancy. Unconsciously at first he turned to her for sunlight, big views and quiet power, for the very stimulus he had been wont to draw from the wide, high reaches of his far-off valley. Later, came a conscious turning, an open-eyed bringing of all his needs, to lay them in her waiting lap. Then it was he saw that on that first night at Edom her confidence and enthusiasm had been things he leaned upon quite naturally, though unwittingly. The knowledge brought him a vague unrest. Furtive, elusive impulses, borne to him on the wings of certain old memories—memories once resolutely put away in the face of his one, big world-desire—now came to trouble him.

It seemed that one must forever go in circles. With fine courage he had made straight off to toil up the high difficult paths of the ideal. Never had he consciously turned, nor even swerved. Yet here he was at length upon his old tracks, come again to the wondering girl.

Did it mean, then, that his soul was baffled—or did it mean that his soul would not suffer him to baffle it, try as he might? Was that girl of the old days to greet him with her wondering eyes at the end of every high path? These and many other questions he asked himself.

At the close of this day he sought her, eager for the light of her understanding eyes—for a certain waiting sympathy she never withheld. As she looked up now with a kind of composed gladness, it seemed to him that they two alone, out of all the world, were sanely quiet. Silently he sank into a chair near her and they sat long thus, feeling no need of words. At last she spoke.

“Are you coming nearer to it, Bernal?”

He laughed.

“I’m farther away than ever, Nance. Probably there’s but one creature in this city to-day as out of place as I am. He’s a big, awkward, country-looking dog, and he was lost on Broadway. Did you ever see a lost dog in a city street? This fellow was actually in a panic, wholly demoralised, and yet he seemed to know that he must conceal it for his own safety. So he affected a fine air of confidence, of being very busy about an engagement for which he feared he might be late. He would trot swiftly along for half a block, then pause as if trying to recall the street number; then trot a little farther, and stop to look back as if the other party to his engagement might happen along from that direction. It was a splendid bit of acting, and it deceived them all, in that street of mutterers and hard faces. He was like one of them, busy and hurried, but apparently cool, capable, and ominously alert. Only, in his moments of indecision, his eyes shifted the least bit nervously, as if to note whether the real fear he felt were detected, and then I could read all his secret consternation.

“I’m the same lost dog, Nance. I feel as he felt every time I go into that street where the poor creatures hurry and talk to themselves from sheer nervous fatigue.”

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He ceased speaking, but she remained silent, fearing lest she say too little or too much.

“Nance,” he said presently with a slow, whimsical glance, “I’m beginning to suspect that I’m even more of a fool than Hoover thought me—and he was rather enthusiastic about it, I assure you!”

To which she at length answered musingly:

“If God makes us fools, doubtless he likes to have us thorough. Be a great fool, Bernal. Don’t be a small one.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE INEFFECTIVE MESSAGE

The week had gone while he walked in the crowds, feeling his remoteness; but he knew at last that he was not of the brotherhood of the zealots; that the very sense of humour by which he saw the fallacies of one zealot prevented him from becoming another. He lacked the zealot’s conviction of his unique importance, yet one must be such a zealot to give a message effectively. He began to see that the world could not be lost; that whatever might be vital in his own message would, soon or late, be delivered by another. The time mattered not. Could he not be as reposeful, as patient, as God?

In spite of which, the impulse to speak his little word would recur; and it came upon him stoutly one day on his way up town. As the elevated train slowly rounded a curve he looked into the open window of a room where a gloomy huddle of yellow-faced, sunken-cheeked, brown-bearded men bent their heads over busy sewing-machines. Nearest the window, full before it, was one that touched him—a young man with some hardy spirit of hope still enduring in his starved face, some stubborn refusal to recognise the odds against him. And fixed to his machine, where his eyes might now and then raise to it from his work, was a spray of lilac—his little spirit flaunting itself gaily even from the cross. The pathos of it was somehow intensified by the grinding of the wheels that carried him by it.

The train creaked its way around the curve—but the face dreaming happily over the lilac spray in that hopeless room stayed in his mind, coercing him.

As he entered the house, Nancy met him.

“Do go and be host to those men. It’s our day for the Ministers’ Meeting,” she continued, as he looked puzzled, “and just as they sat down Allan was called out to one of his people who is sick. Now run like a good boy and ’tend to them.”

So it came that, while the impulse was still strong upon him, he went in among the dozen amiable, feeding gentlemen who were not indisposed to listen to whomsoever might talk—if he did not bore—which is how it befell that they had presently cause to remark him.

Not at first, for he mumbled hesitatingly, without authority of manner or point to his words, but the phrase, “the fundamental defect of the Christian religion” caused even the Unitarian to gasp over his glass of mineral water. His green eyes glittered pleasantly upon Bernal from his dark face with its scraggly beard.

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“That’s it, Mr. Linford—tell us that—we need to know that—do we not, gentlemen?”

“Speak for yourself, Whittaker,” snapped the aggressive little Baptist, “but doubtless Mr. Linford has something to say.”

Bernal remained unperturbed by this. Very earnestly he continued: “Christianity is defective, judged even by poor human standards; untrue by the plain facts of human consciousness.”

“Ah! Now we shall learn!” Father Riley turned his most gracious smile upon the speaker.

“Your churches are losing their hold upon men because your religion is one of separation, here and hereafter—while the one great tendency of the age is toward brotherhood—oneness. Primitive man had individual pride—family pride, city pride, state pride, national pride followed—but we are coming now to the only permissible pride, a world pride—in which the race feels its oneness. We are nearly there; even now the spirit that denies this actual brotherhood is confined to the churches. The people outside more generally than you dream know that God does not discriminate among religions—that he has a scheme of a dignity so true that it can no more permit the loss of one black devil-worshipper than that of the most magnificent of archbishops.”

He stopped, looking inquiringly—almost wistfully, at them.

Various polite exclamations assured him of their interest.

“Continue, by all means,” urged Whittaker. “I feel that you will have even Father Riley edified in a moment.”

“The most cynical chap—even for a Unitarian,” purled that good man.

Bernal resumed.

“Your God is a tribal God who performed his wonders to show that he had set a difference between Israel and Egypt. Your Saviour continues to set the same difference: Israel being those who believed his claim to Godship; Egypt those who find his evidence insufficient. But we humans daily practise better than this preaching of retaliation. The Church is losing power because your creeds are fixed while man, never ceasing to grow, has inevitably gone beyond them—even beyond the teachings of your Saviour who threatened to separate father from son and mother from daughter—who would distinguish sheep from goats by the mere intellectual test of the opinion they formed of his miracles. The world to-day insists on moral tests—which Christianity has never done.”

“Ah—now we are getting at it,” remarked the Methodist, whose twinkling eyes curiously belied his grimly solemn face. “Who was it that wished to know the belief of the average unbeliever?”

“The average unbeliever,” answered Bernal promptly, “no longer feels the need of a Saviour—he knows that he must save himself. He no longer believes in the God who failed always, from Eden to Calvary, failed even to save his chosen tribe by that last device of begetting a son of a human mother who should be sacrificed to him. He no longer believes that he must have a mediator between himself and that God.”

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“Really, most refreshing,” chortled Father Riley. “More, more!” and he rapped for silence.

“The man of to-day must have a God who never fails. Disguise it as you will, your Christian God was never loved. No God can be loved who threatens destruction for not loving him. We cannot love one whom we are not free *not* to love.”

“Where shall we find this God—outside of Holy Writ,” demanded Floud, who had once or twice restrained himself with difficulty, in spite of his amusement.

“The true God comes to life in your own consciousness, if you will clear it of the blasphemous preconceptions imposed by Christianity,” answered Bernal so seriously that no one had the heart to interrupt him. “Of course we can never personify God save as a higher power of self. Moses did no more; Jesus did no more. And if we could stop with this—be content with saying ’God is better than the best man’—we should have a formula permitting endless growth, even as He permits it to us. God has been more generous to us than the Church has been to Him. While it has limited Him to that god of bloody sacrifice conceived by a barbaric Jew, He has permitted us to grow so that now any man who did not surpass him morally, as the scriptures portray him, would be a man of inconceivable malignity.

“You see the world has demonstrated facts that disprove the Godship of your God and your Saviour. We have come, indeed, into a sense of such certain brotherhood that we know your hell is a falsity. We know—a knowledge of even the rudiments of psychology proves—*that there will be a hell for all as long as one of us is there*. Our human nature is such that one soul in hell would put every other soul there. Daily this becomes more apparent. We grow constantly more sensitive to the pain of others. This is the distinctive feature of modern growth—our increasing tendency to find the sufferings of others intolerable to ourselves. A disaster now is felt around the world—we burn or starve or freeze or drown with our remote brothers—and we do what we can to relieve them because we suffer with them. It seems to me the existence of the S.P.C.A. proves that hell is either for all of us or for none of us—because of our oneness. If the suffering of a stray cat becomes our suffering, do you imagine that the minority of the race which Christianity saves could be happy knowing that the great majority lay in torment?

