

Positivism on an island : the new Paul and Virginia.

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POSITIVISM ON AN ISLAND:

THE NEW PAUL AND VIRGINIA.

*Those who can read the signs of the times, read in them
that the Kingdom of Man is at hand.*—PROFESSOR
CLIFFORD.

I.

THE magnificent ocean-steamer, the *Australasian*, was bound for England, on her homeward voyage from Melbourne. She carried Her Majesty's mails and ninety-eight first-class passengers. The skies were cloudless; the sea was smooth as glass. Never did vessel start under happier auspices. No sound of sickness was to be heard anywhere; and when dinner-time came there was not a single appetite wanting.

But the passengers soon discovered they were lucky in more than weather. Dinner was hardly half over before two of those present had begun to attract general attention; and every one was wondering, in whispers, who they could possibly be.

One of the objects of this delightful curiosity was a large-boned, middle-aged man, with gleaming spectacles, and lank, untidy hair; whose coat fitted him so ill, and who held his head so high, that it was plain at a glance he was some great celebrity. The other was a beautiful lady of about thirty years of age. No one present had seen her like before. She had the fairest hair and the darkest eyebrows, the largest eyes and the smallest waist conceivable;—in fact, art and nature had been struggling as to which should do the most for her;—whilst her bearing was so haughty and distinguished, her glance so tender, and her dress so expensive and so fascinating, that she seemed at the same time to defy and to court attention.

Evening fell on the ship with a soft warm witchery. The air grew purple, and the waves began to glitter in the moonlight. The passengers gathered in knots upon the deck. The distinguished strangers were still the subject of conjecture. At last the secret was discovered by the wife of an old colonial judge; and the news spread like wildfire. In a few minutes all knew that there were on board

the *Australasian* no less personages than Professor Paul Darnley and the superb Virginia St. John.

II.

Miss St. John had, for at least six years, been the most renowned woman in Europe. In Paris and St. Petersburg, no less than in London, her name was equally familiar both to princes and to pot-boys; the eyes of all the world were upon her. Yet, in spite of this exposed situation, scandal had proved powerless to wrong her, she defied detraction. Her enemies could but echo her friends' praise of her beauty; her friends could but confirm her enemies' description of her character. Though of birth that might be called almost humble, she had been connected with the heads of many distinguished families; and so general was the affection she inspired, and so winning the ways in which she contrived to retain it, that she found herself at the age of thirty mistress of nothing except a large fortune. She was now converted with surprising rapidity by a ritualistic priest, and she became in a few months a model of piety and devotion. She made lace trimmings for the curate's vestments; she bowed at church as often and profoundly as possible; she enjoyed nothing so much as going to confession; she learnt to despise the world. Indeed, such utter dross did her riches now seem to her, that, despite all the arguments of her ghostly counsellor, she remained convinced that they were too worthless to offer to the Church, and she saw nothing for it but to still keep them for herself. The mingled humility and discretion of this resolve so won the heart of a gifted colonial bishop, then on a visit to England, that, having first assured himself that Miss St. John was sincere in making it, he besought her to share with him his humble mitre, and make him the happiest prelate in the whole Catholic Church. Miss St. John consented. The nuptials were celebrated with the most elaborate ritual, and after a short honeymoon the bishop departed for his South Pacific diocese of the Chasuble Islands, to prepare a home for his bride, who was to follow him by the next steamer.

Professor Paul Darnley, in his own walk of life, was even more renowned than Virginia had been in hers. He had written three volumes on the origin of life, which he had spent seven years in looking for in infusions of hay and cheese; he had written five volumes on the entozoa of the pig, and two volumes of lectures, as a corollary to these, on the sublimity of human heroism and the whole duty of man. He was renowned all over Europe and America as a complete embodiment of enlightened modern thought. His mind was like a sea, into which the other great minds of the age discharged themselves, and in which all the slight discrepancies of the philosophy of the present century mingled together and formed one harmonious whole. He criticized everything; he took nothing on

trust, except the unspeakable sublimity of the human race and its august terrestrial destinies. And in his double capacity of a seer and a *savant*, he had destroyed all that the world had believed in the past, and revealed to it all that it is going to feel in the future. Nor was he less successful in his own private life. He married, at the age of forty, an excellent evangelical lady, ten years his senior, who wore a green gown, grey cork-screw curls, and who had a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds. Orthodox though she was, Mrs. Darnley was yet proud beyond measure of her husband's world-wide fame, for she did but imperfectly understand the grounds of it. Indeed, the only thing that marred her happiness was the single tenet of his that she had really mastered. This, unluckily, was that he disbelieved in hell. And so, as Mrs. Darnley conceived that that place was designed mainly to hold those who doubted its existence, she daily talked her utmost, and left no text unturned to convince her darling of his very dangerous error. These assiduous arguments soon began to tell. The Professor grew moody and brooding, and he at last suggested to his medical man that a voyage round the world, unaccompanied by his wife, was the prescription most needed by his failing patience. Mrs. Darnley at length consented with a fairly good grace. She made her husband pledge himself that he would not be absent for above a twelvemonth, or else, she said, she should immediately come after him. She bade him the tenderest of adieus, and promised to pray till his return for his recovery of a faith in hell.

The Professor, who had but exceeded his time by six months, was now on board the *Australasian*, homeward bound to his wife. Virginia was outward bound to her husband.

III.

The sensation created by the presence of these two celebrities was profound beyond description; and the passengers were never weary of watching the gleaming spectacles and the square-toed boots of the one, and the liquid eyes and the ravishing toilettes of the other. There were three curates, who, having been very quick in making Virginia's acquaintance, soon sang at nightfall with her a beautiful vesper hymn. And so lovely did the strains sound, and so devotional did Virginia look, that most of the passengers the night after joined in a repetition of this touching evening office.

The Professor, as was natural, held quite aloof; and pondered over a new species of bug, which he had found very plentiful in his berth. But it soon occurred to him that he often heard the name of God being uttered otherwise than in swearing. He listened more attentively to the sounds which he had at first set down as negromelodies: and he soon became convinced that they were something whose very existence he despised himself for remembering—namely,

Christian hymns. He then thought of the three curates, whose existence he despised himself for remembering also. And the conviction rapidly dawned on him, that though the passengers seemed fully alive to his fame as a man of science, they could yet know very little of all that science had done for them; and of the death-blow it had given to the foul superstitions of the past. He therefore resolved that next day he would preach them a lay-sermon.

At the appointed time the passengers gathered eagerly round him—all but Virginia, who retired to her cabin when she saw that the preacher wore no surplice; as she thought it would be a mortal sin to listen to a sermon without one.

The Professor began amidst a profound silence. He first proclaimed to his hearers the great primary axiom in which all modern thought roots itself. He told them that there was but one order of things, it was so much neater than two; and if we would be certain of anything, we must never doubt it. Thus, since countless things exist that the senses can take account of, it is evident that nothing exists that the senses cannot take account of. The senses can take no account of God; therefore God does not exist. Men of science can only see theology in a ridiculous light; therefore theology has no side that is not ridiculous. He then told them a few of the new names that enlightened thinkers had applied to the Christian Deity—how Professor Tyndall had called him an “atom-manufacturer,” and Professor Huxley, a “pedantic drill-sergeant.” The passengers at once saw how demonstrably at variance with fact was all religion, and they laughed with a sense of humour that was quite new to them. The Professor’s tones then became more solemn; and, having extinguished error, he proceeded to unveil the brilliant light of truth. He showed them how, viewed by modern science, all existence is a chain, with a gas at one end, and no one knows what at the other; and how Humanity is a link somewhere; but, holy and awful thought!—we can none of us tell where. “However,” he proceeded, “of one thing we can be quite certain: all that is, is matter; the laws of matter are eternal, and we cannot act or think without conforming to them: and if,” he said, “we would be solemn, and high, and happy, and heroic, and saintly, we have but to strive and struggle to do what we cannot for an instant avoid doing. Yes,” he exclaimed, “as the sublime Tyndall tells us, let us struggle to attain to a deeper knowledge of matter, and a more faithful conformity to its laws!”

