

Silhouettes

A Romance in Radium

POPULAR FICTION

BARONESS ORCZY.

A SON OF THE PEOPLE
THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL
BY THE GODS BELOVED
THE EMPEROR'S CANDLESTICKS

J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND.

THE FINANCIER

REGINALD TURNER.

UNCLE PEACEABLE
DOROTHY RAEBURN
THE STEEPLE
THE COMEDY OF PROGRESS

Mrs BAGOT-HARTE.

THE PRICE OF SILENCE

GEO. R. SIMS.

TWO LONDON FAIRIES

Mrs CHAN TOON.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE
A MARRIAGE IN BURMAH

ELLIOTT O'DONNELL.

JENNIE BARLOW: ADVENTURESS
THE UNKNOWN DEPTHS
FOR SATAN'S SAKE

MAX BARING.

A PROPHET OF WALES
THE CANON'S BUTTERFLY
A DOCTOR IN CORDUROY

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A ROMANCE IN RADIUM

BY

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A Romance in Radium

PROLOGUE

"And you must wear clothes," says Ha-Sabat, the Keeper of the Chronicles of Muran, to his visitor, Ma-Mylitta, who desires a permit to visit Earth for the purposes of research—historical and otherwise.

"Clothes?"

"And, above all things, a hat. A hat is indispensable," adds the official, tickling his nose with the feather end of his pen.

"But what am I to do with my wings?"

"No Murani travels without wings, and this question of clothes and hats is, it seems, peculiar to Earth. The inhabitants of other planets more resemble ourselves, and wings suffice." The Keeper of the Chronicles looks puzzled for a moment, and then adds cheerfully, "But you'll know more when you get there."

"Yes, and we shall all know more on my return—at all events, I hope so."

"The Earth atmosphere is known to be fatal to Immortals. Of the four who last took the journey three never returned, and the fourth was so distressed that he took a bath of Oblivion immediately, and we are therefore without any positive knowledge of their fate. You may succeed in finding some trace. They may even be alive, which I doubt."

"Five cycles of a thousand years. What is time to an Immortal?"

"Nothing in Muran, true; but the Earth atmosphere, unless it is changed since the last analysis, will not suit the Murani constitution, and at the end of ninety days Immortals become mortal."

"And then?"

"Feathers moult, wings disappear; they eat and drink, grow old and die, like the rest. The adventure is free from peril if you are mindful to return before exhausting the reserve of radio-active energy which you take with you. Your theory that an Immortal is always immortal, and under all circumstances, will not, I fear, hold water."

Ma-Mylitta fears to be convinced, having recently published an article in *The New Review* in support of the theory popular in Muran, that an Immortal is superior to, and independent of, environment, and has been backed up by the very learned Society of which she is a distinguished member. The story that three out of four of the sons of Muran had once on a time been enticed by the fair daughters of men to remain on Earth until they lost the power to return, even if they would, was discussed anew with as much heat as Immortals condescend at home to show about anything, and Ma-Mylitta's design is to visit Earth, the scene of the tragedy, and set all speculation at rest on her return.

"I shall trace them; the Murani are immortal, and I shall trace them," says she, fluttering a wing.

"Then you desire a permit; and the reason for your journey—?" Ha-Sabat inquires with official calm.

"Is in the interests of scientific and historical truth for the completion of my

new *Speculations Concerning Man.* I want to know what it is—what magnet, what magic it is which keeps our immortal Murani in such a planet as Earth for five thousand years."

"The daughters of men were fair and may be so still," says the Official Recorder, turning over the leaves of an ancient parchment with illuminated margins. Then he adds reflectively, "Speculations concerning woman may better help you to understand why the immortal sons of Muran were earthbound."

"Then I may have a permit?"

"Certainly."

"And depart at once?"

"A permit for ninety days, and if you do not return—"

"I am certain of myself."

"Still, there are consequences, and the philosophic mind is never blind to consequences, you know. If you do not return your name will be erased from the register of Immortals, and you will hereafter be reckoned as one of the earthbound. Your

essay concerning man is in the library, and that will be something towards perpetuating your memory."

A tremor passes over Ma-Mylitta's face. Earthbound for an Immortal is a suggestion trying even to an Immortal's nerves.

"But clothes! What am I to do with clothes? And a hat! What is a hat?"

The Recorder confesses ignorance. In ancient days, when the sons of Muran were in the habit of visiting Earth, communications were frequent, and on the margins of books and documents (now referred to) are clever, though faded, sketches of the fair daughters of men flirting with winged immortals. Ma-Mylitta inspects the figures closely. The wings of the Immortals are distinct enough, but the other figures apparently leave the important question of hats and costumes unanswered.

"I shall find out when I get there," says she.

That no search party went from Muran to discover the fate of the missing Immortals was due partly to the fact that the Immor-

tals, having so much time in hand, seldom troubled themselves about anything in particular ; and partly to the fact that the bright light which Earth at the time showed to Muran suddenly disappeared. Some said it had cooled off suddenly and been blotted out of the solar system by way of punishment, but the spirit of *laissez faire* stood in the way of active inquiry. Of late some feeble rays from the dark planet had been observed, and, in consequence, interest and speculation as to the fate of the missing was revived. There was, apparently, some risk to be run, even by an Immortal, on coming in contact with Earth, whose atmosphere is unable to supply the necessary elements for the perpetual renewal of the Murani constitution. It was said that had the journey been to any other planet, numbers would join in the interesting search ; but under the circumstances the Immortals were content to await developments.

Ma-Mylitta, having studied the question from various points of view, and now having a reputation to maintain, becomes possessed

with the idea that it is a duty to go and see for herself. The historical basis of her own clever essay she secretly fears is but fiction —plausible indeed, but fiction, and scarcely worthy of the reputation already made and to be made during the ages. It is under this impression that she seeks and obtains an appointment with Ha-Sabat, the Keeper of the Chronicles at Imbra-Umbra, the seat of the Government of Muran.

Ha-Sabat moves on one side for the purpose of consulting an old register of permits, in which appears the names of the Immortals believed to have at one time been victimised by the fair daughters of men. Of commanding stature, he moves with remarkable lightness and grace, and with no other apparent energy than the play of two small shoulder wings, which act independently of two large wings, the tips of which are just now hidden by miniature wings springing from the ankles. The plumes are bright grey—grey being an official colour. The face is serene, notwithstanding the wear and tear and responsibilities of official life during

some thousands of years. Official changes are very rare, no one being impatient for anyone else's appointment.

Ma-Mylitta, whose plumage is of pure white, with scarlet rings over each breast, fans herself gently with her right shoulder wing whilst Ha-Sabat is looking over the old register. The thought of adventure, and alone, on the mysterious earth planet, and amongst mysterious mortals without wings, but wearing clothes and hats, pleasantly excites her; and as the excitement grows with conjecture, both shoulder wings are presently in rapid motion, and a luminous ring encircles her fine head, her hair being of the colour of Venetian gold. The luminosity increases with rapidity of motion, and when Ma-Mylitta opens and closes her two large wings with the scarlet circles, her whole form is enveloped in dazzling splendour. The light disappears as the wings are brought to rest, and when the Recorder looks up from the Register she stands, as before, with wings folded, and no trace of mental agitation.

"I will undertake the adventure," she says firmly; "but the clothes! Why clothes?" she asks, looking down upon her wings.

"And the hat—above all things, the hat. The hat is a sort of glory for the head."

"Like this," asks Ma-Mylitta, working her shoulder wings and surrounding her head with a halo.

"It is a halo or something fastened with pins," says Ha-Sabat, apparently gratified at being able to give assistance. "There is a note here on the use of pins amongst mortals, which may be useful."

"What a pity the poor things have no wings. Perhaps they once had and then lost them. Who knows?"

"Perhaps," echoes Ha-Sabat, taking from the forefinger of his left hand a signet ring mystically engraved, with which he seals an official permit to visit Earth, and to remain absent from Muran for a period of ninety days. Then he makes a note of the fact in the official register, and records that the object of the journey is to obtain

information concerning earth-born men and women with the view of throwing light, if possible, on the fate of the immortal Murani who failed so long ago to return to Imbra-Umbra after embracing the fair daughters of men.

Then they ascend to the office of the Keeper of the Faculties, who bestows upon Ma-Mylitta the gift of all earthly tongues, and the power of rendering herself invisible at all times whilst on Earth.

"And the clothes; can you give me any useful hints about clothes?" asks Ma-Mylitta.

"Not forgetting hats. The hat is most essential," adds Ha-Sabat.

But the Keeper of the Faculties, whose plumage is of a brilliant electric blue, simply shakes his head, as though saddened at the thought that a race of beings exists somewhere in the Universe degenerate enough to require such trappings. He certainly has no positive information respecting the planet Earth and its inhabitants, though he remembers having heard some ages ago that

earth mortals were very curious and emotional, and spent much time in eating, drinking and sleeping. There were other stories which were just as well forgotten, he says.

. . . . .

The New Historical Society, of which Ma-Mylitta is so distinguished a member, assembled to see her take her departure; and there were some who, at the last moment, discouraged the enterprise, being willing to let time clear up whatever might be doubtful and obscure; but they were only the ultra-conservative element in the new Society, the majority of whose members applauded the enterprise.

"I shall return at the end of ninety days," says Ma-Mylitta, gaily spreading her wings.

Certain members of the New Historical Society accompany the voyager as far as the confines of the atmosphere of Muran, beyond which they may not go without official permit. They see Ma-Mylitta disappear in space, and descend again to Imbra-Umbra to await events.

CHAPTER I

A CABLE from the East announces that pious Buddhists dwelling within the sacred zone in Tibet have been greatly agitated by the presence of an Immortal from another world. The sacred zone being the reputed cradle of the human race, and the site of the Garden of Eden under another name, the mysterious visitant has not inappropriately made inquiries, historical and otherwise, respecting the earliest dwellers. There is much mystery about the whole affair, and the ubiquitous Reuter, cabling from Madras, dismisses the matter with a vague suggestion of political inquietude masked by some religious agitation amongst the mystics of the sacred zone.

The practical Western world reads and forgets until the morning papers publish accounts from New York describing with

much detail an aerial phenomenon in human form, but with wings, hovering over the saintly city of the Pacific; but many strange stories and conjectures are reserved for the evening editions, it being well known that the great British public become less and less critical and more credulous each day after the sun passes its meridian. The Astronomer-Royal and the most eminent star-gazers in Europe and America when interviewed are unable to make anything of the story—a little star dust, perhaps, seen by an imaginative gentleman after dinner, covers sufficiently the range of probabilities and satisfies most people; and those who condescend to give the curious story a second thought suspect an ingenious trick for advertising a new pill, a new play, or a new prophet.

The phenomenon, whatever it may be, has apparently no special mission for the City of the Golden Gates, New York, or the Great Western Hemisphere, and although circumstantial accounts of visits from "a glorious being in feathers, brilliant with

radio-active radiations, making inquiries about clothes and hats," reach the leading journals, the 'cute editors pitch the "drivel" into the wastepaper-baskets. The story didn't catch on, they said; and although pretty enough allegories, specially contributed by "eminent" persons, duly appeared, statistics were also published proving conclusively that the aerial phenomenon, with or without trumpet, was only visible where the highest percentage of imbecility was present, which was thought to be hard on some very good people living in very good places.

It is only another Yankee story, people say; and London editors would soon have forgotten it, but for the sudden anxiety of their own special and well-accredited correspondents in Paris demanding space for more or less sensational accounts of something strange hovering over the city of fashion and imagination, already styled by the polite Parisians, "La Céleste." The Paris correspondents talk to their respective editors in Fleet Street.