“Suppose but two were left in hell—Judas Iscariot and Herbert Spencer—the first great sinner after Jesus and the last of any consequence. One betrayed his master and the other did likewise, only with far greater subtlety and wickedness—teaching thousands to disbelieve his claims to godhood—to regard Christianity as a crude compound of Greek mythology and Jewish tradition—a thing built of myth and fable. Even if these two were damned and all the rest were saved—can you not see that a knowledge of their suffering would embitter heaven

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itself to another hell? Father Riley was good enough to tell us last week of the state of unbaptised infants after death. Will you please consider coldly the infinite, good God setting a difference for all eternity between two babies, because over the hairless pate of one a priest had sprinkled water and spoken words? Can you not see that this is untrue because it is absurd to our God-given senses of humour and justice? Do you not see that such a God, in the act of separating those children, taking into heaven the one that had had its little head wetted by a good man, and sending the reprobate into what Father Riley terms, 'in a wide sense, a state of damnation'—"

Father Riley smiled upon him with winning sweetness.

"—do you not see that such a God would be shamed off his throne and out of heaven by the pitying laugh that would go up—even from sinners?

"You insist that the truth touching faith and morals is in your Bible, despite its historical inaccuracies. But do you not see that you are losing influence with the world because this is not so—because a higher standard of ethics than yours prevails out in the world—a demand for a veritable fatherhood of God and a veritable brotherhood of man—to replace the caricatures of those doctrines that Christianity submits."

"Our young friend seems to think exceeding well of human nature," chirped Father Riley.

"Yes," rejoined Bernal. "Isn't it droll that this poor, fallen human nature, despised and reviled, 'conceived in sin and born in iniquity,' should at last call the Christian God and Saviour to account, weigh them by its own standard, find them wanting, and replace them with a greater God born of itself? Is not that an eloquent proof of the living God that abides in us?"

"Has it ever occurred to you, young man, that human nature has its selfish moments?" asked the high-church rector—between sips of claret and water.

"Has it ever occurred to you that human nature has *any* but selfish moments?" replied Bernal. "If so, your impression was incorrect."

"Really, Mr. Linford, have you not just been telling us how glorious is this nature of man—"

"I know—I will explain to you," he went on, moving Father Riley to another indulgent smile by his willingness to instruct the gray-bearded Congregationalist who had interrupted.

"When I saw that there must be a hell for all so long as there is a hell for one—even for Spencer—I suddenly saw there was nothing in any man to merit the place—unless it

were the ignorance of immaturity. For I saw that man by the very first law of his being can never have any but a selfish motive. Here again practical psychology sustains me. You cannot so much as raise your hand without an intention to promote your happiness—nor are you less selfish if you give your all to the needy—you are still equally doing that which promotes your happiness.

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That it is more blessed to give than to receive is a terse statement of a law scientifically demonstrable. You all know how far more exquisite is the pleasure that comes from giving than that which comes from receiving. Is not one who prefers to give then simply selfish with a greater wisdom, a finer skill for the result desired—his own pleasure? The man we call good is not less selfish than the man we call bad—only wiser in the ways that bring his happiness—riper in that divine sensitiveness to the feelings of his brother. Selfish happiness is equally a law with all, though it send one of us to thieving and another to the cross.

“Ignorance of this primary truth has kept the world in spiritual darkness—it has nurtured belief in sin—in a devil, in a God that permits evil. For when you tell me that my assertion is a mere quibble—that it matters not whether we call a man unselfish or wisely selfish—you fail to see that, when we understand this truth, there is no longer any sin. ‘Sin’ is then seen to be but a mistaken notion of what brings happiness. Last night’s burglar and your bishop differ not morally but intellectually—one knowing surer ways of achieving his own happiness, being more sensitive to that oneness of the race which thrills us all in varying degrees. When you know this—that the difference is not moral but intellectual, self-righteousness disappears and with it a belief in moral difference—the last obstacle to the realisation of our oneness. It is in the church that this fiction of moral difference has taken its final stand.

“And not only shall we have no full realisation of the brotherhood of man until this inevitable, equal selfishness is understood, but we shall have no rational conception of virtue. There will be no sound morality until it is taught for its present advantage to the individual, and not for what it may bring him in a future world. Not until then will it be taught effectively that the well-being of one is inextricably bound up with the well-being of all; that while man is always selfish, his selfish happiness is still contingent on the happiness of his brother.”

The moment of coffee had come. The Unitarian lighted a black cigar and avidly demanded more reasons why the Christian religion was immoral.

“Still for the reason that it separates,” continued Bernal, “separates not only hereafter but here. We have kings and serfs, saints and sinners, soldiers to kill one another—-God is still a God of Battle. There is no Christian army that may not consistently invoke your God’s aid to destroy any other Christian army—none whose spiritual guides do not pray to God for help in the work of killing other Christians. So long as you have separation hereafter, you will have these absurd divisions here. So long as you preach a Saviour who condemns to everlasting punishment for disbelief, so long you will have men pointing to high authority for all their schemes of revenge and oppression here.

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“Not until you preach a God big enough to save all can you arouse men to the truth that all must be saved. Not until you have a God big enough to love all can you have a church big enough to hold all.

“An Indian in a western town must have mastered this truth. He had watched a fight between drunken men in which one shot the other. He said to me, ’When I see how bad some of my brothers are, I know how good the Great Spirit must be to love them all!’”

“Was—was he a member of any church?” inquired the amiable Presbyterian, with a facetious gleam in his eyes.

“I didn’t ask him—of course we know he wasn’t a Presbyterian.”

Hereupon Father Riley and the wicked Unitarian both laughed joyously. Then the Congregationalist, gazing dreamily through the smoke of his cigarette, remarked, “You have omitted any reference to the great fact of Christianity—the sacrifice of the Son of Man.”

“Very well, I will tell you about it,” answered the young man quite earnestly, whereat the Unitarian fairly glowed with wicked anticipations.

“Let us face that so-called sacrifice honestly. Jesus died to save those who could accept his claim to god-ship—believing that he would go to sit at the right hand of God to judge the world. But look—an engineer out here the other day died a horrible death to save the lives of a scant fifty people—their mere physical lives—died out of that simple sense of oneness which makes us selfishly fear for the suffering of others—died without any hope of superior exaltation hereafter. Death of this sort is common. I would not belittle him you call the Saviour—as a man he is most beautiful and moving to me—but that shall not blind me to the fact that the sacrificial element in his death is surpassed daily by common, dull humans.”

A veiled uneasiness was evident on the part of his listeners, but the speaker gave no heed.

“This spectacle of sacrifice, of devotion to others, is needed as an uplift,” he went on earnestly, “but why dwell upon one remote—obscured by claims of a God-jugglery which belittle it if they be true—when all about you are countless plain, unpretentious men and women dying deaths and—what is still greater,—living lives of cool, relentless devotion out of sheer human love.

“Preach this divineness of human nature and you will once more have a living church. Preach that our oneness is so real that the best man is forever shackled to the worst. Preach that sin is but ignorant selfishness, less admirable than virtue only as ignorance is less admirable than knowledge.

“In these two plain laws—the individual’s entire and unvarying selfishness and his ever-increasing sensitiveness to the sufferings of others—there is the promise not of a heaven and a hell, but of a heaven for all—which is what the world is more and more emphatically demanding—which it will eventually produce even here—for we have as little sensed the possibilities of man’s life here as we have divined the attributes of God himself.

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“Once you drove away from your church the big men, the thinkers, the fearless—the souls God must love most truly were it possible to conceive him setting a difference among his creatures. Now you drive away even the merely intelligent rabble. The average man knows your defect—knows that one who believes Christ rose from the dead is not by that fact the moral superior of one who believes he did not; knows, indeed, of God, that he cannot be a fussy, vain, blustering creature who is forever failing and forever visiting the punishment for his failures upon his puppets.

“This is why you are no longer considered a factor in civilisation, save as a sort of police-guard upon the very ignorant. And you are losing this prestige. Even the credulous day-labourer has come to weigh you and find you wanting—is thrilling with his own God-assurance and stepping forth to save himself as best he can.

“But, if you would again draw man, heat him, weld him, hold him—preach Man to him, show him his own goodness instead of loading him with that vicious untruth of his conception in iniquity. Preach to him the limitless devotion of his common dull brothers to one another through their sense of oneness. Show him the common beautiful, wonderful, selfish self-giving of humanity, not for an hour or for a day, but for long hard life-times. Preach the exquisite adjustment of that human nature which must always seek its own happiness, yet is slowly finding that that happiness depends on the happiness of all. The lives of daily crucifixion without hope of reward are abundant all about you—you all know them. And if once you exploit these actual sublimities of human nature—of the man in the street—no tale of devotion in Holy Writ will ever again move you as these do. And when you have preached this long enough, then will take place in human society, naturally, spontaneously, that great thing which big men have dreamed of doing with their artificial devices of socialism and anarchism. For when you have demonstrated the race’s eternal oneness man will be as little tempted to oppress, starve, enslave, murder or separate his brothers as he is now tempted to mutilate his own body. Then only will he love his neighbor as himself—still with a selfish love.