The Professor would have proceeded; but the weather had been rapidly growing rough, and he here became violently sea-sick.

“Let us,” he exclaimed hurriedly, “conform to the laws of matter and go below.”

Nor was the advice premature. A storm arose, exceptional in its suddenness and its fury. It raged for two days without ceasing. The *Australasian* sprang a leak; her steering gear was disabled; and it

was feared she would go ashore on an island that was seen dimly through the fog to the leeward. The boats were got in readiness. A quantity of provisions and of the passengers' baggage was already stowed in the cutter; when the clouds parted, the sun came out again, and the storm subsided almost as quickly as it arose.

IV.

No sooner were the ship's damages in a fair way to be repaired than the Professor resumed his sermon. He climbed into the cutter, which was still full of the passengers' baggage, and sat down on the largest of Virginia's boxes. This so alarmed Virginia that she followed the Professor into the cutter, to keep an eye on her property; but she did not forget to stop her ears with her fingers, that she might not be guilty of listening to an un-surplised minister.

The Professor took up the thread of his discourse just where he had broken it off. Every circumstance favoured him. The calm sea was sparkling under the gentlest breeze; all Nature seemed suffused with gladness; and at two miles' distance was an enchanting island, green with every kind of foliage, and glowing with the hues of a thousand flowers. The Professor, having reminded his hearers of what nonsense they now thought all the Christian teachings, went on to show them the blessed results of this. Since the God that we once called all-holy is a fable, that Humanity is all-holy must be a fact. Since we shall never be sublime, and solemn, and unspeakably happy hereafter, it is evident that we can be sublime, and solemn, and unspeakably happy here. "This," said the Professor, "is the new Gospel. It is founded on exact thought. It is the gospel of the kingdom of man; and had I only here a microscope and a few chemicals, I could demonstrate its eternal truth to you. There is no heaven to seek for; there is no hell to shun. We have nothing to strive and live for except to be unspeakably happy."

This eloquence was received with enthusiasm. The captain in particular, who had a wife in every port he touched at, was overjoyed at hearing that there was no hell; and he sent for all the crew, that they might learn the good news likewise. But soon the general gladness was marred by a sound of weeping. Three-fourths of the passengers, having had time to reflect a little, began exclaiming that as a matter of fact they were really completely miserable, and that for various reasons they could never be anything else. "My friends," said the Professor, quite undaunted, "that is doubtless completely true. You are not happy now; you probably never will be. But that is of little moment. Only conform faithfully to the laws of matter, and your children's children will be happy in the course of a few centuries; and you will like that far better than being happy yourselves. Only consider the matter in this light, and you yourselves will become happy

also; and whatever you say, and whatever you do, think only of the effect it will have five hundred years afterwards."

At these solemn words, the anxious faces grew calm. An awful sense of the responsibility of each one of us, and the infinite consequences of every human act, was filling the hearts of all; when by a faithful conformity to the laws of matter, the boiler blew up, and the *Australasian* went down. In an instant the air was rent with yells and cries; and all the Humanity that was on board the vessel was busy, as the Professor expressed it, uniting itself with the infinite azure of the past. Paul and Virginia, however, floated quietly away in the cutter, together with the baggage and provisions. Virginia was made almost senseless by the suddenness of the catastrophe; and on seeing five sailors sink within three yards of her, she fainted dead away. The Professor begged her not to take it so much to heart, as these were the very men who had got the cutter in readiness; "and they are therefore," he said, "still really alive in the fact of our happy escape." Virginia, however, being quite insensible, the Professor turned to the last human being still to be seen above the waters, and shouted to him not to be afraid of death, as there was certainly no hell, and that his life, no matter how degraded and miserable, had been a glorious mystery, full of infinite significance. The next moment the struggler was snapped up by a shark. The cutter, meanwhile, borne by a current, had been drifting rapidly towards the island. And the Professor, spreading to the breeze Virginia's beautiful lace parasol, soon brought it to the shore on a beach of the softest sand.

V.

The scene that met Paul's eyes as he landed was one of extreme loveliness. He had run the boat ashore in a little fairy bay, full of translucent waters, and fringed with silvery sands. On either side it was protected by fantastic rocks, and in the middle it opened inland to an enchanting valley, where tall tropical trees made a grateful shade, and where the ground was carpeted with the softest moss and turf.

Paul's first care was for his fair companion. He spread a costly cashmere shawl on the beach, and placed her, still fainting, on this. In a few moments she opened her eyes; but was on the point of fainting again as the horrors of the last half-hour came back to her, when she caught sight in the cutter of the largest of her own boxes, and she began to recover herself. Paul begged her to remain quiet whilst he went to reconnoitre.

He had hardly proceeded twenty yards into the valley, when to his infinite astonishment he came on a charming cottage, built under the shadow of a bread tree, with a broad verandah, plate-glass windows, and red window-blinds. His first thought was that this could be no

desert island at all, but some happy European settlement. But on approaching the cottage, it proved to be quite untenanted, and from the cobwebs woven across the door-way it seemed to have been long abandoned. Inside there was abundance of luxurious furniture; the floors were covered with gorgeous Indian carpets; and there was a pantry well stocked with plate and glass and table-linen. The Professor could not tell what to make of it, till, examining the structure more closely, he found it composed mainly of a ship's timbers. This seemed to tell its own tale; and he at once concluded that he and Virginia were not the first castaways who had been forced to make the island for some time their dwelling-place.

Overjoyed at this discovery, the Professor hastened back to Virginia. She was by this time quite recovered, and was kneeling on the cashmere shawl, with a rosary in her hands designed especially for the use of Anglo-Catholics, and was alternately lifting up her eyes in gratitude to Heaven, and casting them down in anguish at her torn and crumpled dress. The poor Professor was horrified at the sight of a human being in this degrading attitude of superstition. But as Virginia quitted it with alacrity as soon as ever he told his news to her, he hoped he might soon convert her into a sublime and holy Utilitarian. The first thing she besought him to do was to carry her biggest box to this charming cottage, that she might change her clothes, and appear in something fit to be seen in. The Professor most obligingly at once did as she asked him; and whilst she was busy at her toilette, he got from the cutter what provisions he could, and proceeded to lay the table. When all was ready, he rang a gong which he found suspended in the lobby; Virginia appeared shortly in a beautiful pink dressing-gown, embroidered with silver flowers; and just before sunset, the two sat down to a really excellent meal. The bread-tree at the door of the cottage contributed some beautiful French rolls; close at hand also they discovered a butter-tree; and the Professor had produced from the cutter a variety of salt and potted meats, *pâté-de-foie-gras*, cakes, preserved fruit, and some bottles of fine champagne. This last helped much to raise their spirits. Virginia found it very dry, and exactly suited to her palate. She had but drunk five glasses of it, when her natural smile returned to her, though she was much disappointed because Paul took no notice of her dressing-gown; and when she had drunk three glasses more, she quietly went to sleep on the sofa.

The moon had by this time risen in dazzling splendour; and the Professor went out and lighted a cigar. All during dinner there had been a feeling of dull despair in his heart, which even the champagne did not dissipate. But now, as he surveyed in the moonlight the wondrous Paradise in which his strange fate had cast him, his mood changed. The air was full of the scents of a thousand night-smelling flowers; the sea murmured on the beach in soft, voluptuous cadences.