No, no, there is no hoax about it, they say. The American story be hanged! The It, the Something, good or bad, natural or supernatural, is flying about all over Paris. Some people count six wings, and the face is human, and so is the whole form. It may be all artificial, but it's clever, because light is generated with the motion of the wings, and envelops the flying form in a luminous cloud. The luminous radiations under the circumstances are, to say the least, novel.

Is there anything in it? Who can say more than it is the sensation of the hour, and is filling the churches with women confessing their sins. And the men? They hang around the *cafés* and public places waiting for *dénouements*—anything or nothing.

"In a word, what is the effect of this new sensation in Paris?" ask the wary editors, and the reply determines the most sceptical.

"The women are becoming hysterical and running to the churches, which spells

ruin to trade ; and then, if they confess to their husbands, there will be—"

The aerial phenomenon story started in the East looks quite different now that it comes from Paris and is vouched for by "Our Own Specials." There must be something in it, people now say, and if La Céleste (whatever it turns out to be) wishes to see shops, and the very latest thing in hats, what more natural than this visit to Paris ?

For three days and nights La Céleste, the Visible-Invisible, hovers over Paris, and the scientific world is thrown into a fever of speculation. Aerial cars are chartered to take members of the Académie des Sciences within speaking distance of the too-elusive phenomenon. Père Rollin, the popular preacher of the day, intrusts himself to the unknown dangers of the air in a flying machine supplied with jars of *l'eau bénite*. The unexpected always happens, and, who knows ? The adventurous gentlemen of science and theology are, however, discouraged on finding that La

Céleste becomes invisible at the most critical moments.

And the crowds in the streets, and open spaces, and bridges, awe-stricken at first, relax into smiles, and then laugh aloud, when the comic papers take the matter up and represent La Céleste playing Little Bo-Peep with the learned professors of science and theology; and comfortable *bourgeoisie* with fat banking accounts, speculating in "futures" by purchasing standing room in Paradise at the doors of the churches. "Long live La Céleste! The rich bleed!" cries Lazarus.

Paris is quickly thronged with "Specials" versed in all known dialects and languages to interview the phenomenon, with special artists to sketch, and special photographers with special plates to snap-shot the phenomenon. A syndicate is formed to acquire all rights, title and interest, and then to exploit the mystery for all it is worth. The Church proclaims a solemn fast, and even scientists are disturbed at learning that photographic

chemistry is at fault, and that nothing is imaged on the sensitive plates that any known developer is able to develop.

At the end of a week this portent in the air, which will give no account of itself, gets upon the nerves of well-meaning people with money invested to such an extent that they sell their stocks and shares wildly, and cause a "slump" most disastrous to the fortunes of millionaires. So much so, that M. Dubecq, in the sacred name of *la haute finance*, seeks to remove the cause by a bullet.

Those who see him fire declare that La Céleste, who is henceforth apotheosised and becomes l'Ange Céleste, was struck in the breast, in the centre of the scarlet ring, which offered so fair a bull's eye to the marksman. The mysterious figure was resting with wings folded on the Egyptian monument, calmly surveying the ways of men and the fashions of women as seen in the Place de la Concorde, and when M. Dubecq fired it vanished, like a light extinguished. Not a feather fell to the

ground, and not a stain recorded the attempt "to assassinate the spirit of the air," as people in their excitement now express themselves. The thing might have been laughed at as an illusion had not so many declared they saw the whole affair, including the figure resting on the monolith.

All Paris is watchful now, quivering with expectation, but day after day passes, and there is no further appearance of the white-winged figure leaving a trail of light as it moves its grand wings. The bullet—the spirit in which it was fired, perhaps—has apparently scared away the celestial Something which is independent of the law of gravitation and disappoints photographers, and which the clergy pronounce a "miracle," and the scientists a "phenomenon." The journals are indignant towards M. Dubecq for driving away the great attraction and sensation of the season. What if it be illusion? they ask. Illusion is real when everyone shares it. The army of foreign special correspondents and artists

disappear, and the telegraph wires and cables have comparative rest.

Many are disappointed that the end of all things does not follow this mysterious visitation. Those who sold out their stocks and shares so hastily are loud in their lamentations at the deceitfulness of things ; and the women who crowded the churches for a week put on their jewellery and chiffons, and smile gaily once more. The medicals coin a new word for the weakness of those who had for once been surprised into telling their husbands the truth, and so many possible scandals are avoided. Hour by hour the liveliest impressions fail, the " miracle " becomes an " apparition," an " optical illusion," a " nothing-at-all-in-particular," and the world goes well.

'Will La Céleste appear elsewhere and the mystery be solved ?

CHAPTER II

A LAZY afternoon in June, a pleasant breeze stirring the leaves in St James's Park, a shaded room with open windows, and a mere hum of life. This is Lady Gerard's room—" retreat " she calls it—and the smart Mrs Montem Brille is here paying a friendly call on her ladyship, in order really to become better acquainted with the sweet Mrs Balmayn, fresh from the Antipodes, who is on her wedding tour. A niece by marriage to Sir John Gerard, the fresh young bride, sitting by the open window and happy with her own thoughts, is worth the attention of Mrs Montem Brille, who hunts after the young and beautiful for her garden-parties with the keenness of a collector of *bric-à-brac*, or any other passing craze. Mrs Balmayn is, in the result, duly

booked for the next garden-party, and she is to bring her husband, a handsome young Englishman with a fine air of Colonial dash and independence about him, as Mrs Montem Brille knows. So the young bride is happy enough, though her ears are only filled with the faint hum of distant noises.

"I wish the It, whatever it is, would pay us a visit," says Mrs Montem Brille, smilingly sipping her tea.

"An optical delusion, don't you think so?" asks her ladyship.

"I think so now, but I confess I was a bit frightened at first. The horrible things that people used to talk about before children came into my mind."

Lady Gerard's homely face puts on a new expression. She has the round-apple face on which there is plenty of room for sun-light and shadow, and the blue eyes seem bluer to look at now her hair is turning prematurely grey. She looks for a moment at Mrs Montem Brille, wondering what on earth a woman so perfectly costumed can fear.

Mrs Balmayn catches the word "fear," and is interested. She holds her cup close to her lips, and her large velvety-brown eyes grow pathetic, for she has been disturbed of late by dreams.

"What do you make of it, Lady Gerard?" continues Mrs Montem Brille.

"I? Oh, nothing. Sir John says it's a new flying machine, or Marconi signal. You remember that the Thing collapsed when a man fired at it. Sir John says the scarlet ring perforated by the bullet was a sort of something, I don't know exactly what, and the energy was concealed there. The bullet struck a detonator, or something, and the whole thing was self-consumed."

"Very clever of dear Sir John to think of all that, and so comforting!"

Lady Gerard leans back and laughs gaily. The idea of Sir John getting the credit of thinking to such an extent amuses her.

"No, no, not Sir John," says she, "but some mad inventor, or one of his mad constituents, worked all this out for him. Ever

since Sir John has been in Parliament he's been inundated with letters from people, mostly mad. Don't you let your husband drift into Parliament."

"No," says Mrs Montem Brille, tapping her little foot lightly. "I can spend all that Montem can do without," and she smiles and nods towards the bride in such manner as to leave no doubt of her being quite in earnest.

Lady Gerard has no doubt at all upon Mrs Montem Brille's capacity for spending; but then she is clever and up-to-date, and always gets good advertisement for her money.

Mrs Balmayn looks reproachfully, moving in her seat restlessly.

"Dear Lady Gerard," says she, "if it is true—if it can be true, that the air is peopled with resplendent beings, how can you mock?"

"My child, you are so young," says her ladyship, soothingly, noting the voice tremor. "We are living in a work-a-day world, and resplendent beings only fill the heads of young dreamers. You may be

sure this mystery will soon be turned inside out, like an old gown."

"But what if the end of the world should come, and I only just married?"

"Don't forget my garden-party," says Mrs Montem Brille, taking leave.

CHAPTER III

INSPECTOR TAGGARD of the Metropolitan Police, engaged in filling up an official sheet, lifts his head as he hears a heavy but uncertain step. If that's Evans there's something wrong with him, is the Inspector's mental note, for he knows the true ring of a constable's step, and can tell one man's from another's with fine instinct sharpened by practice. But what does Constable Evans mean by returning now with a step suggestive of a certain uncertainty? There's only one step to be heard, whilst the voice he hears is Evans's voice toned down to sweet imploring modulation.

The Inspector throws himself back in his chair and looks suspiciously keen at the constable, who enters alone with blanched face and scared. No one visible is with

him, and yet he walks as though someone were by his side ; and he looks beseechingly at vacancy as though help might come from space.

"Well?" demands Inspector Taggard, sharply.

"I found It wandering in St Paul's Churchyard, and now it's gone," says the constable, finding speech at last, but still under some unearthly terror.

"I wish you'd find your senses, man. What did you find, and what's gone?"

The Inspector speaks roughly, and the tone brings back native courage, so that the blood returns once more to the man's cheeks.

The constable stands bolt upright, and delivers himself more and more boldly at the sound of his own voice.

"It's half-past twelve, and I'm on duty, and I see a strange light over the dome of St Paul's—maybe a flash of lightning, nothing particular about that this time of the year. Suddenly a figure with out-stretched wings comes flying through the air, and goes all round the building, as

though looking for an open window, and as it flies the light becomes more brilliant. I draw myself into a doorway and watch, and am not seen at first. The light becomes stationary inside the railings, and there is a figure in human form clothed with white wings before me standing out clear, and the black walls of St Paul's behind. And then I take fear."

"Never mind your feelings," says the Inspector, "stick to facts."

"Then the mysterious Thing must have seen me, and as it comes towards me I would have squeezed myself through a keyhole, but I stand still, paralysed. I try to speak, to move, to whistle, but am helpless. The Thing I see is pure white with scarlet rings on the breast, and I see the wings are folded, but the head is that of a woman with long hair. I see all this, and then I remember the mystery of Paris which we were all reading about."

"I see now, constable, yours'll be a case for the Divisional Surgeon," says Inspector Taggard.

"That's not all. The Thing spoke."

"What did it say?"

"'I want clothes.' And I say, 'Very much so, and it's indecent and against the clothes.' And when clothes are mentioned I feel ashamed, which wasn't the case at first."

"And then?"

"'It's my duty, my painful duty, to arrest you,' I say."

Inspector Taggard nods approval; but asks laconically, "What charge?"

"Indecent exposure."

"What of?"

The police constable looks conscious—some sort of doubt springs into existence, but he replies, "Feathers, I suppose."

"Exposure of feathers is not an offence," says Inspector Taggard. "If you made an arrest, you acted wrongly. But finish your story."

"The Thing speaks again and says, 'I want a hat.' Two little shoulder wings, which I had not noticed, begin to flutter,

and a ring of light forms around its head. Then the Thing says, 'A hat is made of something and is fixed with pins.' I know what a hat is well enough; and then I fancy that the poor, wandering Thing in feathers must be a little off."

"Did it occur to you that there was someone inside the feathers, speaking and making a fool of you all the time?"

"Yes; and I said, 'Come now, no larks,' and brought my hand down heavily on the Thing's shoulder—leastways, where the shoulder should be."

"Well?"

"There was nothing there, and my hand returns to my side; I might as well have tried to arrest a moonbeam."

Inspector Taggard looks suspiciously at the constable—moonbeams put an idea into his head. It is a moonlight night, too.

"Then the Thing says, 'If you'll get me clothes and a hat I'll come with you.' I say 'Very well,' and here we are."

"Where's the other?" asks the Inspector.

"I can't see it, but I know it's here," says Constable Evans.

"On what charge?"

"Wandering about without visible means of subsistence."

Inspector Taggard rings up the Divisional Surgeon. Constable Evans is a good deal "off" now, in his opinion.