“Preach Man to man as a discovery in Godhood. You will not revive the ancient glories of your Church, but you will build a new church to a God for whom you will not need to quibble or evade or apologise. Then you will make religion the one force, and you will rally to it those great minds whose alienation has been both your reproach and your embarrassment. You will enlist not only the scientist but the poet—and all between. You will have a God to whom all confess instinctively.”

CHAPTER XV

THE WOMAN AT THE END OF THE PATH

He stopped, noticing that the chairs were pushed back. There was an unmistakeable air of boredom, though one or two of the men still smoked thoughtfully. One of these,

indeed—the high church rector—even came back with a question, to the undisguised apprehension of several brothers.

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“You have formulated a certain fashion of belief, Mr. Linford, one I dare say appealing to minds that have not yet learned that even reason must submit to authority; but you must admit that this revelation of God in the human heart carries no authoritative assurance of immortality.”

Bernal had been sitting in some embarrassment, dismayed at his own vehemence, but this challenge stirred him.

“True,” he answered, “but let us thank God for uncertainty, if it take the place of Christian belief in a sparsely peopled heaven and a crowded hell.”

“Really, you know—”

“I know nothing of a future life; but I prefer ignorance to a belief that the most heinous baby that ever died in sin is to languish in a state of damnation—even ‘in a wide sense’ as our good friend puts it.”

“But, surely, that is the first great question of all people in all ages—’If a man die shall he live again?’

“Because there has never been any dignified conception of a Supreme Being. I have tried to tell you what my own faith is—faith in a God wiser and more loving than I am, who, being so, has devised no mean little scheme of revenge such as you preach. A God more loving than my own human father, a God whose plan is perfect whether it involve my living or dying. Whether I shall die to life or to death is not within my knowledge; but since I know of a truth that the God I believe in must have a scheme of worth and dignity, I am unconcerned. Whether his plan demand extinction or immortality, I worship him for it, not holding him to any trivial fancy of mine. God himself can be no surer of his plan’s perfection than I am. I call this faith—faith the more perfect that it is without condition, asking neither sign nor miracle.”

“And life is so good that I’ve no time to whine. If this *ego* of mine is presently to become unnecessary in the great Plan, my faith is still triumphant. It would be interesting to know the end, but it’s not so important as to know that I am no better—only a little wiser in certain ways—than yesterday’s murderer. Living under the perfect plan of a perfect Creator, I need not trouble about hidden details when so many not hidden are more vital. When, in some far-off future, we learn to live here as fully and beautifully as we have power to, I doubt not that in the natural ways of growth we shall learn more of this detail of life we call ’death’—but I can imagine nothing of less consequence to one who has faith.

“I saw a stanza the other day that tells it well:

"'We know not whence is life, nor whither death,
Know not the Power that circumscribes our breath.
But yet we do not fear; what made us men,
What gave us love, shall we not trust again?'"

While quoting the lines his eyes had been straight ahead, absently dwelling upon the space between the slightly parted doors that gave into the next room. But even as he spoke, the last line faltered and halted. His glance slowly stiffened out of widening eyes to the face it had caught there—a face new, strange, mesmeric, that all at once enchained him soul and body. With a splendid, reckless might it assailed him—left him dazed, deaf, speechless.

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It was the face of Nancy, for the first time all its guards down. Full upon him flamed the illumined eyes that made the face a yielding radiance; lifted a little was the chin of gentle curves, the under lip caught as if in that quivering eagerness she no longer breathed—the face of Nancy, no longer wondering, Nancy at last compelled and compelling. A moment the warm light flashed from each to each.

He stopped in a sudden bewilderment, looking blankly, questioningly at the faces about him. Then out of the first chaos came the sense of having awakened from some long, quiet sleep—of having suddenly opened his eyes upon a world from which the morning mists had lifted, to see himself—and the woman who stood always at the end of that upward path—face to face for the first time. One by one his outer sensations returned. At first he heard a blurred murmuring, then he became aware that some of the men were looking at him curiously, that one of them had addressed him. He smiled apologetically.

“I beg your pardon. I—I couldn’t have been listening.”

“I merely asked,” repeated Floud, “how you expect to satisfy humanity with the vague hope that you would substitute for the Christian promise of eternal life.”

He stared stupidly at the questioner.

“I—I don’t know.” He passed a hand slowly upward over his forehead. “Really I can hardly trouble about those matters—there’s so much life to live. I think I knew a moment ago, but I seem to have forgotten, though it’s doubtless no great loss. I dare say it’s more important to be unafraid of life than to be unafraid of death.”

“You were full of reasons a moment ago,” reminded Whittaker—“some of them not uninteresting.”

“Was I? Oh, well, it’s a small matter—I’ve somehow lost hold of it.” He laughed awkwardly. “It seems to have come to me just now that those who study an apple until it falls from its stem and rots are even more foolish than those who pluck and eat.”

Again he was silent, with a great hidden impatience for them to be gone. But Whittaker, the wicked Unitarian, detained them still a moment longer.

“How hardly we should believe in a God who saved every one!” he breathed softly to the remains of his cigar.

“Humph! Such a God would be a mere mush of concession!” retorted Floud, the Baptist.

“And how true,” pursued the unruffled Unitarian, “that we cannot worship a ’mere mush of concession’—how true that our God must hate what we hate, and punish what we

would punish. We might stomach a God who would save orthodox burglars along with orthodox bishops, but not one who saved unbaptised infants and adults of unsound doctrine. Dear, dear, yes! We must have a God with a little human spite in Him or He seems to be spineless."

"A hopeless cynic," declared the soft voice of the Catholic—"it's the Unitarianism working out of him, mind you!"

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“So glad to have met you!” continued the same good man to Bernal. “Your words are conducive to thought—you’re an earnest, decent lad at all events.”

But Bernal scarcely heard them or identified the speakers. They were to him but so many noisy wheels of the vast machine, each revolving as it must. His whole body seemed to send electric sparks of repulsion out to them to drive them away as quickly as might be. All his energies were centred to one mighty impulse.

At last the door closed and he stood alone with the disordered table and the pushed back chairs, doggedly gathering himself. Then he went to the doors and with a hand to each, pushed them swiftly apart.

She stood at the farther side of the room. She seemed to have fled there, and yet she leaned toward him breathless, again with the under lip caught fast in its quivering—-helpless, piteously helpless. It was this that stayed him. Had she utterly shrunk away, even had he found her denying, defiant—the aroused man had prevailed. But seeing her so, he caught at the back of a chair as if to hold himself. Then he gazed long and exultingly into the eyes yielded so abjectly to his. For a moment it filled him to see and know, to be certain that she knew and did not deny. But the man in him was not yet a reasoning man—too lately had he come to life.

He stepped eagerly toward her, to halt only when one weak white hand faltered up with absurd pretension of a power to ward him off. Nor was it her hand that made him stop then. That barrier confessed its frailness in every drooping line. Again it was the involuntary submission of her whole poise—she had actually leaned a little further toward him when he started, even as her hand went up. But the helpless misery in her eyes was still a defense, passive but sufficient.

Then she spoke and his tension relaxed a little, the note of helpless suffering in her voice making him wince and fall back a step.

“Bernal, Bernal, Bernal! It hurts me so, hurts me so! It’s the Gratcher—isn’t it hurting you, too? Oh, it must be!”

He retreated a little, again grasping the back of the chair with one hand, but there was no restraint in his voice.

“Laugh, Nance, laugh! You know what laughing does to them!”

“Not to this one, Bernal—oh, not to this one!”

“But it’s only a Gratcher, Nance! I’ve been asleep all these years. Now I’m awake. I’m in the world again—here, do you understand, before you. And it’s a glad, good world. I’m full of its life—and I’ve money—think of that! Yesterday I didn’t know what money was. I was going to throw it away—throw it away as lightly as I threw away all those

good, precious years. How much it seems now, and what fine, powerful stuff it is! And I, like a sleeping fool, was about to let it go at a mere suggestion from Allan."

He stopped, as if under the thrust of a cold, keen blade.

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[Illustration: “He gazed long and exultingly into the eyes yielded so abjectly to his.”]

“Allan—Allan!” he repeated dazedly while the look of pain deepened in the woman’s eyes. He stared back at her dumbly. Then another awakening became visible in him and he laughed awkwardly.

“It’s funny, Nance—funny—and awful! Do you know that not until I spoke his name then had a thought of Allan come to me? Can you comprehend it? I can’t now. But it’s the truth. I woke up too suddenly. Allan—Allan—.” It sounded as if he were trying to recall some forgotten personality. “Oh, Allan!”