The Professor's cigar was excellent. He now saw his situation in a truer light. Here was a bountiful island, where earth unbidden brought forth all her choicest fruits; and most of the luxuries of civilization had already been wafted thither. Existence here seemed to be purified from all its evils. Was not this the very condition of things which all the sublimest and exactest thinkers of modern times had been dreaming and lecturing and writing books about for a good half-century? Here was a place where Humanity could do justice to itself, and realize those glorious destinies which all exact thinkers take for granted must be in store for it. True, from the mass of Humanity he was completely cut away; but Virginia was his companion. Holiness, and solemnity, and unspeakably significant happiness, did not, he argued, depend on the multiplication table. He and Virginia represented Humanity as well as a million couples. They were a complete Humanity in themselves, and Humanity in a perfectible shape; and the very next day they would make preparations for fulfilling their holy destiny, and being as solemnly and unspeakably happy as it was their stern duty to be. The Professor turned his eyes upwards to the starry heavens; and a sense came over him of the eternity and the immensity of Nature, and the demonstrable absence of any intelligence that guided it. These reflections naturally brought home to him with more vividness the stupendous and boundless importance of Man. His bosom swelled violently; and he cried aloud, his eyes still fixed on the firmament, "Oh, important All! oh, important Me!"

When he came back to the cottage, he found Virginia just getting off the sofa, and preparing to go off to bed. She was too sleepy even to say good-night to him, and with evident want of temper was tugging at the buttons of her dressing-gown. "Ah," she murmured as she left the room, "if God, in his infinite mercy, had only spared my maid!"

Virginia's evident discontent gave profound pain to Paul. "How solemn," he exclaimed, "for half Humanity to be discontented!" But he was still more disturbed at the appeal to a chimerical manufacturer of atoms; and he exclaimed, in yet more sorrowful tones, "How solemn for half Humanity to be sunk lower than the beasts by superstition!"

However, he hoped that these stupendous evils might, under the present favourable conditions, vanish in the course of a few days' progress; and he went to bed, full of august auguries.

VI.

Next morning he was up betimes; and the prospects of Humanity looked more glorious than ever. He gathered some of the finest pats from the butter-tree, and some fresh French rolls from the bread-tree.

He discovered a cow close at hand, that allowed him at once to milk it; and a little roast pig ran up to him out of the underwood, and fawning on him with its trotters, said, "Come, eat me." The Professor vivisected it before Virginia's door, that its automatic noise, which the vulgar call cries of pain, might awaken her; and he then set it in a hot dish on the table.

"It has come! it has come!" he shouted, rapturously, as Virginia entered the room, this time in a blue silk dressing-gown, embroidered with flowers of gold.

"What has come?" said Virginia, pettishly, for she was suffering from a terrible headache, and the Professor's loud voice annoyed her. "You don't mean to say that we are rescued, are we?"

"Yes," answered Paul, solemnly; "we are rescued from all the pains and imperfections of a world that has not learnt how to conform to the laws of matter, and is but imperfectly acquainted with the science of sociology. It is therefore inevitable that, the evils of existence being thus removed, we shall both be solemnly, stupendously, and unspeakably happy."

"Nonsense!" said Virginia, snappishly, who thought the Professor was joking.

"It is not nonsense," said the Professor. "It is deducible from the teachings of John Stuart Mill, of Auguste Comte, of Mr. Frederic Harrison, and of all the exact thinkers who have cast off superstition, and who adore Humanity."

Virginia meanwhile ate *pâté-de-foie-gras*, of which she was passionately fond; and, growing a little less sullen, she at last admitted that they were lucky in having at least the necessities of life left to them. "But as for happiness—there is nothing to do here, there is no church to go to, and you don't seem to care a bit for my dressing-gown. What have we got to make us happy?"

"Humanity," replied the Professor eagerly,—“Humanity, that divine entity, which is of course capable of everything that is fine and invaluable, and is the object of indescribable emotion to all exact thinkers. And what is Humanity?” he went on more earnestly, “You and I are Humanity—you and I are that august existence. You already are all the world to me; and I very soon shall be all the world to you. Adored being, it will be my mission and my glory to compel you to live for me. And then, as modern philosophy can demonstrate, we shall both of us be significantly and unspeakably happy.”

For a few moments Virginia merely stared at Paul. Suddenly she turned quite pale, her lips quivered, and exclaiming, “How dare you!—and I, too, the wife of a bishop!” she left the room in hysterics.

The Professor could make nothing of this. Though he had dissected many dead women, he knew very little of the hearts of live ones. A sense of shyness overpowered him. He felt embarrassed, he

could not tell why, at being thus left alone with Virginia. He lit a cigar, and went out. Here was a to-do indeed, he thought. How would progress be possible if one half of Humanity misunderstood the other?

He was thus musing, when suddenly a voice startled him; and in another moment a man came rushing up to him, with every demonstration of joy.

"Oh, my dear master! oh, emancipator of the human intellect! and is it indeed you? Thank God!—I beg pardon for my unspeakable blasphemy—I mean, thank circumstances over which I have no control."

It was one of the three curates, whom Paul had supposed drowned, but who now related how he had managed to swim ashore, despite the extreme length of his black clerical coat. "These rags of superstition," he said, "did their best to drown me. But I survive in spite of them, to covet truth and to reject error. Thanks to your glorious teaching," he went on, looking reverentially into the Professor's face, "the very notion of an Almighty Father makes me laugh consumedly, it is so absurd and so immoral. Science, through your instrumentality, has opened my eyes. I am now an exact thinker."

"Do you believe," said Paul, "in solemn, significant, and unspeakably happy Humanity?"

"I do," said the curate, fervently. "Whenever I think of Humanity, I groan and moan to myself out of sheer solemnity."

"Then two thirds of Humanity," said the Professor, "are thoroughly enlightened. Progress will now go on smoothly."

At this moment Virginia came out, having rapidly recovered composure at the sound of a new man's voice.

"You here—you, too!" exclaimed the curate. "How solemn, how significant! This is truly Providential—I mean this has truly happened through conformity to the laws of matter."

"Well," said Virginia, "since we have a clergyman amongst us, we shall perhaps be able to get on."

VII.

Things now took a better turn. The Professor ceased to feel shy; and proposed, when the curate had finished an enormous breakfast, that they should go down to the cutter, and bring up the things in it to the cottage. "A few hours' steady progress," he said, "and the human race will command all the luxuries of civilization—the glorious fruits of centuries of onward labour."

The three spent a very busy morning in examining and unpacking the luggage. The Professor found his favourite collection of modern philosophers; Virginia found a large box of knick-knacks, with which to adorn the cottage; and there was, too, an immense store of wine and of choice provisions.

"It is rather sad," sighed Virginia, as she dived into a box of French chocolate-creams, "to think that all the poor people are drowned that these things belonged to."

"They are not dead," said the Professor: "they still live on this holy and stupendous earth. They live in the use we are making of all they had got together. The owner of those chocolate-creams is immortal because you are eating them."

Virginia licked her lips, and said, "Nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense," said the Professor. "It is the religion of Humanity."

All day they were busy, and the time passed pleasantly enough. Wines, provisions, books, and china ornaments were carried up to the cottage and bestowed in proper places. Virginia filled the glasses in the drawing-room with gorgeous leaves and flowers; and declared by the evening, as she looked round her, that she could almost fancy herself in St. John's Wood.

"See," said the Professor, "how rapid is the progress of material civilization! Humanity is now entering on the fruits of ages. Before long it will be in a position to be unspeakably happy."