"The man is as sane as he ever was in his life," says the surgeon, "but if he persists in his story let him tell it at the Mansion House to the Lord Mayor, and then everybody will know it, and it is possible that some sort of explanation will be forthcoming. It will never do for people to fancy that something which the police can't tackle is prowling round. The Cock Lane ghost will be a fool to it, and in a week half the people will be in madhouses. Englishmen will face anything but the unaccountable—a mysterious shadow drives them frantic."

CHAPTER IV

SIR JOHN GERARD hears the story from the Lord Mayor, who is much impressed by the policeman's narrative, told him in his private room, but which he thinks desirable not to make public unless the phenomenon is repeated. Balmayn, the young Colonial, who is introduced to the City Fathers by Sir John, notes that the Lord Mayor is ill at ease when the honourable baronet retails some cynical jests at the expense of our aerial visitor to this mundane planet.

"What the deuce the thing wants in London, and in the City of all places in the wide world, I can't guess," says Sir John.

"The providential government of the world is too mysterious for me," says the chief magistrate. "If this is intended as a warning—"

Sir John interrupts with a loud laugh; he has heard so much the last week or two about signs, and warnings, and last judgments. "You forget, my lord, that the flying angel which is to shake us all up is to carry a trumpet, and blow it for all it's worth. Where's the trumpet? If the Whatever-it-is only had a trumpet!"

"No mention was made of a trumpet in the American and French reports, and the constable said nothing about one."

"Of course not; a mere mechanical toy, clever certainly, and you'll see a big advertisement out soon. Knock the idea of the supernatural out of people's heads or there'll be another 'slump' in stocks. I've washed my hands already of all weak stuff."

The police constable's story leaks out, and the evening papers are selling in the streets when Sir John and Mr Balmayn emerge from the Mansion House. The narratives are not wanting in ingenious embellishment.

. . . . . .

"Did you see the mysterious Something in the City?" asks Lady Gerard at dinner.

"The privilege was reserved, it seems, for some fool of a policeman, who told a cock-and-bull story about a young woman dressed up in feathers running about St Paul's Churchyard at midnight, and asking for clothes and a hat."

"With what result?"

"The constable promptly ran her in."

"Most proper, Sir John."

"Most foolish, I think, for if let alone there would have been the usual story of London Bridge at midnight, and a splash."

"Do you think the policeman was sober?" asks her ladyship with the air of one who has pierced a mystery without trouble.

"The man had read about the Paris business, and it got on his nerves, I suppose."

"And did the very improper young Thing in feathers give any account of its actions?"

"Said something about clothes and a hat, but the constable warned the Whatever-it-

was that what it said would be used in evidence against it, and so, naturally enough, the Thing said nothing."

"Clothes and a hat," repeats her lady-ship. "The hat decides me—the mystery is a woman in masquerade. Don't you think so, my dear," addressing Mrs Balmayn, who is eagerly following the conversation, and feels relieved now at the thought that the world will last until her honeymoon is over.

"Little wife of yours a bit nervous, I should think," says Sir John to his nephew.

"She is in sympathy with everything supernatural; one gets like that in Australia where the natives appear to have intimate relations with the unseen."

"All illusion," says Sir John.

"But splendid, for to them it is real. Has it ever occurred to you, Sir John, that the races late in development are more familiar with the unseen than those in advance of them in civilisation?"

Sir John contemplates his cigar ash. The young Colonial has a trick of switching

him off the line sometimes. The butler enters.

"Well, Jackson," demands Sir John, briskly, "where the devil did you get that look from?"

"I waited for the ladies to retire; but, Sir John—" And Jackson speaks in a low key, and with embarrassment.

"What! Row in my house! Women in hysterics! Speak up, sir, what do you mean?"

"It's about a Vision in the City, and the Last Day!"

"So soon," says Sir John, puffing out his cheeks. "Well, I'll be ——; but never mind me, Jackson. Tell the women I'll be with 'em in a brace of shakes if there's any such nonsense in my house. It'll be the last day with some of them to-morrow if I hear more of this."

"Shall I send for the doctor?" asks Jackson.

"Doctor 'm yourself, Jackson. Glass of port all round. And, Jackson, not a word to the ladies. And, Jackson, tell that

yellow-haired Abigail to hold her tongue, to be as close as wax when she goes to my lady, or she'll pack in the morning. Do you hear, Jackson ? Dose the wenches at once and steady their nerves, but mum to my lady."

" Yes, Sir John."

An unearthly shriek rings through the house.

" Ten thousand demons," says Sir John to Balmayn. " Very little disturbs people's nerves. A slump in the City, a slump in the kitchen, and it wants a slump in the House to-night to make things cheerful. I must be off now, early division expected, and I'd rather meet this Thing in feathers than an angry ' whip ' if the Government is defeated on a snap division. Wonder if anyone will ask Balfour a question—something elusive is a bit in his line, you know."

" Extry-extry-special," shouts a man.

" Damn the papers ! " mutters Sir John, getting into a hansom and driving to Westminster.

CHAPTER V

PERHAPS the only man in London, not blind and totally deaf, who has not heard of the advent of La Céleste in Paris, and who is quite unconscious of the sensation which the evening papers have already produced, is Dr John Riddle of Storey's Gate, who carries the fifty and odd letters following his name with so much modesty as not even to remember them. And Mrs Riddle is so fitted to be the wife of so eminent a man, that the doctor is seldom disturbed at home by what he philosophically regards as the little " accidents " which make up the sum and substance of feminine existence. An inward and an outward calm the doctor thinks necessary for his special studies, and being a specialist of repute, he only troubles himself with the correspondence of scientists like himself, and of the

very first water. What the learned doctor can see with the naked eye has little interest for him ; and the whole visible universe might disappear without causing him much regret, if only some atom is left behind so minute in its entirety as only to be seen under the powerful lens specially prepared for him at Leipzig.

Mrs Riddle secretly delights in recalling the few times in married life that she has crossed the doctor's conscious line of vision ; and only once in an early war against dust and " litters " in his sanctum did she disturb his calm study of the infinitely small. She remembers the whole scene—a tempest and a litany ; and then the fixing of a spring lock upon the doctor's door which none may hereafter open from the outside but himself

Mrs Riddle has heard the story of the mystery and is quivering to tell the doctor at dinner, for they dine together by custom, and the doctor sometimes answers questions, though more often follows her with his eyes as though regretting that as a " subject "

she is too large for his microscope. The brief desire (if it really exists) passes, for he has always plenty of subjects on hand for mounting, and the doctor returns joyfully to his room with the spring lock, for where the mind of a scientist is, there is his heart also.

Dr Riddle is even more than usually unconscious this evening of the presence of the wife of his bosom, and fails utterly to understand the allusions to a Something and a mad policeman, because his mind has scarcely yet freed itself from the task of revising a critical MS.; and in this state he returns to his room, and his whole being soon tingles again with delicious warmth as eyes follow finger on the MS. He takes off his black silk cap and shows a bald broad forehead, glowing with the inward heat which genius may indulge in when no one is looking. Then he says audibly,—

"I agree, there is mystery, but the mystery of to-day may be the fact of to-morrow. Every unexplained phenomenon is 'mystery,' and mystery in the hands of

fools is generally mischievous. Fonblanque puts the case for the reality of the unreal very high, but then he is a visionary, and, consequently, weak. Now I—"

The doctor is very much absorbed in his work, and can scarcely believe his ears when someone says reproachfully,—

" If there is no welcome on Earth for an Immortal, I will return."

Dr Riddle lifts his eyes suddenly. For a moment his heart stops, and then his pulses throb with unphilosophic tumult. A soft, musical voice fills the air ; a vision in white with folded wings stands before him.

He turns his eyes to familiar things ; to his beloved microscope, to his papers, to his finger-nails ; they are all there. He adjusts the lamp-shade and his hand trembles—all real. Then he is sane enough. Once more he lifts his eyes, and there is the vision in human form and face, and head crowned with a wealth of hair of the colour of Venetian gold. He turns suddenly in his chair towards the door and notes that that is closed by the faithful spring. How then

has this mysterious visitor come into his room ? For a moment he is angry at the intrusion, and the very human feeling of outraged privacy gives him courage.

" This room is private, and I am engaged," says he, turning once again to his MS. as though it were a matter of indifference to him what became of a being who penetrated rooms fastened with patent locks.

" An Immortal from Muran is not welcome on Earth ? "

The voice is very sweet, but the doctor really wants to get on with his work. He is so full of his subject, too, that it is difficult to make room suddenly for a new set of impressions. It dawns upon him, however, that novel conditions have arisen, within or without him, and entirely independent of his will, worthy of notice, perhaps, and must be attended to immediately, or the opportunity may pass.

Then the situation. This, too, dawns upon him as something novel, and not altogether without possible future incon-

veniences—a leading scientific light alone in his study, fastened by a spring lock, with something in the feminine form, smothered with wings, and speaking with the seductive tones of language set to celestial music.

The doctor begs pardon and puts his precious MS. away in a place of safety. When so much has happened the rest may follow—who knows what destructive energy may be under these wings ? This done, he says abruptly and without preface,—

" What is it you want ? "

" Clothes and a hat—a hat above all things. Something like this, you know." The figure moves its shoulder wings rapidly and a ring of light encircles its head, and then the tip of one of the shoulder wings gives the nimbus the appearance of the sweetest feminine thing in hats that ever penetrated the doctor's consciousness.

" I was not prepared for so luminous a transformation," says he, gazing intently at the nimbus, which gradually disappears when the wings are brought to rest. And then, with sudden inspiration, " I observe

that you are only covered with feathers, which, I would remind you, is not altogether suited to our climate ; and not altogether, ahem ! yes, not altogether—I suppose I must say it—not altogether proper."

The Immortal looks conscious now that wings will not pass muster among the proprieties. Ha-Sabat, the Keeper of the Chronicles, knew what he was about when advising her that whilst on Earth she must provide herself with clothes and a hat. She has wandered from the East to the New World, and from thence to the Old, seldom seen, but seeing always, and a new feeling, a feeling of despair, creeps over her, born of fear that her mission must prove a failure from want of a few garments and a hat ! And then, how is she to make the New Historical Society of Muran understand that Immortals are not *comme il faut* among the Earth ephemera ? Dr Riddle notes his visitor's embarrassment, and presently sees her spread two grand white wings, and hold out beseechingly two hands so delicately fair.

"Give me a garment and a hat, that I may mix with men and women, and perform my mission!"

Am I really awake, or only in one of those sub-conscious states so much talked about, thinks Dr Riddle, slyly pinching himself. He is certain that he feels pain, and equally certain is he that before him stands a figure, all celestial, according to the poets and painters of the world, with outstretched hands, and a mute appeal in eyes whose calm depths are infinitely profound.

"You must pardon me, you really must, the visit is so strange, and the demand so, so very embarrassing. Clothes and a hat! Mrs Riddle may manage that; but you referred to a 'mission' and that may interest me. What is your mission?"

"To discover traces of the lost Murani if still on your planet; and if they are not, to learn what attractions Earth possesses for Immortals so powerful that they should say, 'Immortality is well lost may we but dwell amongst the earthborn, becoming one of them.'"

The suspicion crosses the learned doctor's mind that he is involuntarily entertaining some demented Ophelia wandering through space. There is no room under his lens for such a subject as this, and he charitably thinks the sooner the unfortunate returns to whence it came, the better. As every parish bears its own burdens, why not every planet ?

"I never heard of any missing links between mortals and immortals being discovered on our earth," says the doctor, with a slight possessory flourish on the "our," just sufficient to make an alien conscious of trespass. Then,—

"But you have not told me how you got here."

"I willed to come, and I am here."