The last was more like a cry. He fell into the chair by which he had stood. And now the woman erected herself, coming forward to stand before him, her head bowed, her hands convulsively interlocked.

“Do you see it all, Bernal? Is it plain now? Oh, how it tortured me—that last Gratcher—the one we make in our own image and yet make to be perfect. It never hurt me before, but now I know why. It couldn’t hurt me so long as I looked it straight in the eye—but just now my eyes had to fall before it, and all in a second it was tearing me to pieces. That’s the only defense against this last Gratcher, Bernal, to look it in the eyes unafraid. And oh, it hurts so—and it’s all my own miserable fault!”

“No, it’s your goodness, Nance.” He spoke very quietly now. “Only the good have a Gratcher that can’t be laughed away. My own was late in coming. Your Gratcher has saved us.”

He stood up and took her unresisting hands in both his own. They rested there in peace, yielding themselves like tired children to caring arms.

“Now I shall be healed,” she said.

“It will take me longer, Nance. My hurt is more stubborn, more complicated. I can’t help it. Something in me resists. I see now that I know too much—too much of you, too much of—”

She saw that he must have suffered some illumination upon Allan. There was a look of bitter comprehension in his face as he broke off. She turned away from it.

When, an hour later, Allan came in, he found them chatting easily of the few people of St. Antipas that Bernal had met. At the moment, they were discussing Mrs. Wyeth, whose face, Bernal declared, was of a rare perfection. Nance turned to her husband.

“You must thank Bernal,” she said, “for entertaining your guests this afternoon.”

“He wouldn’t if he knew what I said—or how it must have bored them. One thing, Nance, they won’t meet here again until you swear I’ve gone!”

“Bernal’s heart is right, even if his theology doesn’t always please me,” said his brother graciously, examining some cards that lay on the table. “I see Mrs. Wyeth has called,” he continued to Nancy, looking up from these.

“Yes. She wanted me to see her sister, poor Mrs. Eversley, who is ill at her house. I promised to look in to-morrow.”

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“I’ve just been telling Nance how beautiful I think Mrs. Wyeth is,” said Bernal. “She’s rare, with that face of the low-browed Greek. It’s one of the memories I shall take back to my Eve-less Eden.”

“She *is* beautiful,” said Nancy. “Of course her nose is the least bit thin and long, but it rather adds zest to her face. Now I must dress for dinner.”

When Nancy had gone, Bernal, who had been speaking with a marked lightness of tone, turned to Allan with an equally marked seriousness.

“Old chap, you know about that money of mine—of Grandfather’s?”

Allan instantly became attentive.

“Of course, there’s no hurry about that—you must take time to think it over,” he answered.

“But there *is* hurry! I shouldn’t have waited so long to make up my mind.

“Then you *have* made up your mind?” questioned his brother, with guarded eagerness.

“Definitely. It’s all yours, Allan. It will help you in what you want to do. And not having it will help me to do what I want to do—make it simpler, easier. Take it—and for God’s sake be good to Nancy.”

“I can’t tell you how you please me, Bernal. Not that I’m avid for money, but it truly seems more in accord with what must have been grandfather’s real wish. And Nancy—of course I shall be good to her—though at times she seems unable to please me.”

There was a sanctified displeasure in his tone, as he spoke of Nancy. It caused Bernal to turn upon him a keen, speculative eye, but only for a moment. And his next words had to do with matters tangible. “To-morrow I’ll do some of the business that can be done here. Then I’ll go up to Edom and finish the transfers that have to be made there.” After a brief hesitation, he added: “Try to please *her* a bit, Allan. That’s all.”

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE MIRROR IS HELD UP TO HUMAN NATURE

When, the next day, Nancy went to pay her promised visit to Mrs. Eversley, the rectory was steeped in the deep household peace of mid-afternoon. Both Allan and Bernal had gone out soon after luncheon, while Aunt Bell had withdrawn into the silence, there to meditate the first letters of the alphabet of the inexpressible, to hover about the pleasant line that divides the normal from the subliminal.

Though bruised and torn, Nancy was still grimly upright in the eye of duty, still a worthy follower of orthodox ways. Buried in her own eventful thoughts in that mind-world where love is born and dies, where beliefs rise and perish but no sound ever disturbs the stillness, she made her way along the shaded side of the street toward the Wyeth residence. Not until she had passed several doors beyond the house did she recall her errand, remember that her walk led to a goal, that she herself had matters in hand other than thinking, thinking, thinking.

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Retracing her steps, she rang the bell and asked for Mrs. Eversley. Before the servant could reply, Mrs. Wyeth rustled prettily down the hall from the library at the back. She wore a gown of primrose yellow. An unwonted animation lighted the cold perfection of her face, like fire seen through ice.

"*So* glad to see you!" she said with graceful effusion—"And the Doctor? And that queer, fascinating, puzzling brother of yours, how are they? So glad! Yes, poor sister keeps to her room and you really mustn't linger with me an instant. I'm not even going to ask you to sit down. Go right up. Her door's at the end of the hall, you know. You'll comfort the poor thing beautifully, you dear!"

She paused for breath, a vivid smile taking the place of words. Mrs. Linford, rendered oddly, almost obstinately reserved by this excessive cordiality, was conscious of something unnatural in that smile—a too great intensity, like the greenness of artificial palms.

"Thank you so much for coming, you angel," she went on playfully, "for doubtless I shall not be visible when you go. You see Donald's off in the back of the house re-arranging whole shelves of wretched, dusty books and he fancies that he must have my suggestions."

"The door at the end of the hall!" she trilled in sweet but unmistakable dismissal, one arm pointing gracefully aloft from its enveloping foam of draperies, that same too-intense smile upon the Greek face that even Nancy, in moments of humane expansion, had admitted to be all but faultless. And the latter, wondering not a little at the stiff disposition to have her quickly away, which she had somehow divined through all the gushing cordiality of Mrs. Wyeth's manner, went on upstairs. As she rapped at Mrs. Eversley's door, the bell of the street door sounded in her ears.

Somewhat less than an hour after, she came softly out again, opening and closing the door noiselessly. So effectually had she soothed the invalid, that the latter had fallen into a much-needed sleep, and Nancy, eager to escape to that mind-world where the happenings are so momentous and the silence is so tense, had crept like a mouse from the room.

At the top of the stairs she paused to gather up her skirts. Then her ears seemed to catch the sound of voices on the floor below and she remained motionless for a second, listening. She had no desire to encounter for the second time the torrent of Mrs. Wyeth's manner, no wish to meet unnecessarily one so disagreeably gifted in the art of arousing in her an aversion of which she was half ashamed.

No further sound greeted her straining ears, and, deciding that the way was clear, she descended the thickly carpeted stairs. Near the bottom, opposite the open doors of the front drawing-room, she paused to look into the big mirror on the opposite wall. As she

turned her head for a final touch to the back of her veil, her eyes became alive to something in that corner of the room now revealed to her by the mirror—something that held her frozen with embarrassment.

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Though the room lay in the dusk of drawn curtains, the gown of Mrs. Wyeth showed unmistakably—Mrs. Wyeth abandoned to the close, still embrace of an unrecognized man.

Distressed at the awkwardness of her position, Nancy hesitated, not knowing whether to retreat or go forward. She had decided to go on, observing nothing—and of course she *had* observed nothing save an agreeable incident in the oft impugned domesticity of Mr. and Mrs. Wyeth—when a further revelation arrested her.

Even as she put her foot to the next step, the face of Mrs. Wyeth was lifted and Mrs. Wyeth's big eyes fastened upon hers through the impartial mirror. But their expression was not that of the placid matron observed in a passage of conjugal tenderness. Rather, it was one of acute dismay—almost fear. Poor Mrs. Weyth, who had just said, "Doubtless I shall not be visible when you go!"

Even as she caught this look, Nancy started down the remaining steps, her cheeks hot from her own wretched awkwardness. She wanted to hurry—to run; she might still escape without having reason to suspect that the obscured person was other than he should be in the opinion of an exacting world. Then, as her hand was at the door, while the silken rustling of that hurried disentanglement was in her ears, the voice of Wyeth sounded remotely from the rear of the house. It seemed to come from far back in the library, removed from them by the length of the double drawing-rooms—a comfortable, smooth, high-pitched voice—lazy, drawling—

"Oh, *Linford!*"

Linford! The name seemed to sink into the stillness of the great house, leaving no ripple behind. Before an answer to the call could come, she had opened the great door and pulled it sharply to behind her.

Outside, she lingered a moment as if in serenely absent contemplation of the street, with the air of one who sought to recall her next engagement. Then, gathering up her skirts, she went leisurely down the steps and passed unhurriedly from the view of those dismayed eyes that she felt upon her from the Wyeth window.

On the avenue she turned north and was presently alone in a shaded aisle of the park—that park whose very trees and shrubs seem to have taken on a hard, knowing look from having been so long made the recipients of cynical confidences. They seemed to understand perfectly what had happened, to echo Wyeth's high-pitched, friendly drawl, with an added touch of mockery that was all their own—"Oh—Linford!"