Virginia retired to bed early. The Professor took the curate out with him to look at the stars; and promised to lend him some writings of the modern philosophers, which would make him more perfect in the new view of things. They said good-night, murmuring together that there was certainly no God, that Humanity was very important, and that everything was very solemn.

VIII.

Next morning the curate began studying a number of essays that the Professor lent him, all written by exact thinkers, who disbelieved in God, and thought Humanity adorable and most important. Virginia lay on the sofa, and sighed over one of Miss Broughton's novels; and it occurred to the Professor that the island was just the place where, if anywhere, the missing link might be found.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "all is still progress. Material progress came to an end yesterday. Mental progress has begun to-day. One third of Humanity is cultivating sentiment; another third is learning to covet truth. I, the remaining and most enlightened third, will go and seek it. Glorious, solemn Humanity! I will go and look about for its arboreal ancestor."

Every step the Professor took he found the island more beautiful. But he came back to luncheon, having been unsuccessful in his search. Events had marched quickly in his absence. Virginia was at the beginning of her third volume; and the curate had skimmed over so many essays, that he professed himself able to give a thorough account of the want of faith that was in him.

After luncheon the three sat together in easy chairs, in the verandah, sometimes talking, sometimes falling into a half-doze. They all agreed that they were wonderfully comfortable, and the Professor said—

“All Humanity is now at rest, and in utter peace. It is just taking breath, before it becomes unspeakably and significantly happy.”

He would have said more, but he was here startled by a piteous noise of crying, and the three found themselves confronted by an old woman, dripping with sea-water, and with an expression on her face of the utmost misery. They soon recognized her as one of the passengers on the ship. She told them how she had been floated ashore on a spar, and how she had been sustained by a little roast pig, that kindly begged her to eat it, having first lain in her bosom to restore her to warmth. She was now looking for her son.

“And if I cannot find him,” said the old woman, “I shall never smile again. He has half broken my heart,” she went on, “by his wicked ways. But if I thought he was dead—dead in the midst of his sins, it would be broken altogether; for in that case he must certainly be in hell.”

“Old woman,” said the Professor, very slowly and solemnly, “be comforted. I announce to you that your son is alive.”

“Oh, bless you, sir, for that word!” cried the old woman. “But where is he? Have you seen him? Are you sure that he is living?”

“I am sure of it,” said the Professor, “because enlightened thought shows me that he cannot be anything else. It is true that I saw him sink for a third time in the sea, and that he was then snapped up by a shark. But he is as much alive as ever in his posthumous activities. He has made you wretched after him; and that is his future life. Become an exact thinker, and you will see that this is so. Old woman,” added the Professor, solemnly, “you are your son in hell.”

At this the old woman flew into a terrible rage.

“In hell, sir!” she exclaimed; “me in hell!—a poor lone woman like me! How dare you!” And she sank back in a chair and fainted.

“Alas!” said the Professor, “thus is misery again introduced into the world. A fourth part of Humanity is now miserable.”

The curate answered promptly that if no restoratives were given her, she would probably die in a few minutes. “And to let her die,” he said, “is clearly our solemn duty. It will be for the greatest happiness of the greatest number.”

“No,” said the Professor; “for our sense of pity would then be wounded, and the happiness of all of us would be marred by that.”

“Excuse me,” said the curate; “but exact thought shows me that pity for others is but the imagining of their misfortune falling on ourselves. Now, we can none of us imagine ourselves exactly in the old woman’s case; therefore it is quite impossible that we can pity her.”

"But," said the Professor, "such an act would violate our ideas of justice."

"You are wrong again," said the curate; "for exact thought shows me that the love of justice is nothing but the fear of suffering injustice. If we were to kill strong men, we might naturally fear that strong men would kill us. But whatever we do to fainting old women, we cannot expect that fainting old women will do anything to us in return."

"Your reasoning cannot be sound," said the Professor; "for it would lead to the most horrible conclusions. I will solve the difficulty better. I will make the old woman happy, and therefore fit to live. Old woman," he exclaimed, "you are yourself by your own unhappiness expiating your son's sins. Do but think of that, and you will become unspeakably happy."

Meanwhile, however, the old woman had died. When the Professor discovered this he was somewhat shocked; but at length with a sudden change of countenance, "We neither of us did it," he exclaimed; "her death is no act of ours. It is part of the eternal not-ourselves that makes for righteousness—righteousness, which is, as we all know, but another name for happiness. Let us adore the event with reverence."

"Yes," said the curate, "we are well rid of her. She was an immoral old woman; for happiness is the test of morality, and she was very unhappy."

"On the contrary," said the Professor, "she was a moral old woman; for she has made us happy by dying so very opportunely. Let us speak well of the dead. Her death has been a holy and a blessed one. She has conformed to the laws of matter. Thus is unhappiness destined to fade out of the world. Quick! let us tie a bag of shot to all the sorrow and evil of Humanity, which, after all, is only a fourth part of it; and let us sink her in the bay close at hand, that she may catch lobsters for us."

IX.

"At last," said the Professor, as they began dinner that evening, "the fulness of time has come. All the evils of Humanity are removed, and progress has come to an end because it can go no further. We have nothing now to do, but to be unspeakably and significantly happy."

The champagne flowed freely. Our friends ate and drank of the best, their spirits rose; and Virginia admitted that this was really "jolly." The sense of the word pleased the Professor, but its sound seemed below the gravity of the occasion; so he begged her to say "sublime" instead. "We can make it mean," he said, "just the same, but we prefer it for the sake of its associations."

It soon, however, occurred to him that eating and drinking were hardly delights sufficient to justify the highest state of human emotion;

and he began to fear he had been feeling sublime prematurely ; but in another moment he recollected he was an altruist, and that the secret of their happiness was not that any one of them was happy, but that they each knew the others were.

"Yes, my dear curate," said the Professor, "what I am enjoying is the champagne that you drink, and what you are enjoying is the champagne that I drink. This is altruism ; this is benevolence ; this is the sublime outcome of enlightened modern thought. The pleasures of the table, in themselves, are low and beastly ones ; but if we each of us are only glad because the others are enjoying them, they become holy and glorious beyond description."

"They do," cried the curate rapturously, "indeed they do ! I will drink another bottle for your sake. It is sublime !" he said as he tossed off three glasses. "It is significant !" he said as he finished three more. "Tell me, my dear, do I look significant ?" he added, as he turned to Virginia, and suddenly tried to crown the general bliss by kissing her.

Virginia started back, looking fire and fury at him. The Professor was completely astounded by an occurrence so unnatural, and exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "Morality, sir,—remember morality ! How dare you upset that which Professor Huxley tells us must be for ever strong enough to hold its own ?"

But the last glass of champagne had put the curate beyond the reach of exact thought. He tumbled under the table, and the Professor carried him off to bed.

X.

The Professor, like most serious thinkers, knew but little of that trifle commonly called "the world." He had never kissed any one except his wife ; even that he did as seldom as possible ; and the curate lying dead drunk was the first glimpse he had of what, *par excellence*, is called "life." But though the scene just described was thus a terrible shock to him, in one way it gave him an unlooked-for comfort. He felt that even yet things were not quite as sublime as they should be. He now saw the reason. "Of course," he said, "existence cannot be perfect, so long as one third of Humanity makes a beast of itself. A little more progress is still necessary."

He hastened to explain this next morning to Virginia, and begged her not to be alarmed at the curate's scandalous conduct. "Immorality," he said, "is but a want of success in attaining our own happiness. It is evidently most immoral for the curate to be kissing you ; and therefore kissing you would not really conduce to his happiness. I will convince him of this solemn truth in a very few moments. Then the essential dignity of human nature will become at once apparent, and we shall all of us at last begin to be unspeakably happy."