"Charmingly simple, and not very expensive. Now, really (this compassionately), you must have forgotten that the planet Muran is one hundred and forty millions of miles distant, and that, travelling with the velocity of light, the journey would occupy—"

"Light, yes; a Murani, but the inappreciable fraction of a second. I spread my wings and fly through your atmosphere, and then I fold them, and *will*, and am in the atmosphere surrounding Muran. Once more I open my wings and fly to Imbra-Umbra and report my return to the Keeper of the Chronicles. My leave of absence is for ninety days."

"Why so short?"

"Because the Earth's atmosphere will not support an Immortal longer. Only thirty days remain to me."

"Pardon me," says Dr Riddle, apologetically, "I will make a note for future reference. The atmosphere of Muran differs from that of Earth, you say?"

"Yes; the atmosphere of Muran provides every element necessary for immortal life to a Murani. Decay is impossible in Muran; but I can only remain on Earth for ninety days without losing the power of returning. The atmosphere of Muran, you must know, is an eternal energy."

Ma-Mylitta pauses, and then flutters her

two great wings until she appears clothed with light as with a garment. There is not space in the room for further exhibition, but, such as it is, it is splendid, the doctor standing in a luminous field, mystified, astonished, fearful—halting between a desire to fall down and worship and to shout through terror at the bare thought that his precious collections will be injured in this bath of celestial glory. Then Ma-Mylitta brings her wings to rest again, and the points of light seem reabsorbed by the white-winged figure.

"In Muran," continues Ma-Mylitta, "we obtain all the vital energy we need from the atmosphere, so that waste is made good almost before it may be said to occur. On Earth—" Ma-Mylitta shakes a shoulder wing, which is significant to the doctor, who says,—

"Those who rely on our atmosphere for direct supplies have but lean fare."

"Poor Immortals!" says Ma-Mylitta, referring to those who came to Earth so long ago and failed to return in time. Then she asks,-

"Are there any traditions of Immortals coming to Earth?"

"Traditions innumerable. Every quarter of the world is full of them, only we say they are false—mere dreams of infancy."

"But may not one—only one—be true? Think, is there only one—one so needful to human development, so necessary to the first dreams of things beyond mere life, that you would say, 'It must be true'?"

"There is a story which every child knows, and it dates back long ago, when the higher races were in their infancy. You must suppose that Immortals from somewhere were in the habit of visiting this poor planet, as you have done now. And then the story goes, *The sons of God saw the daughters of men, and took unto them wives.* Perhaps this may give you a clue."

"And they never returned?"

"Tradition sayeth not, but speaking from universal experience I should say that if winged Immortals took unto them fair women as wives, they would lose their

feathers. The women would be sure to want them. I don't profess to be an authority," the doctor adds quickly.

"What is there in the fair daughters of men so enthralling ?"

"You ask me as a man of science ?"

"Yes."

"Then I do not know."

"I ask you as a Man."

"Now you are on delicate, if not dangerous, ground. Ask history, ask the tombs, ask the question in worlds beyond worlds. Does not life in the planet Muran suggest an answer ?"

"Immortals never marry."

"Ah !" exclaims the doctor, twirling his cap on his finger-tip.

There is silence, and Ma-Mylitta endeavours in vain to follow the train of thought passing through the doctor's mind ; but she has no cue and is baffled until he speaks.

"Perhaps," he says, "the absence of marriage is a weak point in the otherwise admirable system of you Immortals. Those

whom you seek found that the daughters of men were fair, and they tried an experiment in domestic economy. They were progressives and sacrificed themselves to an experiment in the true scientific spirit. I honour them," adds the doctor.

Ma-Mylitta, interested, fans herself with her shoulder wings until the nimbus reappears. She, too, is thinking, and Dr Riddle cannot divine the complex ideas which his words have suggested. An Immortal becoming earthbound and tied to a woman who would use his feathers for hats, and all in the interests of " science," is, for her, a proposition not to be viewed in all its lights in an instant.

" I will follow up the idea," says she.

" And in the meantime ? "

" I must have clothes and a hat."

" I will prepare Mrs Riddle for an interview," says the doctor.

CHAPTER VI

THE electric bell on the table tinkles.

The doctor remembers that Professor Fonblanque intends calling and is vexed at the interruption, his mind having been made up on the spur of the moment to summon Mrs Riddle and, in the inviolate secrecy of his sanctum, introduce his mysterious visitor. The impulse is so sudden that difficulties have had no time to germinate. Mrs Riddle is to take this Immortal off his hands, make her presentable, if possible, and aid her in her mission. So far, so good; the doctor feels pleasure at the bare thought of its being reported in another planet that he, representing science, did something towards facilitating a scientific mission. Now the bell tinkles a sudden check is given to his purpose, and he asks himself whether, after all, it will be

the wisest thing to introduce so exceptional a person, under such exceptional circumstances, to so estimable a mortal as his wife? In a moment, the bell still vibrating, he lives through situations intensely dramatic. Mrs Riddle is woman, and this Immortal, calling itself feminine, is not costumed; and even to his mind, singularly incurious as to such matters, it is clear that feathers emitting luminous rays cannot be considered "clothes." As a scientific man the emission of light by radio-action is one thing; as the husband of Mrs Riddle the duty of making a sufficient explanation is another. His domestic side is uppermost now.

"A scientific friend," says the doctor, replacing his skull cap, but he seems uncertain what to say through the tube which he holds in his fingers. Ma-Mylitta's plumes absorb all his attention. He knows his servant below waits for instructions and his mind refuses to act. He can neither say "send him up," nor "engaged."

Ma-Mylitta comes to his aid.

"I will be invisible," says she, disappearing.

. . . . . .

Professor Fonblanque is full of the subject, of the evening paper reports, of "interviews" with the unhappy police constable, who has come to the conclusion that he has seen a heavenly vision and intends quitting the force for the Salvation Army, and of the excited groups of men and women in the open spaces, in the streets, on the bridges, gazing intently upwards in the expectation of seeing some new thing in the sky.

"I heard, as I came along, that something unusual crossed St James's Park in this direction," says the professor.

"And what is the hope or the expectation of the man-in-the-street?" asks the doctor.

"More dread than hope, I should say. Unaccountable appearances in the air fill people with alarm. If it were only given to man to see the invisible—"

"The old argument," says the doctor, impatiently, who has only just seen the

invisible. He, the champion of matter! He is fearful lest the invisible may re-appear now, and so adds, "If all the planets in all the spheres are known to be filled with spirits, yet will I say that the basis of man's life is physical. Everything points to it, and we are so near to demonstration that I sometimes tremble at the thought of missing it. The simplicity of it, when found!"

"Yes, the simplicity of the greatest thing is greatest. There is something very simple about this story of an aerial body producing luminous rays. I see nothing impossible about it. Why should not the inhabitants of another planet be composed of cells, radio-active, and lighter than ether?"

"And then?"

"Luminosity be generated by the mere flapping of wings, as we produce fire by friction."

"Your supposed inhabitant of a supposed planet would certainly have a singular constitution. What does the spectrum say?"

"That there is a world of mystery around us. What did it say of argon, what of radium? Every new discovery leads to new mystery. Is there not tradition in all lands of the existence in ancient days of celestial beings with singular constitutions? What is tradition but human experience preserved? Except a few, the whole world to-day believes in the unseen."

"And immortal?"

"And why not?"

"I take it," says Dr Riddle, quietly, "that one day your radio-active cells will become exhausted, and then what becomes of your Immortals?"

"Surely no such necessity exists," says the professor, who knows the doctor is most dangerous when in this mood. "Why should not radio-active cells be renewed for ever? Something takes a little nitrogen from our atmosphere in the night, and, miracle of miracles, a mushroom is born. Why should not a higher organism in another planet take from its own atmosphere just so much of the something re-

quired to repair waste, and so life go on for ever ? ”

“ What happens, or may happen, in your celestial regions, of course, I do not know ; but what would you say, Fonblanque, would happen to one of your radio-active celestials rash enough to come to Earth ? Our atmosphere is not, I believe, composed for the support of Immortals, but of man and mushrooms.”

Is Dr Riddle deceived, or is there really a movement in the air near him ? Is his mysterious visitor interested in the very plain question which may be all-important to her ? If she cannot re-charge exhausted cells here below then she may be earthbound. Perhaps this was the reason why the Immortals of old never returned to Muran, but sunk cold and lifeless in the arms of the fair daughters of men.

“ Ah ! ” says the professor, rising, “ I have no knowledge of what might happen ; but I think that when the world was young the gods were nearer to man than they are now ; when they were common and beauti-

ful everywhere with the commonness and beauty of sunlight and wind."

The professor is animated now, and there springs into his face something of the tone beauty of his subject.

"Can you doubt it?" he asks with animation. "I know you truly despise much that to me is real, and I cannot even tell you why my soul at times is full of harmonies which I cannot translate into song or words. And yet, Riddle, believe me, I would not be without them."

Dr Riddle points towards his microscope. It is an old habit of his to remind the professor that he is getting into cloudland; all very fine, perhaps, but cloudland.

"Oh, yes, I know," says the professor, flushing slightly at being brought down suddenly. "Oh, yes, I know, the sign and symbol of the age—practical demonstration. Your lens is an added power to the eye, and may be improved on again and again until the inmost secret of Nature's mechanism is revealed; and then you will be as far away as ever from the secret of the voices

and forms which dwelt with man in the days of old. How did man discover that he has a soul ? " asks the professor, suddenly.

" Has not the discovery yet to be made ? " replies the doctor, coldly. " Plenty of assumption and no proof. Let me but once get the evidence under that glass ! Let us be honest to ourselves. Is not the soul, as popularly understood, the product of human vanity and reason ? On the whole, perhaps, men and women are none the worse for fancying there is something inside of them which may one day be turned to good account elsewhere. I don't know where," adds he, smiling ; " but, speaking from my own limited observation, I think that belief in a soul is looked on as a bit of a nuisance, and that most people would be more comfortable without the belief, if not without the thing."

" No, no, a thousand times no, doctor. The soul in man is real, and so unlike everything else that only man with a soul could have invented it. The conception almost proves the existence of the thing."

Surely the doctor feels a current, a movement, a something in the air. He turns his head quickly, but sees nothing.

"Then you think, Fonblanque, there may be something worthy of serious investigation in this aerial phenomenon?"

"I would give much to witness it under favourable conditions. It is not impossible that some ingenious person has been able to produce an appearance popularly ascribed to angelic beings. If it is a trick it can be repeated at will, and the shops will be flooded with new scientific toys."

"Then you would like to see this phenomenon face to face?"

"Greatly."

The doctor pauses as with set intent to give the Immortal an opportunity to become visible. The chance was favourable. They were alone. Professor Fonblanque was so touched with mysticism as to be willing to believe in Murani Immortals, whilst he, less impressionable, would act as check and so reduce the chance of imposture. Then Fonblanque might be willing to help the

stranger in her quest. He pauses, but there is no sign, and the professor departs.

The spring lock snaps, and once more the doctor is alone. He waits for some manifestation, but there is none, and then a feeling of irritation passes over him. Has he, after all, been the subject of delusion ? He pulls himself together and speaks distinctly towards the spot where the appearance stood when it became visible. No voice, no sign. Then his pride is in revolt as the idea of being mocked occurs to him. The doctor has been seriously interrupted, the electricity has run off the wires, and there is no more work for him to-night.

The light is switched off.

CHAPTER VII

PROFESSOR FONBLANQUE walks rapidly towards Westminster Bridge, Big Ben striking eleven without a tremor, in seeming rebuke to the excited people in the streets within sound of its slow, sonorous strokes.