CHAPTER XVII

FOR THE SAKE OF NANCY

It was toward six o'clock when she ascended the steps of the rectory. Bernal, coming from the opposite direction, met her at the door. Back of his glance, as they came together, was an intimation of hidden things, and at sight of him she was smitten by an electric flash of wonder. The voice of Wyeth, that friendly, untroubled voice, she now remembered had called to no specific Linford. In the paralysis of embarrassment that had seized her in that darkened hallway, she had failed to recall that there were at least two Linfords in existence. In an instant her inner world, wrought into something like order in the past two hours, was again chaos.

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“Why, Nance—you look like night, when there are no stars—what is it?” He scanned her with an assumption of jesting earnestness, palpably meant to conceal some deeper emotion. She put a detaining hand on his arm as he was about to turn the key in the lock.

“Bernal, I haven’t time to be indirect, or beat about, or anything—so forgive the abruptness—were you at Mrs. Wyeth’s this afternoon?”

His ear caught the unusual note in her voice, and he was at once concerned with this rather than with her question.

“Why, what is it, Nance—what if I was? Are you seeing another Gratcher?”

“Bernal, quick, now—please! Don’t worry me needlessly! Were you at Mrs. Wyeth’s to-day?”

Her eyes searched his face. She saw that he was still either puzzled or confused, but this time he answered plainly,

“No—I haven’t seen that most sightly cold lady to-day—more’s the pity!”

She breathed one quick little sigh—it seemed to him strangely like a sigh of relief.

“I knew you couldn’t have been.” She laughed a little laugh of secrets. “I was only wondering foolish wonders—you know how Gratchers must be humoured right up to the very moment you puff them away with the deadly laugh.”

Together they went in. Bernal stopped to talk with Aunt Bell, who was passing through the hall as they entered; while Nancy, with the manner of one not to be deflected from some set purpose, made straight for Allan’s study.

In answer to her ominously crisp little knock, she heard his “Come!” and opened the door.

He sat facing her at his desk, swinging idly from side to side in the revolving chair, through the small space the desk permitted. Upon the blotter before him she saw that he had been drawing interminable squares, oblongs, triangles and circles, joining them to one another in aimless, wandering sequence—his sign of a perturbed mind.

He glanced up with a look of waiting defiance which she knew but masked all his familiar artillery.

Instantly she determined to give him no opportunity to use this. She would end matters with a rush. He was awaiting her attack. She would make none.

“I think there is nothing to say,” she began quickly. “I could utter certain words, but they would mean one thing to me and other things to you—there is no real communication possible between us. Only remember that this—to-day—matters little—I had already resolved that sooner or later I must go. This only makes it necessary to go at once.”

She turned to the door which she had held ajar. At her words he sat forward in his chair, the yellow stars blazing in his eyes. But the opening was not the one he had counted upon, and before he could alter his speech to fit it, or could do more than raise a hand to detain her, she had gone.

He sat back in his chair, calculating how to meet this mood. Then the door resounded under a double knock and Bernal came in.

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“Well, old boy, I’ll be off to-night. The lawyer is done with me here and now I’ll go to Edom and finish what’s to be done there. Then in a few days I’ll be out of this machine and back to the ranche. You know I’ve decided that my message to the world would best take the substantial form of beef—a message which no one will esteem unpractical.”

He paused, noting the other’s general droop of gloom.

“But what’s the trouble, old chap? You look done up!”

“Bernal—it’s all because I am too good-hearted, too unsuspecting. Being slow to think evil of others, I foolishly assume that others will be equally charitable. And you don’t know what women are—you don’t know how the sentimental ones impose upon a man in my office. I give you my word of honour as a man—my word of *honour*, mind you!—-there never has been a thing between us but the purest, the most elevated—the loftiest, most ideal—”

“Hold on, old chap—I shall have to take the car ahead, you know, if you won’t let me on this one....”

“—as pure a woman as God ever made, while as for myself, I think my integrity of purpose and honesty of character, my sense of loyalty should be sufficiently known—”

“Say, old boy—” Bernal’s face had lighted with a sudden flash of insight—“is it—I don’t wish to be indiscreet—but is it anything about Mrs. Wyeth?”

“Then you *do* know?”

“Nothing, except that Nance met me at the door just now and puzzled me a bit by her very curious manner of asking if I had been at the Wyeth’s this afternoon.”

“*What*?” The other turned upon him, his eyes again blazing with the yellow points, his whole figure alert. “She asked you *that—Really*?”

“To be sure!”

“And you said—”

“’No’—of course—and she mumbled something about having been foolish to think I could have been. You know, old man, Nance was troubled. I could see that.”

His brother was now pacing the floor, his head bent from the beautifully squared shoulders, his face the face of a mind working busily.

“An idiot I was—she didn’t know me—I had only to—”

Bernal interrupted.

“Are you talking to yourself, or to me?”

The rector of St. Antipas turned at one end of his walk.

“To both of us, brother. I tell you there has been nothing between us—never anything except the most flawless idealism. I admit that at the moment Nancy observed us the circumstances were unluckily such that an excitable, morbidly suspicious woman might have misconstrued them. I will even admit that a woman of judicial mind and of unhurried judgments might not unreasonably have been puzzled, but I would tear my heart open to the world this minute—’Oh, be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny!’”

“If I follow you, old chap, Nancy observed some scene this afternoon in which it occurred to her that I might have been an actor.” There was quick pain, a sinking in his heart.

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“She had reason to know it was one of us—and if I had denied it was I—”

“I *see*—why didn’t you?”

“I thought she must surely have seen me—and besides”—his voice softened with affection—“do you think, old chap, I would have shifted a misunderstanding like that on to *your* shoulders. Thank God, I am not yet reduced to shirking the penalties of my own blameless acts, even when they will be cruelly misconstrued.”

“But you should have done so—It would mean nothing to me, and everything to you—to that poor girl—poor Nance—always so helpless and wondering and so pathetically ready to *believe*! She didn’t deserve that you take it upon yourself, Allan!”

“No—no, don’t urge! I may have made mistakes, though I will say that few men of my—well, my attractions! Why not say it bluntly?—few men of my attractions, placed as I have been, would have made so few—but I shall never be found shirking their consequences—it is not in my nature, thank God, to let another bear the burden—I can always be a man!—”

“But, old boy—you must think of poor Nancy—not of me!” Again he felt the hurt of her suspicion.

“True—compassion requires that I think of her rather than of my own pride—and I have—but, you see, it’s too late. I committed myself before I knew she didn’t *know*!”

“Let her believe it is still a mistake—”

“No, no—it would be trickery—and it’s impracticable—I as good as confessed to her, you see—unless”—he brightened here and stopped in his walk—“unless she could be made to believe that I meant to shield you!”

“That’s it! Really, you are an executor, Allan! Now we’ll put the poor girl easy in her mind again. I’ll tell her you did it to shield me. You know it’s important—what Nancy thinks of you, old chap—she’s your wife—and—it doesn’t matter a bit how meanly—she thinks of me—of course not. I dare say it will be better for me if she *does* think meanly of me—I’ll tell her at once—what was it I did?”

“No—no—she wouldn’t believe you now. I dislike to say this, Bernal, but Nancy is not always so trusting as a good woman should be—she has a habit of wondering—but—-mind you, I could only consent to this for the sake of her peace of mind—”

“I understand perfectly, old chap—it will help the peace of mind of all of us, I begin to see—hers and mine—and yours.”

“Well, then, if she can be made to suspect this other aspect of the affair without being told directly—ah!—here’s a way. Turn that messenger-call. Now listen—I will have a note sent here addressed to you by a certain woman. It will be handed to Nancy to give to you. She will observe the writing—and she will recognise it,—she knows it. You will have been anxious about this note—expecting it—inquiring for it, you know. Get your dinner now, then stay in your room so the maid won’t see you when the note comes—-she will have to ask Nance where you are—”

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At dinner, which Bernal had presently with Aunt Bell and two empty seats, his companion regaled him with comments upon the development of the religious instinct in mankind, reminding him that should he ever aspire to a cult of his own he would find Boston a more fertile field than New York.

“They’re so much broader there, you know,” she began. “Really, they’ll believe anything if you manage your effects artistically. And that is the trouble with you, Bernal. You appeal too little to the imagination. You must not only have a novelty to preach nowadays, but you must preach it in a spectacular manner. Now, that assertion of yours that we are all equally selfish is novel and rather interesting—I’ve tried to think of some one’s doing some act to make himself unhappy and I find I can’t. And your suggestion of Judas Iscariot and Mr. Spencer as the sole inmates of hell is not without a certain piquancy. But, my dear boy, you need a stage-manager. Let your hair grow, wear a red robe, do healing—”

He laughed protestingly. “Oh, I’m not a prophet, Aunt Bell—I’ve learned that.”