The curate, however, altogether declined to be convinced. He maintained stoutly that to kiss Virginia would be the greatest pleasure that Humanity could offer him. "And if it is immoral as well as pleasant," he added, "I should like it all the better."

At this the Professor gave a terrible groan; he dropped almost fainting into a chair; he hid his face in his hands; and murmured half-articulately, "Then I can't tell what to do!" In another instant, however, he recovered himself; he fixed a dreadful look on the curate, and said, "That last statement of yours cannot be true; for if it were, it would upset all my theories. It is a fact that can be proved and verified, that if you kissed Virginia it would make you miserable."

"Pardon me," said the curate, rapidly moving towards her, "your notion is a remnant of superstition; I will explode it by a practical experiment."

The Professor caught hold of the curate's coat-tails, and forcibly pulled him back into his seat.

"If you dare attempt it," he said, "I will kick you soundly, and, shocking, immoral man! you will feel miserable enough then."

The curate was a terrible coward, and very weak as well. "You are a great hulking fellow," he said, eyeing the Professor; "and I am of a singularly delicate build. I must, therefore, conform to the laws of matter, and give in." He said this in a very sulky voice; and, going out of the room, slammed the door after him.

A radiant expression suffused the face of the Professor. "See," he said to Virginia, "the curate's conversion is already half accomplished. In a few hours more he will be rational, he will be moral, he will be solemnly and significantly happy."

The Professor talked like this to Virginia the whole morning; but in spite of all his arguments she declined to be comforted. "It is all very well," she said, "whilst you are in the way. But as soon as your back is turned, I know he will be at me again."

"Will you never," said Paul, by this time a little irritated, "will you never listen to exact thought? The curate is now reflecting; and a little reflection must inevitably convince him that he does not really care to kiss you, and that it would give him very little real pleasure to do so."

"Stuff!" exclaimed Virginia, with a sudden vigour at which the Professor was thunderstruck. "I can tell you," she went on, "that better men than he have borne kicks for my sake; and to kiss me is the only thing that that little man cares about.—What *shall* I do!" she exclaimed bursting into tears. "Here is one of you insulting me by trying to kiss me; and the other insulting me by saying that I am not worth being kissed!"

"Ah, me!" groaned the poor Professor in an agony, "here is one third of Humanity plunged in sorrow; and another third has not yet freed itself from vice. When, when will sublimity begin?"

XI.

At dinner, however, things wore a more promising aspect. The curate had been so terrified by the Professor's threats, that he hardly dared to so much as look at Virginia; and to make up for it, he drank an unusual quantity of champagne, which soon set him laughing and chattering at a rate that was quite extraordinary. Virginia, seeing herself thus neglected by the curate, began to fear that, as Paul said, he really did not so much care to kiss her after all. She, therefore, put on all her most enticing ways; she talked, flirted, and smiled her best, and made her most effective eyes, that the curate might see what a prize was for ever beyond his reach.

Paul thought the state of affairs full of glorious promise. Virginia's tears were dried, she had never looked so radiant and exquisite before. The curate had forgone every attempt to kiss Virginia, and yet he seemed happiness itself. The Professor took the latter aside, as soon as the meal was over, to congratulate him on the holy state to which exact thought had conducted him. "You see," he said, "what a natural growth the loftiest morality is. Virginia doesn't want to be kissed by you. I should be shocked at your doing so shocking a thing as kissing her. If you kissed her, you would make both of us miserable; and, as a necessary consequence, you would be in an agony likewise; in addition to which, I should inevitably kick you."

"But," said the curate, "suppose I kissed Virginia on the sly,—I merely put this as an hypothesis, remember,—and that in a little while she liked it, what then? She and I would both be happy; and you ought to be happy too, because we were."

"Idiot!" said the Professor. "Virginia is another man's wife. Nobody really likes kissing another man's wife; nor do wives ever like kissing any one except their husbands. What they really like is what Professor Huxley calls 'the undefined but bright ideal of the highest good,' which, as he says, exact thought shows us is the true end of existence. But, pooh! what is the use of all this talking? You know which way your higher nature calls you; and, of course, unless men believe in God, they cannot help obeying their higher nature."

"I," said the curate, "think the belief in God a degrading superstition; I think every one an imbecile who believes a miracle possible. And yet I do not care two straws about the highest good. What you call my lower nature is far the strongest; I mean to follow it to the best of my ability; and I prefer calling it my higher, for the sake of the associations."

This plunged the Professor in deeper grief than ever. He knew not what to do. He paced up and down the verandah, or about the rooms, and moaned and groaned as if he had a violent toothache. Virginia and the curate asked what was amiss with him. "I am agonizing," he said, "for the sake of holy, solemn, unspeakably dignified Humanity."

The curate, seeing the Professor thus dejected, by degrees took heart again; and as Virginia still continued her fascinating behaviour to him, he resolved to try and prove to her that, the test of morality being happiness, the most moral thing she could do would be to allow him to kiss her. No sooner had he begun to propound these views, than the Professor gave over his groaning, seized the curate by the collar, and dragged him out of the room with a roughness that nearly throttled him.

"I was but propounding a theory—an opinion," gasped the curate. "Surely thought is free. You will not persecute me for my opinions?"

"It is not for your opinions," said the Professor, "but for the horrible effect they might have. We can only tolerate opinions that have no possible consequence. You may promulgate any of those as much as you like; because to do that would be a self-regarding action."

XII.

"Well," said the curate, "if I may not kiss Virginia, I will drink brandy instead. That will make me happy enough; and then we shall all be radiant."

He soon put his resolve into practice. He got a bottle of brandy, he sat himself down under a palm-tree, and told the Professor he was going to make an afternoon of it.

"Foolish man!" said the Professor; "I was never drunk myself, it is true; but I know that to get drunk makes one's head ache horribly. To get drunk is, therefore, horribly immoral; and therefore I cannot permit it."

"Excuse me," said the curate; "it is a self-regarding action. Nobody's head will ache but mine; so that is my own look-out. I have been expelled from school, from college, and from my first curacy for drinking. So I know well enough the balance of pains and pleasures."

Here he pulled out his brandy bottle, and applied his lips to it.

"Oh, Humanity!" he exclaimed, "how solemn this brandy tastes!"

Matters went on like this for several days. The curate was too much frightened to again approach Virginia. Virginia at last became convinced that he did not care about kissing her. Her vanity was wounded, and she became sullen; and this made the Professor sullen also. In fact, two thirds of Humanity were overcast with gloom. The only happy section of it was the curate, who alternately smoked and drank all day long.

"The nasty little beast!" said Virginia to the Professor; "he is nearly always drunk. I am beginning quite to like you, Paul, by comparison with him. Let us turn him out, and not let him live in the cottage."

"No," said the Professor; "for he is one third of Humanity. You do not properly appreciate the solidarity of mankind. His existence, however, I admit is a great difficulty."

One day at dinner, however, Paul came in radiant.

"Oh holy, oh happy event!" he exclaimed; "all will go right at last."

Virginia inquired anxiously what had happened, and Paul informed her that the curate, who had got more drunk than usual that afternoon, had fallen over a cliff, and been dashed to pieces.

"What event," he asked, "could be more charming—more unspeakably holy? It bears about it every mark of sanctity. It is for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Come," he continued, "let us begin our love-feast. Let us each seek the happiness of the other. Let us instantly be sublime and happy."

XIII.

"Let us prepare ourselves," said Paul solemnly, as they sat down to dinner, "for realizing to the full the essential dignity of Humanity—that *grand être*, which has come, in the course of progress, to consist of you and me. Every condition of happiness that modern thinkers have dreamed of is now fulfilled. We have but to seek each the happiness of the other, and we shall both be in a solemn, a significant, and unspeakable state of rapture. See, here is an exquisite leg of mutton. I," said Paul, who liked the fat best, "will give up all the fat to you."