The crowd is apparently determined to remain in the open until midnight, for it is always at midnight in the popular imagination that something happens—midnight, the world's new birth, the miracle of another day. Tired and jaded and half asleep, crowds weary already with the struggle for bare existence, cannot seek repose until the last stroke of midnight booms and the first dew-drops of the new day fall cool upon their fevered, upturned faces. And then, if nothing happens, there will be nothing for them to do but to sleep and wake again,

to toil and moil, to fret and suffer, to curse and die under the crushing wheels of a civilisation pitiless and brutal.

The professor is also in a waiting mood, leans upon the parapet in the centre of the bridge, and marks the broken shadows in the dark and silent waters of the two vast piles in which life flows and ebbs. On the right, the representatives of the people in the House of Commons are at fever heat, the great chamber ringing with cheers and counter-cheers as the "tellers" announce the figures of a division which, it is hoped, will shape the destinies of a Government. What full-voiced passion there, could one but hear it! And then, on the other side, the steady burning lights in wards of wakeful suffering—and now a light extinguished, as though one more weary soul, enfranchised by pain, has taken wing. He looks upward, as though in expectation of seeing a shaft of light move heavenward, but there is no sign of release and joy; only he knows all that is taking place amongst the silent nurses drawing white sheets over upturned

faces. Strange contrast for the watcher solitary in a restless crowd ; the passionate lust of political strife on the one side, and the last sigh escaping from the other ; and between but a narrow stream reflecting vain, distorted shadows, the image of life without passion and intensity.

Midnight sounds, and the professor turns his shoulders to the stone coping and watches the crowds break up and rush past, some jeering and mocking at their own credulity and at their companions for their idle fears ; and some cursing and sad that a sign has not come for the eternal ruin of a world to which they have no title but an overshare of misery.

Cabs rattle out of Palace Yard as he turns up Parliament Street and walks towards Grosvenor Square, thinking, as he walks, what would be the effect upon the world if the glorious mysteries of the unseen were made visible to human eyes. And he has no knowledge that by his side, silent and invisible, is Ma-Mylitta, the Immortal from Muran.

Professor Fonblanque goes into his "den" and lights a cigar.

. . . . . .

"Will it distress you if I reveal myself?"

The soft, sweet voice scarce disturbs him. It may be an inward harmony. The professor turns his head mechanically.

"You told Dr Riddle you would like to see me face to face, and I am here."

The name recalls the conversation; but still he looks into nothingness.

"I was in Dr Riddle's study and left with you, and have been with you since, and if you will welcome an Immortal I will show myself. I am very lonely."

The professor is strangely moved, and says, "Reveal yourself, and welcome."

Then Ma-Mylitta stands before him, and as he looks into the deep, unfathomable eyes his soul is filled with reverence.

The morning rays find them talking of mystery upon mystery.

"I will give you every assistance in my power," says the professor.

"And clothe me?"

"Certainly."

"And get me a hat?"

"Most assuredly, if there is one in Europe."

CHAPTER VIII

"A MOST remarkable story, and don't you think the house would be mobbed if I were to offer asylum to so singular a being?" asks Lady Gerard of Professor Fonblanque.

The interview has already been a long one, and the professor is not yet certain that he can gain consent to his strange request to domicile for a short time an Immortal one hundred and forty millions of miles from home, and wanting clothes and a hat.

"So far from home, without luggage or visible means of subsistence; a sort of wandering vagabond on a large scale," says her ladyship with a play of good-humour around her mouth, which the professor interprets as the first sign of ultimate surrender.

"Immortals on Earth always seem to have been pretty destitute on their arrival,

but those who entertained them found their reward," says the professor.

"You must hunt up some suitable texts for the conversion of Sir John, even if I consent."

"I'll find the texts if your ladyship will point the moral."

"What moral?"

"That when we arrive in another sphere we shall be without luggage, and as destitute as this stranger, and Sir John may find his account in another world by being hospitable in this." The professor becomes serious again. "After all," says he, "I scarcely know what I am asking, for I can hardly ask for 'protection' for a being which becomes invisible at will, neither eats nor drinks, can wing its way through the air from continent to continent, and transfer itself from planet to planet with the rapidity of thought. You know, Lady Gerard, that, in its conventional sense, I have no home, and that I may not entertain even a sexless Immortal who says that in the scale of being to which it belongs it bears

a feminine appellative. Had this stranger but called itself masculine the case would have been different, and I should not be here now asking your ladyship to afford nominal protection to a celestial visitant."

"The protection is only nominal, you say."

"Quite nominal. This Immortal comes from another planet for the purpose of research; and if not altogether successful, the purpose may not be so certain to miscarry if someone (your ladyship for instance) takes her in charge, shows her what she wishes to see, and tells her what she wishes to know."

"What is it this Immortal particularly wants to know?" asks her ladyship.

The professor flushes. Translated into words the motive is romantic and, coldly received, may sound ridiculous. Her ladyship's homely face lights up with curiosity, and she adds, "Why, professor, I believe there must be love in it."

"Your ladyship is right. Once upon a time, it seems, some Immortals from the

planet Muran came to Earth and were captured by the fair daughters of men. As the Immortals have been missing ever since, and there is a sort of hiatus in the Chronicles of Muran, the desire has sprung up to know for certain what became of the adventurers, and what motive there can have been sufficiently strong to induce them to forfeit their high estate in the scale of created existence."

"The Immortals fell in love with the women?"

"That's the story."

"But all this happened a long time ago."

"Five thousand years."

Lady Gerard is decidedly interested. A love story in mummy cloths five thousand years old is still a love story for a woman. But her ladyship has many things to think about, and she shows the professor her practical side once again.

"But the clothes. What does an invisible want with clothes?"

"Nothing, when invisible; but this strange being becomes visible or invisible

at will. It is a strange power, but I assure you, you soon get accustomed to the phenomenon."

"But when visible! There's the rub, professor. What did you say? Plain white feathers with scarlet rings over each breast, and a certain mystical sheen over all, like the flashing lights on flowers. And then the radium, or something of that sort; a luminous gas turned on and off at will, just as we turn on and off electric lights."

"A most brilliant and unaccountable phenomenon."

"But shockingly improper, admit that, professor."

"I cannot. The idea of impropriety does not attach to the ethereal."

"And angelic."

"Better still, and even more exalted."

"I will remember that for the benefit of Sir John," says her ladyship, who is almost won over by the phrase and the pleading of the professor, who talks scientific mysticism for a little while longer, and then plays

upon her womanly sympathies, curiosity and vanity, until she consents to extend to Ma-Mylitta, the Immortal from Muran, all the protection in her power. It will be for a short time—only thirty days now, the professor understands, and the Immortal must return ; so much time has been spent already in the mysterious East and elsewhere. It is, however, understood between them that if Sir John becomes too disagreeable, or if Society professes itself shocked and scandalised, or if the unexpected happen in some shape, form or guise displeasing to her ladyship, then the Immortal is to be requested to vanish instantly, and no reflection is to be cast, at any time, upon her ladyship's hospitality, or want of it. It is further stipulated that Professor Fonblanque shall undertake to satisfy the scientists that the Immortal is genuine, and persuade her to submit to such interviews, tests and examinations as the scientists are prepared on short notice to make. If there is any deception practised and discovered, then the professor is to receive all the blame, and make no complaint.

CHAPTER IX

Sir John Gerard tips his hat over his eyes and frowns, and then cocks it at an angle and puts his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, and looks wicked; but her ladyship has her own way, although he declares with fine emphasis that he'll pair for the remainder of the session and go—. Sir John is a little hazy, as usual, in long-distance geography, and her ladyship knows that he'll only have an extra rubber or two in Piccadilly or the Mall after the House is up.

If the invisible chooses to come into his house through keyholes or windows, how the deuce can he help it? he asks himself as soon as he's alone; and then he becomes curious (and the curiosity grows on him) as to what sort of an animal this celestial alien will turn out to be. And as he walks through the Park briskly he rehearses

replies to imaginary questions which will surely be put to him at the House, and elsewhere, when it gets known that Lady Gerard has taken the stranger metaphorically under her wing.

Lady Gerard's interest in Ma-Mylitta increases with Sir John's apparent dislike to the proposal, which is a matter of course, the few tastes which the worthy baronet and his lady have in common being of the neutral kind which make for comfort; but what one likes with passionate insistence, the other, as a rule, as passionately detests.

Professor Fonblanque has gained my lady's sympathies, and she is now secretly longing for the opportunity to surprise Society with an Immortal from Muran in flowing garments — something Japanese suggests itself. And the hat! Bond Street will provide that; only one angel more to cover, says my lady, good-naturedly beaming upon Mrs Balmayn, now slowly recovering from her dread that the world may not last long enough to exhaust the joys of her honeymoon. For the present the Immortal

is to remain in her ladyship's pleasant "retreat" with a light robe thrown over her, and the household is induced to become familiar with the stranger's presence.

"You can't think what a fearful fright you gave us poor mortals," says her ladyship. "I really think more people wanted to say their prayers when they heard of your arrival than have been that way inclined for a long time."

"And why?"

"Oh, nothing angelic ever comes on Earth, you know, and we are easily frightened when we think of our sins. Some of the women even took their husbands into confidence, and in their terror actually told them the truth and begged forgiveness. There'll be scandal in high places by-and-by. Sir John says the lawyers are busy, only they say the truth isn't the truth when told under terror, which is very convenient."

"I want to know something of Man," says Ma-Mylitta, now doubting whether her much-discussed "speculations" were, after all, worth publishing.

"Man is an animal with vices, mostly home-made, and the man who travels generally possesses the most varied selection. He begins well, but ends badly; but, with all his faults, he's useful. Mr Balmayn is in the first stage, and Sir John is in the second."

Mrs Balmayn flushes.

"I speak from experience, my dear. I once thought as you think now," says her ladyship, sorry already for having been so frank in the presence of a bride.

The Immortal takes no apparent notice of the by-play, but pursues the object of her inquiry.

"Have you any men with wings like mine?"

"Wings!" exclaims her ladyship. "Men have a natural antipathy to wings, for whatever flies they shoot. Only show a man something with wings and the passion for destruction comes upon him. If it were not for 'close seasons' nothing with wings would now fly in the heavens."

"And that is Man," says the Immortal, turning her grand, deep-set eyes towards Mrs Balmayn.

"Lady Gerard speaks but of some; and there are others so kind, so noble, so—so, I do not know what."

"You will in time, my dear. We old hands know the stages of man—from good to bad, and from bad to worse. Sir John has gone through his stages like the rest. He's in the House of Commons now, and will soon be ripe for repentance, unless the desire comes too late."

Lady Gerard gives her customary sniff when referring to her husband's connection with the House of Commons. The more Sir John delights in being at *the* House the more her ladyship inclines to sniff when his connection with it is mentioned. Her ladyship gives great offence sometimes, but the sniff comforts her.

"I want to find the exiles from Muran, or some trace of them (their descendants, perhaps), and learn what has happened, and write it in a book for Ha-Sabat to add to

his Chronicles. That is my mission, and can you help me ? ”

“ I never heard of the existence of winged men outside of poetry ; and the race, if ever there was one, must have become extinct ages ago. I am afraid your journey is in vain, and you'll have but your labour for your pains,” says her ladyship, with a look of genuine compassion.

“ Tell me, what was there on Earth to induce Immortals to slough off their immortality and die amongst the earth-born ? ”

“ They made love to the fair daughters of men, and that, I suppose, was fatal. Probably it would be now, if they had anything to lose. And I suppose girls are no worse now than formerly. Some people think they are better.”

“ Tell me truly, what is Woman ? ”

“ In a word : A woman is very, very good when no one is looking.”

Her ladyship laughs pleasantly, and Ma-Mylitta is not satisfied. “ I want to know ; it is my mission,” says she.