“But you could be, with proper managing. There’s that perfectly stunning beginning with that wild healing-chap in the far West. As it is now, you make nothing of it—it might have happened to anybody and it never came to anything, except that you went off into the wilderness and stayed alone. You should tell how you fasted with him in a desert, and how he told you secrets and imparted his healing power to you. Then get the reporters about you and talk queerly so that they can make a good story of it. Also live on rice and speak with an accent—*any* kind of accent would make you more interesting, Bernal. Then preach your message, and I’d guarantee you a following of thousands in New York in a month. Of course they’d leave you for the next fellow that came along with a key to the book of Revelations, or a new diet or something, but you’d keep them a while.”

Aunt Bell paused, enthusiastic, but somewhat out of breath.

“I’ll quit, Aunt Bell—that’s enough—”

“Mr. Spencer is an example for you. Contrast his hold on the masses with Mrs. Eddy’s, who appeals to the imagination. I’m told by those who have read his works that he had quite the knack of logic, and yet the President of Princeton Theological Seminary preaches a sermon in which he calls him ‘the greatest failure of the age.’ I read it in this morning’s paper. His text was, ‘Ye believe in God, believe also in me.’ You see, there was an appeal to the imagination—the most audacious appeal that the world has ever known—and the crowd will be with this clergyman who uses it to refute the arguments of a man who worked hard through forty years of ill-health to get at the mere dry common-sense of things. If Jesus had descended to logic, he’d never have made a convert. But he appealed magnificently to the imagination, and see the result!”

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His mind had been dwelling on Allan's trouble, but now he came back to his gracious adviser.

"You do me good, Aunt Bell—you've taken all that message nonsense out of me. I suppose I *could* be one of them, you know—one of those fellows that get into trouble—if I saw it was needed; but it isn't. Let the men who can't help it do it—they have no choice. Hereafter I shall worry as little about the world's salvation as I do about my own."

When they had finished dinner he let it be known that he was not a little anxious concerning a message that was late in arriving, and he made it a point, indeed, that the maid should advise Mrs. Linford to this effect, with an inquiry whether she might not have seen the delayed missive.

Then, after a word with Allan, he went to his room and from his south window smoked into the night—smoked into something approaching quietude a mind that had been rebelliously running back to the bare-armed girl in dusky white—the wondering, waiting girl whose hand had trembled into his so long ago—so many years during which he had been a dreaming fool, forgetting the world to worship certain impalpable gods of idealism—forgetting a world in which it was the divinely sensible custom to eat one's candy cane instead of preserving it superstitiously through barren years!

He knew that he had awakened too late for more than a fleeting vision of what would have made his life full. Now he must be off, up the path again, this time knowing certainly that the woman would never more stand waiting and wondering at the end, to embitter his renunciations. The woman was definitely gone. That was something, even though she went with that absurd, unreasoning, womanish suspicion. And he had one free, dear look from her to keep through the empty days.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FELL FINGER OF CALUMNY SEEMS TO BE AGREEABLY DIVERTED

Shut in his study, the rector of St. Antipas paced the floor with nicely measured steps, or sat at his desk to make endless squares, circles, and triangles. He was engrossed in the latter diversion when he heard the bell sound below. He sat back to hear the steps of the maid, the opening of the door; then, after an interval, her steps ascending the stairs and stopping at his own door; then her knock.

"A letter for Mr. Bernal, sir!"

He glanced at the envelope she held, noting its tint.

"He's not here Nora. Take it to Mrs. Linford. She will know where he is."

He heard her go down the hall and knock at another door. She was compelled to knock twice, and then there was delay before the door opened.

He drew some pages of manuscript before him and affected to be busy at a work of revision, crossing out a word here, interlining one there, scanning the result with undivided attention.

When he heard a knock he did not look up, but said, “Come!” Though still intent at his work, he knew that Nancy stood there, looking from the letter to him.

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“Nora said you sent this letter to me—it’s for Bernal—”

He answered, still without looking up,

“I thought he might be with you, or that you might know where he was.”

“I don’t.”

He knew that she studied the superscription of the envelope.

“Well, leave it here on my desk till he comes. I sent it to you only because I heard him inquiring if a letter had not come for him—he seemed rather anxious about some letter—troubled, in fact—doubtless some business affair. I hoped this might be what he was expecting.”

His eyes were still on the page before him, and he crossed out a word and wrote another above it, after a meditative pause. Still the woman at the door hesitated.

“Did you chance to notice the address on the envelope?”

He glanced at her now for the first time, apparently in some surprise: “No—it is not my custom to study addresses of letters not my own. Nora said it was for Bernal and he had seemed really distressed about some letter or message that didn’t come—if you will leave it here—”

“I wish to hand it to him myself.”

“As you like.” He returned to his work, crossing out a whole line and a half with broad, emphatic marks. Then he bent lower, and the interest in his page seemed to redouble, for he heard the door of Bernal’s room open. Nancy called:

“Bernal!”

He came to the door where she stood and she stepped a little inside so that he might enter.

“I am anxious about a letter. Ah, you have it!”

She was scanning him with a look that was acid to eat out any untruth in his face.

“Yes—it just came.” She held it out to him. He looked at the front of the envelope, then up to her half-shut eager eyes—eyes curiously hardened now—then he blushed flagrantly—a thorough, riotous blush—and reached for the letter with a pitiful confusion of manner, not again raising his uneasy eyes to hers.

“I was expecting—looking—for a message, you know—yes, yes—this is it—thank you very much, you know!”

He stammered, his confusion deepened. With the letter clutched eagerly in his hand he went out.

She looked after him, intently. When he had shut his own door she glanced over at the inattentive Allan, once more busy at his manuscript and apparently unconscious of her presence.

A long time she stood in silence, trying to moderate the beating of her heart. Once she turned as if to go, but caught herself and turned again to look at the bent head of Allan.

At last it seemed to her that she could trust herself to speak. Closing the door softly, she went to the big chair at the end of the desk. As she let herself go into this with a sudden joy in the strength of its supporting arms, her husband looked up at her inquiringly.

She did not speak, but returned his gaze; returned it, with such steadiness that presently he let his own eyes go down before hers with palpable confusion, as if fearing some secret might lie there plain to her view. His manner stimulated the suspicion under which she now seemed to labour.

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“Allan, I must know something at once very clearly. It will make a mighty difference in your life and in mine.”

“What is it you wish to know?” His glance was oblique and his manner one of discomfort, the embarrassed discomfort of a man who fears that the real truth—the truth he has generously striven to withhold—is at last to come out.

“That letter which Bernal was so troubled about came from—from that woman—how could I avoid seeing that when it was handed to me? Did you know it, too?”

“Why, Nancy—I knew—of course—I knew he expected—I mean the poor boy told me—” Here he broke off in the same pitiful confusion that had marked Bernal’s manner at the door—the confusion of apprehended deceit. Then he began again, as if with gathered wits—“What was I saying? I know nothing whatever of Bernal’s affairs or his letters. Really, how should I? You see, I have work on my mind.” As if to cover his awkwardness, he seized his pen and hastily began to cross out a phrase on the page before him.

“Allan!” Though low, it was so near a cry that he looked up in what seemed to be alarm. She was leaning forward in the chair, one hand reaching toward him over the desk, and she spoke rapidly.

“Allan, I find myself suspecting now that you tried to deceive me this afternoon—that Bernal did, also, incredible as it sounds—that you tried to take the blame of that wretched thing off his shoulders. That letter to him indicates it, his own pitiful embarrassment just now—oh, an honest man wouldn’t have looked as he did!—your own manner at this instant. You are both trying—Oh, tell me the truth now!—you’ll never dream how badly I need it, what it means to my whole life—tell me, Allan—for God’s sake be honest this instant—my poor head is whirling with all the lies! Let me feel there is truth somewhere. Listen. I swear I’ll stay by it, wherever it takes me—here or away from here—but I must have it. Oh, Allan, if it should be in you, after all—Allan! dear, *dear*—Oh! I do see it now—you *can’t* deceive—you *can’t* deceive!”

Slowly at first his head bent under her words, bent in cowardly evasion of her sharp glance, the sidelong shiftings of his eyes portraying him, the generous liar, brought at last to bay by his own honest clumsiness. Then, as her appeal grew warmer, tenderer, more insistent, the fine head was suddenly erected and proud confession was written plainly over the glowing face—that beautiful contrition of one who has willed to bear a brother’s shame and failed from lack of genius in the devious ways of deceit.

Now he stood nobly from his chair and she was up with a little loving rush to his arms. Then, as he would have held her protectingly, she gently pushed away.

“Don’t—don’t take me yet, dear—I should be crying in another moment—I’m so—so *beaten*—and I want not to cry till I’ve told you, oh, so many things! Sit again and let us talk calmly first. Now why—*why* did you pretend this wretched thing?”

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He faced her proudly, with the big, honest, clumsy dignity of a rugged man—and there was a loving quiet in his tones that touched her ineffably.