"And I," said Virginia, resignedly, "will give up all the lean to you."

A few mouthfuls made Virginia feel sick. "I confess," said she, "I can't get on with this fat."

"I confess," the Professor answered, "I don't exactly like this lean."

"Then let us," said Virginia, "be like Jack Sprat and his wife."

"No," said the Professor, meditatively, "that is quite inadmissible. For in that case we should be egoistic hedonists. However, for to-day it shall be as you say. I will think of something better to-morrow."

Next day he and Virginia had a chicken apiece; only Virginia's was put before Paul, and Paul's before Virginia; and they each walked round the table to supply each other with the slightest necessities.

"Ah!" cried Paul, "this is altruism indeed. I think already I can feel the sublimity beginning."

Virginia liked this rather better. But soon she committed the sin of taking for herself the liver of Paul's chicken. As soon as she had eaten the whole of it her conscience began to smite her. She confessed her sin to Paul, and inquired, with some anxiety, if he thought she would go to hell for it. "Metaphorically," said Paul, "you have already done so. You are punished by the loss of the pleasure you would have had in giving that liver to me, and also by your knowledge of my knowledge of your folly in foregoing the pleasure."

Virginia was much relieved by this answer; she at once took several more of the Professor's choicest bits, and was happy in the

thought that her sins were expiated in the very act of their commission, by the latent pain she felt persuaded they were attended by. Feeling that this was sufficient, she took care not to add Paul's disapproval to her punishment, so she never told him again.

For a short time this practice of altruism seemed to Virginia to have many advantages. But though the Professor was always exclaiming, "How significant is human life by the very nature of its constitution!" she very soon found it a trifle dull. Luckily, however, she hit upon a new method of exercising morality, and, as the Professor fully admitted, of giving it a yet more solemn significance.

The Professor having by some accident lost his razors, his moustaches had begun to grow profusely; and Virginia had watched them with a deep, but half-conscious admiration. At last, in a happy moment, she exclaimed, "Oh, Paul! do let me wax the ends for you." Paul at first giggled, blushed, and protested, but as Virginia assured him it would make her happy, he consented. "Then," she said, "you will know that I am happy, and that in return will make you happy also. Ah!" she exclaimed when the operation was over, "do go and examine yourself in the glass. I declare you look exactly like Jack Barley—Barley Sugar, as we used to call him—of the Blues."

Virginia smiled; suddenly she blushed; the Professor blushed also. To cover the blushes she begged to be allowed to do his hair. "It will make me so much happier, Paul," she said. The Professor again assented, that he might make Virginia happy, and that she might be happy in knowing that he was happy in promoting her happiness. At last the Professor, shy and awkward as he was, was emboldened to offer to do Virginia's hair in return. She allowed him to arrange her fringe, and as she found he did no great harm to it, she let him repeat the operation as often as he liked.

A week thus passed, full, as the Professor said, of infinite solemnity. "I admit, Paul," sighed Virginia, "that this altruism, as you call it, is very touching. I like it very much. But," she added, sinking her voice to a whisper, "are you quite sure, Paul, that it is perfectly moral?"

"Moral!" echoed the Professor, "moral! Why exact thought shows us that it is the very essence of all morality!"

XIV.

Matters now went on charmingly. All existence seemed to take a richer colouring, and there was something, Paul said, which, in Professor Tyndall's words, "gave fulness and tone to it, but which he could neither analyze nor comprehend." But at last a change came. One morning, whilst Virginia was arranging Paul's moustaches, she was frightened almost into a fit by a sudden apparition at the window. It was a hideous hairy figure, perfectly naked but for a band of silver

which it wore round its neck. For a moment it did nothing but grin and stare; then it flung into Virginia's lap a filthy piece of carrion, and in an instant it had bounded away with an almost miraculous activity.

Virginia screamed with disgust and terror, and clung to Paul's knees for protection. He seemed unmoved and preoccupied. All at once, to her intense surprise, she saw his face light up with an expression of triumphant eagerness. "The missing link!" he exclaimed, "the missing link at last! Thank God—I beg pardon for my unspeakable blasphemy—I mean, thank circumstances over which I have no control. I must this instant go out and hunt for it. Give me some provisions in a knapsack, for I will not come back till I have caught it."

This was a fearful blow to Virginia. She fell at Paul's feet weeping, and besought him in piteous accents that he would not thus abandon her.

"I must," said the Professor, solemnly; "for I am going in pursuit of Truth. To arrive at Truth is man's perfect and most rapturous happiness. You must surely know that, even if I have forgotten to tell it to you. To pursue truth—holy truth for holy truth's sake—is a more solemn pleasure than even frizzling your hair."

"Oh," cried Virginia, hysterically, "I don't care two straws for truth. What on earth is the good of it?"

"It is its own end," said the Professor. "It is its own exceeding great reward. I must be off at once in search of it. Good-bye for the present. Seek truth on your own account, and be unspeakably happy also, because you know that I am seeking it."

The Professor remained away for three days. For the first two of them Virginia was inconsolable. She wandered about mournfully with her head dejected. She very often sighed; she very often uttered the name of Paul. At last she surprised herself by exclaiming aloud to the irresponsive solitude, "Oh, Paul, until you were gone, I never knew how passionately I loved you!" No sooner were these words out of her mouth than she stood still, horror-stricken. "Alas!" she cried, "and have I really come to this! I am in a state of deadly sin, and there is no priest here to confess to! I must conquer my forbidden love as best I may. But, ah me, what a guilty thing I am!"

As she uttered these words, her eyes fell on a tin box of the Professor's, marked "Private," which he always kept carefully locked, and which had before now excited her curiosity. Suddenly she became conscious of a new impulse. "I will pursue truth!" she exclaimed. "I will break that box open, and I will see what is inside it. Ah!" she added, as with the aid of the poker she at last wrenched off the padlock, "Paul may be right after all. There is more interest in the pursuit of truth than I thought there was."

The box was full of papers, letters, and diaries, the greater part of

which were marked "Strictly private." Seeing this, Virginia's appetite for truth became keener than ever. She instantly began her researches. The more she read, the more eager she became; and the more private appeared the nature of the documents, the more insatiable did her thirst for truth grow. To her extreme surprise, she gathered that the Professor had begun life as a clergyman. There were several photographs of him in his surplice; and a number of devout prayers, apparently composed by himself for his own personal use. This discovery was the result of her labours.

"Certainly," she said, "it is one of extreme significance. If Paul was a priest once, he must be a priest now. Orders are indelible—at least in the Church of England I know they are."

XV.

Paul came back, to Virginia's extreme relief, without the missing link. But he was still radiant in spite of his failure; for he had discovered, he said, a place where the creature had apparently slept, and he had collected in a card-paper box a large number of its parasites.

"I am glad," said Virginia, "that you have not found the missing link: though as to thinking that we really came from monkeys, of course that is too absurd. Now if you could have brought me a nice monkey, I should really have liked that. The Bishop has promised that I shall have a darling one, if I ever reach him—ah me!—if—— Paul," continued Virginia, in a very solemn voice, after a long pause, "do you know that whilst you have been away I have been pursuing truth? I rather liked it; and I found it very, very significant."

"Oh, joy!" exclaimed the Professor. "Oh, unspeakable radiance! Oh holy, oh essentially dignified Humanity! it will very soon be perfect! Tell me, Virginia, what truths have you been discovering?"

"One truth about you, Paul," said Virginia, very gravely, "and one truth about me. I burn—oh, I burn to tell them to you!"