“ Well, they are good enough when no

man is about. Ask Mrs Balmayn, she is the younger."

"Woman is at her best with the man she loves—woman is love," says the young bride, blushing.

"Love," repeats the Immortal, addressing Lady Gerard; and then she asks, "What is love?"

"A sort of nerve disease which begins with kissing in this country; in some places I have heard that rubbing noses together does just as well. There is no certain rule with us. Sometimes a young man knocks a young woman on the head, and she loves him; and sometimes a young woman snubs a young man, and he loves her. In the present day money is the great charm; and a young man wanting it is sure to love a young woman who has got it, and he'll continue in love until he gets it. It's a sort of sickness amongst women."

"'The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took wives of them,' what does that mean to you?"

"Just what it says. But I daresay the silly Immortals repented."

"Were the daughters of men then so fair that Immortals allowed their wings to droop, and then to die for the love of them? There must be some strange, mysterious charm in that you call 'love' to account for so great a sacrifice. What is it?"

Lady Gerard looks into the eyes of her mysterious visitor and is awed by their calm intensity. The grandeur of those eyes which fascinate and seem to engulf one in unfathomable depths! The loose cambric gown is agitated by fluttering wings, and suddenly a radiant glory surrounds the splendid head.

"You will betray yourself unconsciously wherever you may be if you surround yourself with halos," says her ladyship by way of timely monition.

"It is too angelic," says Mrs Balmayn, with clasped hands.

"I must remember and not transgress, but it is so natural for a Murani to move in a field of glory that I cannot understand

an Immortal surrendering the privilege for love of earth-born daughters."

"Have you then no love in Muran?" suddenly exclaims Mrs Balmayn. "Have you no love, no sympathy, no need for self-sacrifice?"

"We neither marry, nor are given in marriage. In Muran we live," replies Ma-Mylitta, grandly.

Mrs Balmayn has lost her fear now, and her heart speaks.

"Life without love!" says she. "Then give me life with love, and suffering, and death. My heart tells me what you want to know. Your Immortals wooed the fair daughters of men and loved them, and would not forsake them. Could they? It would be unworthy of Immortals when even mortal men would die for love. Oh, you Immortals, but you have much to learn."

"All in good time, but the costumes are on the way," says her ladyship, noting the excitement of the speaker.

. . . . . .

"And the hats! I'm so curious about the hats," says Ma-Mylitta.

"If you are 'curious,'" says Lady Gerard, smiling, "I shall begin to believe that there is something of Earth in you after all, and if you once take to dress I shall be sure of it. We are taught to believe that Adam and Eve hadn't feathers even."

"What was the first idea of clothes?" asks Ma-Mylitta.

"A sort of covering, I suppose," replies her ladyship, amused at Mrs Balmayn's hasty retreat from the room. "Being covered and being 'dressed' are very different things."

"Now I shall learn something," says Ma-Mylitta.

"Public opinion, that is the law, requires you to be clothed; fashion requires you to be dressed. Dressing is an art, the only art that some women study."

"And men?"

"Oh, they have lost the art entirely. Look at Sir John! And he's not much behind the rest. But with women it is an

art carried at times to perfection. Being the weaker, women find in dress the most splendid allurements, snares and nets, weapons offensive and defensive, against man, the stronger. Ah, you must see a clever little woman well dressed play the big, strong man she has determined on capturing. Without dress she would be nothing. It is strength and it is weakness, for I do not believe that women really enjoy their pet sins unless they feel they are dressed to their liking. You will never guess the effect of costume upon lives," says her ladyship.

"In Muran one of the attractions of existence, I already see, is wanting. Our feathers are to fly with," says Ma-Mylitta, smiling.

"Too tame for us poor mortals. We want some compensation for living, and life is very sweet in the latest thing in hats. You innocent Immortals do not know the luxury of sinning in a hat that's *chic*."

"No; a little radium and there is a glory round the head, and that sufficeth."

"So you know nothing of the effect of dress on temper and temperament?"

"Not yet."

"Well then," says her ladyship, "an ill-fitting garment is very trying to the temper, and I never knew a woman too old to be provoked by it. And when a woman is so provoked she is usually very—"

She pauses a little and searches for the right word, but is seemingly baffled, for she continues,—

"I really think the word has to be invented to state precisely what she is. When a woman thinks herself badly dressed she takes a lot of tempting before shocking anybody; but when she fancies herself, the difficulty is to keep on the right side of the line."

"Then the influence of dress on mortals is moral," began Ma-Mylitta.

"Or immoral, my dear. Only let a man say, 'You look adorable in that hat,' and the woman is in the seventh heaven. How many little fools I have known!"

"And every woman knows—"

"Knows that every other woman may make a fool of herself when the dainty little shoes are praised and her dainty chiffons are worshipped. The fit of a dress tries the temper, the adoration of trimmings tries the morals. You will have to work it out in your own way when you return."

"But the difficulty will be to make the Immortals understand that so gifted a race can be influenced by the mere fit and colour of a garment."

"You should smuggle a few Society papers into Muran and then they will learn how 'Mrs Fascination smiled sweetly and in spite of the cold east wind wore her favourite blue; whilst Lady Sprightly was seen walking with her usual grace gowned in pink and wearing a bewitching toque.' You see, Mrs Fascination does not mind catching cold, death perhaps, as long as she can look well to someone in her favourite blue; and Lady Sprightly is all the more graceful because she has a bewitching toque —something wickedly coquettish—on her head. The Society papers would soon teach

the Murani some of the advantages of the higher education in dress."

"There are many things I would like to take back with me, but as I came so I must return, only I shall remember."

"Sir John, my dear, professes to be quite charmed with what he calls the 'divine simplicity of feathers,' but I know he picked up the phrase somewhere, it's so unlike him. The sweet simplicity of having no milliner's bills to pay is what really charms most men, after a little experience."

Then the artistes arrive and the consultation is long and serious, for the clothing of an Immortal with six wings is an unheard-of commission.

And the hats! Bond Street is in a flutter of excitement and resolved on triumph.

CHAPTER X

"SCIENCE first," pleads Professor Fonblanque in his interview with Lady Gerard, who is now anxious that the Immortal from Muran shall see and be seen, and is arranging for a reception on a large scale at an early date.

"Our strange guest wishes to know whether men and women possess wings, or if anyone has ever heard of winged people in any part of the world. An advertisement might be useful, but a reception will bring her in personal contact with people who know everything," says her ladyship, smiling.

"But science has claims, and can hardly be denied the first interview. If it should be that we are under some illusion, walking and talking as in a dream, science will awaken us ; but if it is all real and no dream then science, being immortal thought, will

claim affinity with immortal being, and we shall be satisfied."

The professor is in earnest, and his usually pale thin face shows a hectic flush, which tells its own tale too surely, and appeals to her ladyship's sympathies with greater force than words.

The professor says there is widespread doubt as to the genuineness of the Immortal from Muran, and that aerial phenomena being in demand inventive scientists have already produced beautiful human forms with wings floating in fields of light. At the Egyptian Hall, the theatres and music-halls, splendid illusions appear nightly, much to the comfort of the general public, whose nerves were so rudely shaken by the mere report that something celestial had lost its way and come to Earth. Some good people, the professor says, are already saying it is a pity that the man-in-the-street should be permitted to become so very familiar with objects that at one time excited reverential fear and inward quak-ings. What emotion would there be left

to appeal to in days to come if the unknown were made visible and common ?

The professor undertakes to explain everything to Ma-Mylitta, and to arrange a meeting at the Royal Institution with the least delay, so as not to interfere with her ladyship's At Home.

Ma-Mylitta, consenting to an examination, finds herself in the presence of the inner circle of science—science with many-tinted spectacles, speaking many tongues ; many-minded science, clear-eyed and rational, and, for the most part, suspicious and sceptical.

A large pedestal is placed in the centre of the theatre, and Ma-Mylitta stands on it so that everyone may see the perfect human outlines covered with wings—the two scarlet rings over each breast suggesting to the more mystical symbols of eternity. And Ma-Mylitta's grand coils of hair fall loosely, hiding her wings, but mantling her as in cloth of Venetian gold.

And then the wings, pure white, are put in motion. First of all, the wings attached

above the ankles, uncover feet delicate in outline and highly arched, and Ma-Mylitta moves upwards, leaving the marble pedestal vacant, and stands upon air with no other apparent exertion than the gentle movement of the pedal wings. Then the shoulder wings, attached, as the men of science have all seen, below the neck, play like fans curving upwards; and give direction to the body, inclining it now to the right and now to the left, and by the motion of the two sets of wings the feet and head are enveloped in dazzling light. Then the great wings open, and the scientists, critically watching, see the celestial figure move slowly from end to end of the theatre, the long hair streaming backwards. And whilst they look the dazzling effulgence increases until the whole space is filled with splendour, which, however, disappears when Ma-Mylitta comes to rest again upon the pedestal and once more folds her wings.

There is silence amongst the wise, and those who said La Céleste of Paris was an impossibility are seeking for reasons, more

or less plausible, in support of their scepticism ; but they find it difficult now to speak of " illusion " in the presence of a living, sentient being, invisible at will, understanding, as it seems, all languages, and enveloping itself in clouds of glory by the mere movement of its wings. Radio-activity in this form is new—new even to Dr Riddle, who is present with all the notes he made on the night of the interview in his sanctum. The energy is not from without, so much is clear ; then from whence is this mysterious force obtained, and where is it now stored ?

" I can fill this room with light so dazzling that you will not be able to see me, but the loss of power would be serious because in this atmosphere the exhausted cells cannot be recharged. In Muran exhaustion is at once repaired by the atmosphere, so that an Immortal at home never feels lassitude or weakness," says Ma-Mylitta.

" Then if you remain here until your cells are empty, what do you suppose will become of you ? " asks the learned president.

"I shall be earth-bound like the Immortals of long ago who never returned. Do you know of the existence of Immortals upon your planet ? "

" We are Earth's Immortals," says the president, proudly.

Professor Fonblanque gives a little hectic cough and whispers Dr Riddle, " Immortals in ink."

" Can you tell me what happened to the Immortals from Muran who wooed the fair daughters of men and never returned ? My mission is to trace them."

The learned president passes over the question with some scarce audible reference to popes and bishops ; and then questions are put in all seriousness as to the length of time it took to travel from Muran to Earth. One hundred and forty millions of miles, more or less, in an inappreciable fraction of a second is rapid travelling, truly. Dr Riddle is busy with his notes, and they are clear enough. The strange visitor averred that the distance was traversed in a mere point of time.

"I willed to come," says Ma-Mylitta, simply. "When I touched the Earth's atmosphere I spread my wings, and here I am."

The younger men, having the most imagination, are really charmed with the idea of traversing the whole distance between planets in a mere point of time, and landing with outstretched wings, and without fatigue, in a world in which all is new. After all, it is only what thought can do, and does—winging its way from star to star, and system to system, and back again in the twinkling of an eye; only Ma-Mylitta's triumph is to be able to travel bodily through the ether with the rapidity of thought. The older men, grey and cautious, suggest "unconscious error" and produce a weighing-machine, upon which Ma-Mylitta obligingly stands, and is found to be precisely of the same number of grains when invisible as when visible. Observations are rapid:—

"It is an organic being."

"With form and weight."

"And hair. Such grand hair! Must have a capillary system."

"And wings with muscular attachments."

"Radio-active radiation mechanically produced."

"Never eats."

"Never drinks."

"Never sleeps."

"Muran must be a funny world to live in. Wonder if natives smoke."

Comments are endless, and during the general conversation Ma-Mylitta disappears. The pedestal is empty. All has passed as in a dream.