“Poor Bernal had told me his—his *contretemps*. The rest is simple. He is my brother. The last I remember of our mother is her straining me to her poor breast and saying, ‘Oh, take care of little Bernal!’” Tears were glistening in his eyes.

“From the very freedom of the poor boy’s talk about religious matters, it is the more urgent that his conduct be irreproachable. I could not bear that even you should think a shameful thing of him.”

She looked at him with swimming eyes, yet held her tears in check through the very excitement of this splendid new admiration for him.

“But that was foolish—quixotic—”

“You will never know, little woman, what a brother’s love is. Don’t you remember years ago I told you that I would stand by Bernal, come what might. Did you think that was idle boasting?”

“But you were willing to have me suspect *that* of you!”

He spoke with a sad, sweet gentleness now, as one might speak who had long suffered hurts in secret.

“Dearest—dear little woman—I already knew that I had been unable to retain your love—God knows I tried—but in some way I had proved unworthy of it. I had come to believe—painful and humiliating though that belief was—that you could not think less of me—your words to-night proved that I was right—you would have gone away, even without this. But at least my poor brother might still seem good to you.”

“Oh, you poor, foolish, foolish, man—And yet, Allan, nothing less than this would have shown you truly to me. I can speak plainly now—indeed I must, for once. Allan, you have ways—mannerisms—that are unfortunate. They raised in me a conviction that you were not genuine—that you were somehow false. Don’t let it hurt now, dear, for see—this one little unstudied, impetuous act of devotion, simple and instinctive with your generous heart, has revealed your true self to me as nothing else could have done. Oh, don’t you see how you have given me at last what I had to have, if we were to live on together—something in you to *hold* to—a foundation to rest upon—something I can know in my heart of hearts is stable—despite any outward, traitorous *seeming*! Now forever I can be loving, and loyal, in spite of all those signs which I see at last are misleading.”

Again and again she sought to envelope him with acceptable praises, while he gazed fondly at her from that justified pride in his own stanchness—murmuring, “Nance, you please me—you *please* me!”

“Don’t you see, dear? I couldn’t reach you before. You gave me nothing to believe in—not even God. That seeming lack of genuineness in you stifled my soul. I could no longer even want to be good—and all that for the lack of this dear foolish bit of realness in you.”

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“No one can know better than I that my nature is a faulty one, Nance—”

“Say unfortunate, Allan—not faulty. I shall never again believe a fault of you. How stupid a woman can be, how superficial in her judgments—and what stupids they are who say she is intuitive! Do you know, I believed in Bernal infinitely more than I can tell you, and Bernal made me believe in everything else—in God and goodness and virtue and truth—in all the good things we like to believe in—yet see what he did!”

“My dear, I know little of the circumstances, but—”

“It isn’t *that*—I can’t judge him in that—but this I must judge—Bernal, when he saw I did not know who had been there, was willing I should think it was you. To retain my respect he was willing to betray you.” She laughed, a little hard laugh, and seemed to be in pain. “You will never know just what the thought of that boy has been to me all these years, and especially this last week. But now—poor weak Bernal! Poor *Judas*, indeed!” There was a kind of anguished bitterness in the last words.

“My dear, try not to think harshly of the poor boy,” remonstrated Allan gently. “Remember that whatever his mistakes, he has a good heart—and he is my brother.”

“Oh! you big, generous, good-thinking boy, you—Can’t you see that is precisely what he *lacks*—a good heart? Oh, dearest, I needed this—to show Bernal to me not less than to show you to me. There were grave reasons why I needed to see you both as I see you this moment.”

There were steps along the hall and a knock at the door.

“It must be Bernal,” he said—“he was to leave about this time.”

“I can’t see him again.”

“Just this once, dear—for *my* sake! Come!”

Bernal stood in the doorway, hat in hand, his bag at his feet. With his hat he held a letter. Allan went forward to meet him. Nancy stood up to study the lines of an etching on the wall.

“I’ve come to say good-bye, you know.” She heard the miserable embarrassment of his tones, and knew, though she did not glance at him, that there was a shameful droop to his whole figure.

Allan shook hands with him, first taking the letter he held.

“Good-bye—old chap—God bless you!”

He muttered, with that wretched consciousness of guilt, something about being sorry to go.

“And I don’t want to preach, old chap,” continued Allan, giving the hand a farewell grip, “but remember there are always two pairs of arms that will never be shut to you, the arms of the Church of Him who died to save us,—and my own poor arms, hardly less loving.”

“Thank you, old boy—I’ll go back to Hoover”—he looked hesitatingly at the profile of Nancy—“Hoover thinks it’s all rather droll, you know—Good-bye, old boy! Good-bye, Nancy.”

“My dear, Bernal is saying good-bye.”

She turned and said “good-bye.” He stepped toward her—seeming to her to slink as he walked—but he held out his hand and she gave him her own, cold, and unyielding. He went out, with a last awkward “Good-bye, old chap!” to Allan.

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Nancy turned to face her husband, putting out her hands to him. He had removed from its envelope the letter Bernal had left him, and seemed about to put it rather hastily into his pocket, but she seized it playfully, not noting that his hand gave it up with a certain reluctance, her eyes upon his face.

“No more business to-night—we have to talk. Oh, I must tell you so much that has troubled me and made me doubt, my dear—and my poor mind has been up and down like a see-saw. I wonder it’s not a wreck. Come, put away your business—there.” She placed the letter and its envelope on the desk.

“Now sit here while I tell you things.”

An hour they were there, lingering in talk—talking in a circle; for at regular intervals Nancy must return to this: “I believe no wife ever goes away until there is absolutely no shred of possibility left—no last bit of realness to hold her. But now I know your stanchness.”

“Really, Nance—I can’t tell you how much you please me.”

There was a knock at the door. They looked at each other bewildered.

“The telephone, sir,” said the maid in response to Allan’s tardy “Come in.”

When he had gone, whistling cheerily, she walked nervously about the room, studying familiar objects from out of her animated meditation.

Coming to his desk, she snuggled affectionately into his chair and gazed fondly over its litter of papers. With a little instinctive move to bring somewhat of order to the chaos, she reached forward, but her elbow brushed to the floor two or three letters that had lain at the edge of the desk.

As she stooped to pick up the fallen papers the letter Bernal had left lay open before her, a letter written in long, slanting but vividly legible characters. And then, quite before she recognised what letter it was, or could feel curious concerning it, the first illuminating line of it had flashed irrevocably to her mind’s centre.

When Allan appeared in the doorway a few minutes later, she was standing by the desk. She held the letter in both hands and over it her eyes flamed—blasted.

Divining what she had done, his mind ran with lightning quickness to face this new emergency. But he was puzzled and helpless, for now her hands fell and she laughed weakly, almost hysterically. He searched for the key to this unnatural behaviour. He began, hesitatingly, expecting some word from her to guide him along the proper line of defense.

“I am sure, my dear—if you had only—only trusted me—implicitly—your opinion of this affair—”

At the sound of his voice she ceased to laugh, stiffening into a wild, grim intensity.

“Now I can look that thing straight in the eyes and it can’t hurt me.”

“In the eyes?” he questioned, blankly.

“I can *go* now.”

“You will make me the laughing-stock of this town!”

For the first time in their life together there was the heat of real anger in his voice. Yet she did not seem to hear.

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“Yes—that last terrible Gratcher can’t hurt me now.”

He frowned, with a sulky assumption of that dignity which he felt was demanded of him.

“I don’t understand you!”

Still the unseeing eyes played about him, yet she heard at last.

“But *he* will—*he* will!” she cried exultingly, and her eyes were wet with an unexplained gladness.

CHAPTER XIX

A MERE BIT OF GOSSIP

The Ministers’ Meeting of the following Tuesday was pleasantly enlivened with gossip—-retained, of course, within seemly bounds. There was absent the Reverend Dr. Linford, sometime rector of St. Antipas, said lately to have emerged from a state of spiritual chrysalis into a world made new with truths that were yet old. It was concerning this circumstance that discreet expressions were oftenest heard during the function.

One brother declared that the Linfords were both extremists: one with his absurdly radical disbelief in revealed religion; the other flying at last to the Mother Church for that authority which he professed not to find in his own.

Another asserted that in talking with Dr. Linford now, one brought away the notion that in renouncing his allegiance to the Episcopal faith he had gone to the extreme of renouncing marriage, in order that the Mother Church might become his only bride. True, Linford said nothing at all like this;—the idea was fleeting, filmy, traceable to no specific words of his. Yet it left a track across the mind. It seemed to be the very spirit of his speech upon the subject. Certainly no other reason had been suggested for the regrettable, severance of this domestic tie. Conjecture was futile and Mrs. Linford, secluded in her country home at Edom, had steadfastly refused, so said the public prints, to give any reason whatsoever.

His soup finished, the Reverend Mr. Whittaker unfolded the early edition of an evening paper to a page which bore an excellent likeness of Dr. Linford.