The Professor was enraptured to hear that one half of Humanity had been studying human nature; and he began asking Virginia if her discoveries belonged to the domain of historical or biological science. Meanwhile Virginia had flung herself on her knees before him, and was exclaiming in piteous accents—

"By my fault, by my own fault, by my very grievous fault, holy father, I confess to you——"

"Is the woman mad?" cried the Professor, starting up from his seat.

"You are a priest, Paul," said Virginia; "that is one of the things I have discovered. I am in a state of deadly sin; that is the other: and I must and will confess to you. Once a priest, always a priest. You cannot get rid of your orders, and you must and shall hear me."

"I was once in orders, it is true," said Paul, reluctantly; "but how did you find out my miserable secret?"

"In my zeal for truth," said Virginia, "I broke open your tin box; I read all your letters; I looked at your early photographs; I saw all your beautiful prayers."

"You broke open my box!" cried the Professor. "You read my letters and my private papers! Oh, horrible! oh, immoral! What shall we do if half Humanity has no feeling of honour?"

"Oh," said Virginia, "it was all for the love of truth—of solemn and holy truth. I sacrificed every other feeling for that. But I have not told you my truth yet; and I am determined you shall hear it, or I must still remain in my sins. . Paul, I am a married woman; and I discover, in spite of that, that I have fallen in love with you. My husband, it is true, is far away; and, whatever we do, he could never possibly be the wiser. But I am in a state of mortal sin, nevertheless; and I would give anything in the world if you would only kiss me."

"Woman!" exclaimed Paul, aghast with fright and horror, "do you dare to abuse truth, by turning it to such base purposes?"

"Oh, you are so clever," Virginia went on, "and when the ends of your moustaches are waxed, you look positively handsome; and I love you so deeply and so tenderly, that I shall certainly go to hell if you do not give me absolution."

At this the Professor jumped up, and, staring very hard at Virginia, asked her if, after all that he had said on the ship, she really believed in such exploded fallacies as hell, God, and priestcraft.

She reminded him that he had preached there without a surplice, and that she had therefore not thought it right to listen to a word he said.

"Ah," cried the Professor, with a sigh of intense relief, "I see it all now. How can Humanity ever be unspeakably holy so long as one half of it grovels in dreams of an unspeakably holy God? As Mr. Frederic Harrison truly says, a want of faith in 'the essential dignity of man is one of the surest marks of the enervating influence of this dream of a celestial glory.' The Professor accordingly re-delivered to Virginia the entire substance of his lectures in the ship. He fully impressed on her that all the intellect of the world was on the side of Humanity; and that God's existence could be disproved with a box of chemicals. He was agreeably surprised at finding her not at all unwilling to be convinced, and extremely unexact in her demands for proof. In a few days, she had not a remnant of superstition left. "At last!" exclaimed the Professor; "it has come at last! Unspeakable happiness will surely begin now."

XVI.

No one now could possibly be more emancipated than Virginia. She tittered all day long, and whenever the Professor asked her why, she always told him she was thinking of "an intelligent First Cause," a conception which she said "was really quite killing." But when

her first burst of intellectual excitement was over, she became more serious. "All thought, Paul," she said, "is valuable mainly because it leads to action. Come, my love, my dove, my beauty, and let us kiss each other all day long. Let us enjoy the charming license which exact thought shows us we shall never be punished for."

This was a result of freedom that the Professor had never bargained for. He could not understand it; "because," he argued, "if people were to reason in that way, morality would at once cease to be possible." But he had seen so much of the world lately, that he soon recovered himself; and, recollecting that immorality was only ignorance, he began to show Virginia where her error lay—her one remaining error. "I perceive," he said, "that you are ignorant of one of the greatest triumphs of exact thought—the distinction it has established between the lower and the higher pleasures. Philosophers, who have thought the whole thing over in their studies, have become sure that as soon as the latter are presented to men they will at once leave all and follow them."

"They must be very nice pleasures," said Virginia, "if they would make me leave kissing you for the sake of them."

"They *are* nice," said the Professor. "They are the pleasures of the imagination, the intellect, and the glorious apprehension of truth. Compared with these, kissing me would be quite insipid. Remain here for a moment, whilst I go to fetch something; and you shall then begin to taste them."

In a few moments Paul came back again, and found Virginia in a state of intense expectancy.

"Now——" he exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Now——" exclaimed Virginia, with a beating heart.

The Professor put his hand in his pocket, and drew slowly forth from it an object which Virginia knew well. It reminded her of the most innocent period of her life; but she hated the very sight of it none the less. It was a Colenso's Arithmetic.

"Come," said the Professor, "no truths are so pure and necessary as those of mathematics; you shall at once begin the glorious apprehension of them."

"Oh, Paul," cried Virginia, in an agony, "but I really don't care for truth at all; and you know that when I broke your tin box open and read your private letters in my search for it, you were very angry with me."

"Ah," said Paul, holding up his finger, "but those were not necessary truths. Truths about human action and character are not necessary truths; therefore men of science care nothing about them, and they have no place in scientific systems of ethics. Pure truths are of a very different character; and however much you may misunderstand your own inclinations, you can really care for nothing so much as doing a few sums. I will set you some very easy ones to begin with; and

you shall do them by yourself, whilst I magnify in the next room the parasites of the missing link."

Virginia saw that there was no help for it. She did her sums by herself the whole morning, which, as at school she had been very good at arithmetic, was not a hard task for her; and Paul magnified parasites in the next room, and prepared slides for his microscope.

When they met again, Paul began skipping and dancing, as if he had gone quite out of his senses; and every now and then between the skips, he gave a sepulchral groan. Virginia asked him, in astonishment, what on earth was the matter with him.

"Matter!" he exclaimed. "Why, Humanity is at last perfect! All the evils of existence are removed; we neither of us believe in a God or a celestial future; and we are both in full enjoyment of the higher pleasures, and the apprehension of scientific truth. And therefore I skip because Humanity is so unspeakably happy; and I groan because it is so unspeakably solemn."

"Alas, alas!" cried Virginia, "and would not you like to kiss me?"

"No," said the Professor, sternly; "and you would not like me to kiss you. It is impossible that one half of Humanity should prefer the pleasure of unlawful love to the pleasure of finding out scientific truths."

"But," pleaded Virginia, "cannot we enjoy both?"

"No," said the Professor; "for if I began to kiss you, I should soon not care two straws about the parasites of the missing link."

"Well," said Virginia, "it is nice of you to say that; but still—Ah me!"

XVII.

Virginia was preparing, with a rueful face, to resume her enjoyment of the higher pleasures, when a horrible smell, like that of an open drain, was suddenly blown in through the window.

"Oh, rapture!" cried the Professor, as Virginia was stopping her nose with her handkerchief, "I smell the missing link." And in another instant he was gone.

"Well," said Virginia, "here is one comfort. Whilst Paul is away I shall be relieved from the higher pleasures. Alas!" she cried, as she flung herself down on the sofa, "he is so nice-looking, and such an enlightened thinker. But it is plain he has never loved, or else very certainly he would love again."

Paul returned in about a couple of hours, again unsuccessful in his search.

"Ah," cried Virginia, "I am so glad you have not caught the creature!"

"Glad," echoed the Professor, "glad! Do you know that till I have caught the missing link the cause of glorious truth will suffer grievously? The missing link is the token of the solemn fact of our

origin from inorganic matter. I did catch one blessed glimpse of him. He had certainly a silver band about his neck. He was about three feet high. He was rolling in a lump of carrion. It is through him that we are related to the stars—the holy, the glorious stars, about which we know so little.”

“Bother the stars!” said Virginia; “I couldn’t bear, Paul, that anything should come between you and me. I have been thinking of you and longing for you the whole time you have been away.”