Then the scientists search diligently for a stray feather, a single hair, a footprint in the dust; anything that can be seen and handled; anything to give but the touch of realism to a vision. When there is mystery science is restless.

"The phonograph will record the interview," says the president; but he was doomed to disappointment, for Ma-Mylitta's voice left no trace. The instrument is wanting in delicacy.

"Well, then, the photographic plates!"

But the sensitive plates received no impression of Ma-Mylitta's form.

"Ah!" exclaims Professor Fonblanque, "there is still room in the world for imagination."

"We have the evidence of the weighing-machine, and that is something," says Dr Riddle to the president, who is not altogether satisfied.

The interview is voted "interesting but inconclusive." Only a stray hair would be something to produce to the world, which may now laugh and say that the elect of science have been gammoned in broad daylight, in their own theatre, and before dinner! which will make the whole thing more incomprehensible to the man-in-the-street.

. . . . .

"Are you mortals so hard to convince that there is a world—a very real world—outside your experience?" asks Ma-Mylitta of Professor Fonblanque.

"Nothing is taken on trust now; it is

the fashion to demonstrate everything, but I think mankind, as a whole, is not as happy now as when it was a joy to worship what was hidden and mysterious. Had you come to Earth a century or two ago you would have moved an angel of light in an adoring world. But now, you see, you see ! ”

“ Why was I weighed ? ”

“ We weigh and measure everything now —eternity by the yard, and truth—”

“ And truth,” repeats Ma-Mylitta as the professor pauses.

“ The difficulty is to find a weight small enough ; but I don’t despair,” adds the professor with a smile.

“ I will not forget when I bring out my new edition—*Concerning Man*,” says the Immortal. “ But I already find it will want a good deal of revision.”

CHAPTER XI

"An At Home to meet an Immortal in radium will be just the thing," says Lady Gerard to Mrs Balmayn, who has volunteered her services as secretary for the occasion, though with inward misgiving as to the strict propriety of indulging public curiosity in so conventional a manner. "Immortal in radium sounds prettily and is as true as most things, and that's a comfort," adds her ladyship, with a smile all over her apple-round face.

Sir John enters and scans her ladyship's lists in no very amiable mood, and then complains that he's pestered to death with letters from knaves and fools, the former offering to "share profits in the show" if he'll secure the Immortal for an exhibition around the world; and the latter asking curious questions about the other world and enclosing scripture texts thought to

be suitable. Sir John wants the At Home to be "thoroughly representative," and hands her ladyship so long a list of honourable and right honourable gentlemen of the House of Commons that her ladyship suggests an At Home on the terrace of St Stephen's; and accompanies the suggestion with the irritating little sniff which Sir John usually accepts as notice of conflict.

"I have been thinking," commences Mrs Balmayn, seating herself at the writing-table, and then checks herself.

"Out with it, my dear," says Lady Gerard, abruptly; "say to me what comes first, it's always freshest, and often has the best flavour."

"Then I was thinking whether it will be quite respectful towards an Immortal to expose her to the gaze of the curious."

"Curiosity is not always a reproach, is it? If it is, what do you say of the exhibition at the Royal Society?"

"Was not that different? The high priests of science were there."

"The high priests of fiddle-de-dee, my dear," says her ladyship with good-humoured impatience. "Take an old woman's word for it, a man's eyes are none the less curious because of his high-sounding titles. Sir John says that when all the professors were on their hands and knees searching for a hair or a feather, they found distinct traces of powder, and long hairs which never came from the head of an Immortal. The story is going the round of the clubs, and don't be surprised if you hear Sir John tell it with additions."

"But the motive which brought the scientists together, was not that infinitely higher than that which will bring them to your At Home?"

"Curiosity at the best, only some are more curious than others."

"Why will you so strive to disillusionise me?" says Mrs Balmayn, pathetically. "There must be a higher motive than curiosity amongst men. My husband says that only to have seen Ma-Mylitta, only to know for certain there are other worlds in

which life is immortal, has opened his own soul to beautiful thoughts."

"So young, my dear, so young! And now we'll send out our invitations," says her ladyship, tearing up the supplemental list which Sir John has ventured to leave behind.

CHAPTER XII

At Home to meet an Immortal !

The Gerards' spacious rooms are thronged and there is still a long procession of carriages with impatient occupants, though some as they drive up and enter the house are filled with vague fears and old-world terrors at being brought face to face with living mystery.

Ma-Mylitta receives calmly the fluttering homage paid her by the men and women of the world she for the first time sees in the powdered and perfumed refinement of evening dress, and is, seemingly, impressed with the psychology of costume. And she ? Her delicate wings are hidden under a flowing gown of puce-coloured silk, delicately flowered ; but the crowd, moving in slow procession through the rooms, lose sight of everything but the deep-set eyes, now mystically bright, penetrating, as it

seems, inmost thoughts, and reading the heart secrets of all who come within the range of vision. And many who have secrets, but not the *sang-froid* necessary for concealment, are uncomfortable, and almost wish they had not come, though they tell themselves that it is no business of the inhabitant of another world what they may think or do in this. To think otherwise would be to think the intolerable, and yet there is shrinking and unrest, and departures are frequent and early.

But Ma-Mylitta is curious in the matter of wings and looks at the bare shoulders presented for the purpose of satisfying herself whether wings are actually there, or whether there are any outward and visible traces of disused attachments, leading to the conclusion that wings were common to the race at some earlier date, though got rid of, like some other things, in the process of evolution towards a wingless type. The costume is so convenient for the purpose that the Immortal is under the impression, until assured to the contrary, that it has

been adopted for the occasion to give ample opportunity for anatomical study.

"No signs of wings," says Ma-Mylitta to Lady Gerard.

Her ladyship is amused. It would be news to her if there were. "When you've seen one you've seen all," says she, in a whisper. "And as for the men, their wives can give you all needful information. A man with wings would be just too sweet a thing for a woman to possess without talking about, if only to make all others miserable."

"Balfour and a lot of fellows are coming; glad the rooms are thinning a bit," says Sir John, pulling up his collar with self-conscious importance.

A lounge is in the room, and Ma-Mylitta is conducted there to receive distinguished callers, and to chat in the sight of all on subjects just now of paramount importance in the mind of the Immortal author of the *Essay Concerning Man*.

There is a buzz when the Prime Minister arrives, and smiles welcome the tall, supple

form. Whatever happens now, British interests are secure, and it is whispered that if there is a nut to crack he may be depended on to crack it ; or, and this may do just as well, leave it alone, without offending delicate susceptibilities in this world or any other.

. . . . . .

"I should be delighted to assist, but I fear there is no official department to which the matter can be referred with any chance of success. The official mind, you know, works officially within narrow limits."

The speaker gathers confidence with speech and loses something of the bashfulness with which he approached the Immortal, and then sank down by her side and surveyed, through gold-rimmed glasses, the phenomenon of visible nothingness, or nothingness visible, as he had been assured was the case. There was so much candour in the look, such abandonment of self-assertion, such utter helplessness in the presence of mystery ! For a moment the current of thought seems checked in that active brain, and then a faint smile, winning

and confident, spreads over his face as he crosses his arms, and throws his head forward so that Ma-Mylitta sees at a glance the head and profile of the Prime Minister.

"I have heard of you, and had hopes," says the Immortal.

The Prime Minister raises his head quickly, and flushes at the bare thought that his philosophical speculations on the IS and the IS NOT have been heard of in another place. This seeming preface to immortality coming from immortal lips is very grateful.

"The Chronicles of Muran have been preserved for ages, and we know that the Immortals who overstayed their leave upon Earth never returned," continues Ma-Mylitta.

"We will assume that to be a fact; now what is your deduction?" asks the Prime Minister, caressing his chin philosophically with his right forefinger.

"That they remained where they were, don't you think so?"

"I dare not say that that is conclusive. There is certainly one alternative."

"What is it?"

"Oh, they may have gone somewhere else."

"No, they were earth-bound; and what I wish to discover is whether they still exist, or have left any traces of their earthly existence behind them," says Ma-Mylitta.

"Why do you say they were earth-bound so confidently?"

"I will explain. In Muran the atmosphere is life; the Murani breathe immortality."

"And on Earth?"

"The atmosphere is different. If I remain here beyond my allotted time my wings will be useless and I shall be earth-bound."

"And then?"

"Ah, that is what I wish to know. Does an Immortal cease to be immortal upon Earth; or is there any source in terrestrial springs, or air, from which an Immortal Murani can draw immortal sustenance?"

Ma-Mylitta bends slightly forward with an appearance of expectancy and checks the first response rising to lips accustomed to avoid direct reply with refinement.

"No, no, I cannot tell. Immortal life upon this planet has been a dream of the ages; but it has been only a dream."

"Have you ever heard of a race of beings descended from immortal Murani?"

"An interesting but wide question, and you must seek an answer amongst peoples whose mythologies are crowded with Immortals. Some of them do not, however, bear the best of characters, and I would not dare suggest that they came from Muran. Why not try Tibet?"

Ma-Mylitta is all attention. "I have," she replies.

"Then there's Greece, you might catch some faint echoes of long-forgotten voices in the land once so fond of Immortals that literary workshops were set up for their manufacture. In my notes on philosophical bases—"

"Ah, then you are a philosopher!"

"I should have been, only I missed my way in early life and became a politician with philosophical leanings — such as you see me now," answers he, with a sigh.

"Is it possible that you can have any marks upon you to show that you are a descendant from the Immortals?"

There is a fluttering of wings under the puce-coloured Japanese gown. The Immortal is interested; but the mortal by her side does not rise with enthusiasm to a suggestion so full of music to ambition. He only brings his fingers together and inlocks them before replying,—

"Once upon a time I thought I felt the sprouting of wings; but then I became Secretary of State for Ireland, and that was fatal, you know." Then, lowering his voice, "Have you an Irish National Party in Muran?"

"Do they grow wings?" asks she.

"They are quite capable of it, I believe, if they could only turn out the Government."

But Ma-Mylitta is insistent.

"Are there any people now on Earth who grow wings?" she inquires.

"Not after they get into Parliament, certainly. Poets are said to, but they die young, and their budding wings are always found to have been scorched by the reviewers. As for philosophers, well, my own experience is not encouraging. I tried to fly at Cambridge, but some said—Never mind what they said, but I was not encouraged to mount again into the pure ether until I had trained finer."

Ma-Mylitta gazes intently upon the face of the mortal by her side, so ambitious and only a politician; and her profound eyes fill for the first time with that expression of sympathy which makes even mere humans beautiful. The sensation is new to an Immortal living a self-contained life and free from soft emotions; but it is agreeable to judge by the rhythmic movement of the shoulder wings under the puce-coloured gown. The curious first see, and then all witness, a halo of soft light

encircling the heads of both sitting on the lounge.

"Great Scot!" exclaims Sir John Gerard, suddenly stopping a right honourable gentleman with eyeglass and orchid, "Balfour is transfigured."

"The passing of Arthur," says the Right Honourable with a smile. "I always expected an early apotheosis for him."

"He's moving," says Sir John. "Better come and get it over."

The Right Honourable drops into the vacant seat easily, as though by right of succession, and gives the little dry familiar cough so expressive of content.

"I am quite at liberty to speak concerning the institutions of Muran," says the Immortal. "What would you know? Well, then, the laws of Muran are perfect, and never change. Then the Murani are one race and speak one language."

"How very simple! Tell me, have you Three Acres and a Cow, Old Age Pensions, and a Fiscal Question?"

"The condition of things in our planet

precludes all such artificial arrangements. The atmosphere of Muran supplies immortal life, and whatever a Murani wills to have, he possesses."

"Very simple indeed, but I really don't think I should like it! No, I'm sure I should not now I remember that I am Myself, and that to Myself I owe Myself. To live, to have, and not to strive; a dull immortality."