“I’ll read you some things from his letter,” he said, “though I’ll confess I don’t wholly approve his taste in giving it to the press. However—here’s one bit:

“’When I was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church I dreamed of wielding an influence that would tend to harmonise the conflicting schools of churchmanship. It seemed to me that my little life might be of value, as I comprehended the essentials of

church citizenship. I will not dwell upon my difficulties. The present is no time to murmur. Suffice it to say, I have long held, I have taught, nearly every Catholic doctrine not actually denied by the Anglican formularies; and I have accepted and revived in St. Antipas every Catholic practice not positively forbidden.

“But I have lately become convinced that the Anglican orders of the ministry are invalid. I am persuaded that a priest ordained into the Episcopal Church cannot consecrate the elements of the Eucharist in a sacrificial sense. Could I be less than true to my inner faith in a matter touching the sacred verity of the Real Presence—the actual body and blood of our Saviour?

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“After conflict and prayer I have gone trustingly whither God has been pleased to lead me. In my humble sight the only spiritual body that actually claims to teach truth upon authority, the only body divinely protected from teaching error, is the Holy, Catholic and Roman Church.

“For the last time I have exercised my private judgment, as every man must exercise it once, at least, and I now seek communion with this largest and oldest body of Christians in the world. I have faced an emergency fraught with vital interest to every thinking man. I have met it; the rest is with my God. Praying that I might be adorned with the splendours of holiness, and knowing that the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, I took for my motto this sentence from Huxley: ’Sit down before fact as a little child; be prepared to give up every preconceived notion; follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses Nature leads.’ Presently, God willing, I shall be in communion with the See of Rome, where I feel that there is a future for me!”

The reader had been absently stabbing at his fish with an aimless fork. He now laid down his paper to give the food his entire attention.

“You see,” began Floud, “I say one brother is quite as extreme as the other.”

Father Riley smiled affably, and begged Whittaker to finish the letter.

“Your fish is fresh, dear man, but your news may be stale before we reach it—so hasten now—I’ve a presentiment that our friend goes still farther afield.”

Whittaker abandoned his fish with a last thoughtful look, and resumed the reading.

“May I conclude by reminding you that the issue between Christianity and science falsely so called has never been enough simplified? Christianity rests squarely on the Fall of man. Deny the truth of Genesis and the whole edifice of our faith crumbles. If we be not under the curse of God for Adam’s sin, there was never a need for a Saviour, the Incarnation and the Atonement become meaningless, and our Lord is reduced to the status of a human teacher of a disputable philosophy—a peasant moralist with certain delusions of grandeur—an agitator and heretic whom the authorities of his time executed for stirring up the people. In short, the divinity of Jesus must stand or fall with the divinity of the God of Moses, and this in turn rests upon the historical truth of Genesis. If the Fall of man be successfully disputed, the God of Moses becomes a figment of the Jewish imagination—Jesus becomes man. And this is what Science asserts, while we of the outer churches, through cowardice or indolence—too often, alas! through our own skepticism—have allowed Science thus to obscure the issue. We have fatuously thought to surrender the sin of Adam, and still to keep a Saviour—not perceiving that we must keep both or neither.

“There is the issue. The Church says that man is born under the curse of God and so remains until redeemed, through the sacraments of the Church, by the blood of God’s only begotten Son.

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“Science says man is not fallen, but has risen steadily from remote brute ancestors. If science be right—and by *mere evidence* its contention is plausible—then original sin is a figment and natural man is a glorious triumph over brutehood, not only requiring no saviour—since he is under no curse of God—but having every reason to believe that the divine favour has ever attended him in his upward trend.

“But if one finds *mere evidence* insufficient to outweigh that most glorious death on Calvary, if one regards that crucifixion as a tear of faith on the world’s cold cheek of doubt to make it burn forever, then one must turn to the only church that safeguards this rock of Original Sin upon which the Christ is builded. For the ramparts of Protestantism are honeycombed with infidelity—and what is most saddening, they are giving way to blows from within. Protestantism need no longer fear the onslaughts of atheistic outlaws: what concerns it is the fact that the stronghold of destructive criticism is now within its own ranks—a stronghold manned by teachers professedly orthodox.

“It need cause little wonder, then, that I have found safety in the Mother Church. Only there is one compelled by adequate authority to believe. There alone does it seem to be divined that Christianity cannot relinquish the first of its dogmas without invalidating those that rest upon it.

“For another vital matter, only in the Catholic Church do I find combated with uncompromising boldness that peculiarly modern and vicious sentimentality which is preached as ‘universal brotherhood.’ It is a doctrine spreading insidiously among the godless masses outside the true Church, a chimera of visionaries who must be admitted to be dishonest, since again and again has it been pointed out to them that their doctrine is unchristian—impiously and preposterously unchristian. Witness the very late utterance of His Holiness, Pope Pius X, as to God’s divine ordinance of prince and subject, noble and plebeian, master and proletariat, learned and ignorant, all united, indeed, but not in *material* equality—only in the bonds of love to help one another attain their *moral* welfare on earth and their last end in heaven. Most pointedly does his Holiness further rebuke this effeminacy of universal brotherhood by stating that equality exists among the social members only in this: that all men have their origin in God the Creator, have sinned in Adam, and have been equally redeemed into eternal life by the sacrifice of our Lord.

“Upon these two rocks—of original sin and of prince and subject, riches and poverty—-by divine right, the Catholic Church has taken its stand; and within this church will the final battle be fought on these issues. Thank God He has found my humble self worthy to fight upon His side against the hordes of infidelity and the preachers of an unchristian social equality!”

There were little exclamations about the table as Whittaker finished and returned at last to his fish. To Father Riley it occurred that these would have been more

communicative, more sentient, but for his presence. In fact, there presently ensued an eloquent silence in lieu of remarks that might too easily have been indiscreet.

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“Pray, never mind me at all, gentlemen—I’ll listen blandly whilst I disarticulate this beautiful bird.”

“I say one is quite as extreme as the other,” again declared the discoverer of this fact, feeling that his perspicacity had not been sufficiently remarked.

“I dare say Whittaker is meditating a bitter cynicism,” suggested Father Riley.

“Concerning that incandescent but unfortunate young man,” remarked the amiable Presbyterian—“I trust God’s Providence to care for children and fools—”

“And yet I found his remarks suggestive,” said the twinkling-eyed Methodist. “That is, we asked for the belief of the average non-church-goer—and I dare say he gave it to us. It occurs to me further that he has merely had the wit to put in blunt, brutal words what so many of us declare with academic flourishes. We can all name a dozen treatises written by theologians ostensibly orthodox which actually justify his utterances. It seems to me, then, that we may profit by his blasphemies.”

“How?” demanded Whittaker, with some bluntness.

“Ah—that is what the Church must determine. We already know how to reach the heathen, the unbookish, the unthinking—but how reach the educated—the science-bitten? It is useless to deny that the brightest, biggest minds are outside the Church—-indifferentists or downright opponents of it. I am not willing to believe that God meant men like these to perish—I don’t like to think of Emerson being lost, or Huxley, or Spencer, or even Darwin—Question: has the Church power to save the educated?”

“Sure, I know one that has never lacked it,” purled Father Riley.

“There’s an answer to you in Linford’s letter,” added Whittaker.

“Gentlemen, you jest with me—but I shall continue to feel grateful to our slightly dogmatic young friend for his artless brutalities. Now I know what the business man keeps to himself when I ask him why he has lost interest in the church.”

“There’s a large class we can’t take from you,” said Father Riley—“that class with whom religion is a mode of respectability.”

“And you can’t take our higher critics, either—more’s the pity!”

“On my word, now, gentlemen,” returned the Catholic, again, “that was a dear, blasphemous young whelp! You know, I rather liked him. Bless the soul of you, I could as little have rebuked the lad as I could punish the guiltless indecence of a babe—he was that shockingly naif!”

“He is undoubtedly the just fruit of our own toleration,” repeated the high-church rector.

“And he stands for our knottiest problem,” said the Presbyterian.

“A problem all the knottier, I suspect,” began Whittaker—

“Didn’t I *tell* you?” interrupted Father Riley. “Oh, the outrageous cynic! Be braced for him, now!”

“I was only going to suggest,” resumed the wicked Unitarian, calmly, “that those people, Linford and his brother—and even that singularly effective Mrs. Linford, with her inferable views about divorce—you know I dare say that they—really you know—that they possess the courage of—”

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“Their *convictions*!” concluded little Floud, impatient alike of the speaker’s hesitation and the expected platitude.

“No—I was about to say—the courage—of ours.”

A few looked politely blank at this unseasonable flippancy. Father Riley smiled with rare sweetness and murmured, “So cynical, even for a Unitarian!” as if to himself in playful confidence.

But the amiable Presbyterian, of the cheerful auburn beard and the salient nose, hereupon led them tactfully to safe ground in a discussion of the ethnic Trinities.