“What!” cried Paul, “and how have you been able to forego the pleasures of the intellect?”

“I have deserted them,” cried Virginia, “for the pleasures of the imagination, which I gathered from you were also very ennobling. And I found they were so; for I have been imagining that you loved me. Why is the reality less ennobling than the imagination? Paul, you shall love me; I will force you to love me. It will make us both so happy: we shall never go to hell for it; and it cannot possibly cause the slightest scandal.”

The Professor was more bewildered than ever by these appeals. He wondered how Humanity would ever get on if one half of it cared nothing for pure truth, and persisted in following the vulgar impulses that had been the most distinguishing feature of its benighted past—that is to say, those ages of its existence of which any record has been preserved for us. Luckily, however, Virginia came to his assistance.

“I think I know, Paul,” she said, “why I do not care as I should do for the intellectual pleasures. We have been both seeking them by ourselves; and we have been therefore egoistic hedonists. It is quite true, as you say, that selfishness is a despicable thing. Let me,” she went on, sitting down beside him, “look through your microscope along with you. I think perhaps, if we shared the pleasure, the missing link’s parasites might have some interest for me.”

The Professor was overjoyed at this proposal. The two sat down side by side, and tried their best to look simultaneously through the eye-piece of the microscope. Virginia in a moment expressed herself much satisfied. It is true they saw nothing; but their cheeks touched. The Professor too seemed contented; and said they should both be in a state of rapture when they had got the right focus. At last Virginia whispered, with a soft smile—

“Suppose we put that nasty microscope aside; it is only in the way. And then, oh, Paul! dear love, dove of a Paul! we can kiss each other to our hearts’ content.”

Paul thought Virginia quite incorrigible, and rushed headlong out of the room.

XVIII.

“Alas!” cried Paul, “what can be done to convince one half of Humanity that it is really devoted to the higher pleasures and does

not care for the lower—at least nothing to speak of?” The poor man was in a state of dreadful perplexity, and felt well-nigh distracted. At last a light broke in on him. He remembered that as one of his most revered masters, Professor Tyndall, had admitted, a great part of Humanity would always need a religion, and that Virginia now had none. He at once rushed back to her. “Ah!” he exclaimed, “all is explained now. You cannot be in love with me, for that would be unlawful passion. Unlawful passion is unreasonable, and unreasonable passion would quite upset a system of pure reason, which is what exact thought shows us is soon going to govern the world. No! the emotions that you fancy are directed to me are in reality cosmic emotion—in other words are the reasonable religion of the future. I must now initiate you in its solemn and unspeakably significant worship.”

“Religion!” exclaimed Virginia, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. “It is not kind of you to be making fun of me. There is no God, no soul, and no supernatural order, and above all there is no hell. How then can you talk to me about religion?”

“You,” replied Paul, “are associating religion with theology, as indeed the world hitherto always has done. But those two things, as Professor Huxley well observes, have absolutely nothing to do with each other. ‘It may be,’ says that great teacher, ‘that the object of a man’s religion is an ideal of sensual enjoyment, or——’”

“Ah!” cried Virginia, “that is my religion, Paul.”

“Nonsense!” replied Paul; “that cannot be the religion of half Humanity, else high, holy, solemn, awful morality would never be able to stand on its own basis. See, the night has fallen, the glorious moon has arisen, the stupendous stars are sparkling in the firmament. Come down with me to the sea-shore, where we may be face to face with nature, and I will show you then what true religion—what true worship is.”

The two went out together. They stood on the smooth sands, which glittered white and silvery in the dazzling moonlight. All was hushed. The gentle murmur of the trees, and the soft splash of the sea, seemed only to make the silence audible. The Professor paused close beside Virginia, and took her hand. Virginia liked that, and thought that religion without theology was not perhaps so bad after all. Meanwhile Paul had fixed his eyes on the moon. Then in a voice almost broken with emotion, he whispered, “The prayer of the man of science, it has been said, must be for the most part of the silent sort. He who said that was wrong. It need not be silent; it need only be inarticulate. I have discovered an audible and a reasonable liturgy which will give utterance to the full to the religion of exact thought. Let us both join our voices, and let us croon at the moon.”

The Professor at once began a long, low howling. Virginia joined him, until she was out of breath.

“Oh, Paul,” she said at last, “is this more rational than the Lord’s Prayer?”

"Yes," said the Professor, "for we can analyze and comprehend that; but true religious feeling, as Professor Tyndall tells us, we can neither analyze nor comprehend. See how big nature is, and how little—ah, how little!—we know about it. Is it not solemn, and sublime, and awful? Come, let us howl again."

The Professor's devotional fervour grew every moment. At last he put his hand to his mouth, and began hooting like an owl, till it seemed that all the island echoed to him. The louder Paul hooted and howled, the more near did he draw to Virginia.

"Ah," he said, as he put his arm about her waist, "it is in solemn moments like this that the solidarity of mankind becomes most apparent."

Virginia, during the last few moments, had stuck her fingers in her ears. She now took them out, and, throwing her arms round Paul's neck, tried, with her cheek on his shoulder, to make another little hoot; but the sound her lips formed was much more like a kiss. The power of religion was at last too much for Paul.

"For the sake of cosmic emotion," he exclaimed, "O other half of Humanity, and for the sake of rational religion, I will kiss you."

The Professor was bending down his face over her, when, as if by magic, he started, stopped, and remained as one petrified. Amidst the sharp silence, there rang a human shout from the rocks.

"Oh!" shrieked Virginia, falling on her knees, "it is a miracle! it is a miracle! God is angry with us for pretending that we do not believe on him."

The Professor was as white as a sheet; but he struggled with his perturbation manfully.

"It is not a miracle," he cried, "but an hallucination. It is an axiom with exact thinkers that all proofs of the miraculous are hallucinations."

"See," shrieked Virginia again, "they are coming, they are coming. Do not you see them?"

Paul looked, and there, sure enough, were two figures, a male and a female, advancing slowly towards them, across the moonlit sand.

"It is nothing," cried Paul; "it cannot possibly be anything. I protest, in the name of science, that it is an optical delusion."

Suddenly the female figure exclaimed, "Thank God, it is he!"

In another moment the male figure exclaimed, "Thank God, it is she!"

"My husband!" gasped Virginia.

"My wife!" replied the bishop (for it was none other than he). "Welcome to Chasuble Island. By the blessing of God it is on your own home you have been wrecked, and you have been living in the very house that I had intended to prepare for you. Providentially, too, Professor Darnley's wife has called here, in her search for her husband, who has overstayed his time. See, my love, my dove, my

beauty, here is the monkey I promised you as a pet, which broke loose a few days ago, and which I was in the act of looking for when your joint cries attracted us, and we found you."

A yell of delight here broke from the Professor. The eyes of the three others were turned on him, and he was seen embracing wildly a monkey which the bishop led by a chain. "The missing link!" he exclaimed, "the missing link!"

"Nonsense!" cried the sharp tones of a lady with a green gown and grey cork-screw curls. "It is nothing but a monkey that the good bishop has been trying to tame for his wife. Don't you see her name engraved on the collar?"

The shrill accents acted like a charm upon Paul. He sprang away from the creature that he had been just caressing. He gazed for a moment on Virginia's lovely form, her exquisite toilette, and her melting eyes. Then he turned wildly to the green gown and the grey cork-screw curls. Sorrow and superstition he felt were again invading Humanity. "Alas!" he exclaimed at last, "I do now indeed believe in hell."

"And I," cried Virginia, with much greater tact, and rushing into the arms of her bishop, "once more believe in heaven."

W. H. MALLOCK.