"And yet you might not be so very disappointed if you were one of us. Ha-Sabat, the Keeper of the Chronicles, was ten thousand years qualifying for the office. And what is time to an Immortal?"

"Ten thousand years is a long time to wait. What would have become of Me if I had waited?"

"But if you were a Murani you would not be so impatient. We wait cycle after cycle, and still look forward to eternal youth."

"Time is a great advantage, certainly. Now, I never had time enough to finish anything properly. Three Acres and a

Cow amused me in my youth. It was a pretty game for a season, and then I went in for Old Age Pensions, another very pretty game, and some people even play it now."

Ma-Mylitta shows interest.

"You are to get something out of nothing, you know, that's the game; but it gets tiresome when you find that you've to put something in before you can take it out. I gave it up when I found there really wasn't time to perfect the invention. I'm building a Fiscal Tower now."

"And will that take time?"

"I fear so. There are so many foreign bricks to be worked in, and so much colonial cement to be used, and so many big contractors and little men to be employed, and so many to be hindered from pulling down what the others build, that I sometimes fear I'll never finish the job."

A shade as of sadness passes over the speaker's face, rendering the features sharper and more tense.

"If you were a Murani," says the Im-

mortal, "you could take your own time and never grow older. You might occupy yourself one thousand or ten thousand years with your Fiscal Tower and still be as fresh as the morning. Then if you wish to forget the enormous mass of details accumulated there is the bath of Oblivion ready. It is our custom to take this bath every thousand years, so there is with us a perpetual beginning, and an eternity for completion."

"The bath of Oblivion would be a very useful institution with us, and I should like all political opponents to take it frequently. It would be a great advantage, certainly, when opposition is keen and time the very essence of the contract."

There is a pause, and the Immortal, remembering her mission, asks,—

"Can you suggest any sufficient inducement to an Immortal to remain upon your planet and become mortal and pass out of existence, leaving no trace?"

"I do not think either the Board of Trade or Colonial Office offers sufficient

attractions. I have tried both. There is yet one pinnacle a little higher than the rest, and I have heard—"

"I think I understand, but your Prime Minister would have me think that all is vanity and vexation outside of the philosophic path which he has missed. How fitted he for the serene atmosphere of Muran!"

"But really, I don't think it would suit Me," says the Right Honourable with an involuntary movement of resistance.

"And you have no trace of wings?"

"None whatever."

"So they have never been scorched by reviewers?"

The Right Honourable laughs gaily. "My critics have been my best friends, and they have found me a place (modestly) amongst the Immortals. But I see the Hundred Best Books talking to our hostess, and he may be able to help you in your quest for traces of the lost Murani."

. . . . . .

"The study of wings has been one of my

pleasures in life," says the Literary Lord, bubbling over with delightful communicativeness. "Now I think of it, the study of wings is very ancient. Jupiter used to paint them. Many people begin with butterflies, but I was great on wasps. You may have heard of Lubbock on 'Tame Wasps,'" he adds modestly; but the name is not familiar to Ma-Mylitta, who hastens to ask,—

"And have you found traces of wings amongst mortals?"

"I think so," replies the Literary Lord, dreamily. "All men with imagination are winged; and wings stand for much in the history of the world. Usually you find traces of wings in books, and I must send you my list of the best hundred."

"But real wings?"

"Imagination is very real, and can traverse the greatest distance in the merest point of time. Now that I have had this great privilege to-night I shall often visit you in Muran."

"The Immortals will welcome you."

The compliment gives pleasure.

"Could you but bring the hundred best books with you!"

"Have mercy upon me," replies the Literary Lord; "must my sin be always before me?"

"Then I relent. Only you come to Muran, and I will make you visible to the Immortals."

"Is that possible?"

"You shall see when you come. But tell me seriously (it is my mission to discover), is there a race of mortals upon Earth with physical attachments called wings?"

"Then, seriously, I know of none. Mortals are splendidly endowed, though not with wings, and wings are always associated with beings ethereal and more splendid. But mortals have imagination, the soul's wings, with pinions strong enough to travel through eternal space in a point of time. There are traditions of winged beings—the immortal Murani of whom you are in quest, perhaps—coming to our planet and sojourning with mortals; and it may

be that the highest races, gods among men, have in very truth an immortal origin."

Ma-Mylitta places her delicate hand upon his lordship's arm, and though it is so light the contact sets up a sympathetic current, and Ma-Mylitta for the first time becomes sensitised and capable of feeling the contagion of human emotion. Now, also, and for the first time during the ages, she becomes aware of the exceeding joy which pride can suffuse through mere mortals at the bare suggestion of immortal lineage. Her own pulse beats in unison, and every throb spreads pleasurable excitement. Is she on the verge of discovery?

"Can you tell me what there was in and about the fair daughters of men of old to induce Immortals to remain on Earth until they could no longer return to Muran?"

His lordship looks upon the hand so delicately shaped and, to all appearance, human laid upon his arm, and then into eyes now bright with expectancy—another sign of relationship to humanity—and he feels that he would give much to be able to suggest

even sufficient answer to the question. But is it so very simple ?

" The question is too deep for me," he replies, disappointment shading his fine features.

" But imagination — winged imagination ? "

" Has limits, I confess it. It may be easy to annihilate time and space, but the influence of the 'fair daughters of men' upon destiny is a profound mystery, even to imagination."

. . . . . .

The guests still come, and Lady Gerard is busily engaged in telling over again how it was that so strange a visitor came nominally under her roof at the earnest request of Professor Fonblanque. " Our very first object, of course, was to get the Immortal covered somehow. Angels would need covering, if only for decency's sake, as things go," says her ladyship.

" After all, my dear Lady Gerard—"

" Feathers in the nude will do very well for turkeys and peacocks, but Sir John,

even he wouldn't stand it about the house, Immortal or no."

"Oh, Lady Gerard," says a fair-haired lady, known as The Gifted-one, for whom the richly-dressed crowd makes way. An imperious movement, an imperious accent, an imperious glance make The Gifted-one as attractive to many as the mysterious visitor from Muran. "That's she" is whispered as she passes, and then there are speculations as to what will follow—correspondence and something in the papers, an action-at-law, perhaps. The presence of The Gifted-one will surely provide something for Society's relish, something piquant, sarcastic, venomous, according to circumstances. Even the dull think there will be something to look forward to.

"Oh, Lady Gerard, do not let me lose my opportunity, the Literary Lord has risen."

. . . . .

"Call me Marie," says The Gifted-one, seating herself. "The world seldom sees two Immortals on one divan."

"Your philosophical Prime Minister warns me that I must look to mythologies for Immortals," says Ma-Mylitta, looking a question.

"A mere man, what should he know?" asks The Gifted-one with passing irritation. "If you want knowledge, if you want insight, if you want the divine, where must you come? If you want fancy, conception, creative skill, where must you come? Come to Woman, come to ME."

"Now I shall know why the Immortals did not return to Muran. You know the legend. Then tell me, were the daughters of the men of old so divinely fair that the 'Sons of God,' Immortal Murani, would be tempted to forego immortal life for their sakes?"

The Gifted-one follows the direction of the Immortal's eye, resting apparently upon a figure mourning over the wreckage of her trailing skirts. A flush of indignation passes over her as she divines the thought that women breaking their hearts over a little trumpery lace were not worthy of

sacrifice in any period of the world's history.

"You must not judge the past by the present, or you'll come to wrong conclusions," says she, warmly. "The woman of to-day has been made by man—outraged, scourged and stoned by cruel, lustful man, and, what is worse, degraded to the worship of a bit of lace and the pattern of a gown. She was not once what you see her now, a painted, powdered doll, played with for an hour and dying of heartache in the gloom. Tell me, sister Immortal, have not I done well in holding up the mirror? Did not I conceive that grand creation, real and artistic, *The Murder of Delicia?*"

"I did not know—how could I?—that you feel so strongly."

"Every great soul feels. It is the mission and penalty of greatness to feel. Oh, I have studied Man, *The Mighty Atom*, and wept with Satan the Sorrowful."

"And woman?"

"Yes, and woman too, but I prefer man as a study. Man the ignorant and brutal;

and he takes his whippings so meekly when I lay on because he knows he deserves them, and more, infinitely more. Do not tell me I am too merciful, for, after all is said and done, Man *is* attractive, and with ME to guide may reach perfection."

"You claim to be an Immortal. Have you wings?" asks Ma-Mylitta, agitating her own.

"Wings of fancy, yes. My fancy flies from world to world through endless space with *The Soul of Lilith*. My wings I have placed protectingly round our Shakespeare, who was almost an Immortal. It was his misfortune to have been born man. What he might have been had he been woman!"

"Then you are a poet, and your philosophical First Minister has told me that poets' wings are scorched by reviewers. Tell me, what is a reviewer?"

"A reviewer," says The Gifted-one, coldly, "*is* a reviewer. I will write you specially on the subject, and you are at liberty to publish my views in Muran, or

anywhere not protected by the International Copyright Acts."

"My time is limited," says the Immortal.

"You shall have the honour of receiving my views in writing," says The Gifted-one, taking leave with ceremony.

Her ladyship is still surrounded by persons of note most anxious for the privilege of a brief interview, though some who desire it eagerly shrink inwardly whilst making the request. Lady Gerard protests,—

"Can I do more at this hour than introduce you as you file past and leave cards upon the divan? I will tell her to-morrow who you are, and how famous, and all that, so that she may make you known in the world afar off, and that, I'm sure, is a happiness some of you never expected."

Madame Reine, the renowned tragedienne, still palpitating from the emotion of a part in which she dies with enchanting music in her ears, says,—

"If La Céleste will but show herself in splendour it will be ravishing."

The women give way to her, for they know her, and for many she is more enthralling, if less mysterious, than the stranger from Muran.

"A very good idea, my dear madame, and I shall bring her to see you act."

"A million thanks; I am ravished at the thought," says the tragedienne, clasping her hands.

When this request is made known to her Ma-Mylitta rises from the divan and stands erect in her long, flowing gown. A very simple figure, tall and stately, is visible from all parts of the room, and those nearest feel awe at the calm features and grand eyes which in their depths look backward and forward over two infinities. The glorious hair falls over the puce-coloured gown, hiding it, as it were, in waves of Venetian gold. Then she is invisible, and the puce-coloured garment falls to the carpet.

A moment, and Ma-Mylitta stands revealed again in the chaste beauty of her snow-white wings, relieved only by the glowing scarlet circle over each breast.

Then she passes through the large rooms without other movement than the mere play of the ankle wings, and the motion is that of graceful gliding. The lights are lowered, and in the gloom a soft radiance encircles the Immortal's head, the aureole increasing in brightness with the action of the shoulder wings. Then, suddenly, the two great wings spread with magnificent sweep, and all see the strange phenomenon of a being in human shape moving in its own glory.

All hold breath and are astonished at the vision, but many are glad when Ma-Mylitta becomes once more invisible.

Madame Reine is moved to tears.

"It touches my soul," says she.

Dr Riddle whispers Professor Fonblanque,—

"If this mysterious being spends its store of radio-energy so prodigally it'll never last out the allotted ninety days. Do you know any means of replenishing it?"

"None whatever, but I will warn her."

"What could we do with such a being if stranded on Earth?"

The professor shakes his head.

"Earth is fatal to immortality," says he, sadly.

[This chapter was in type before Mr Balfour found himself free to seek immortality in literature, unfettered by the carking cares of official life in Parliament. Many there are who rejoice at the prospective gain to philosophic thought.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.]

CHAPTER XIII

MADAME REINE is excited with strange mystical fears which there is no time to analyse, and she is also shocked at the want of emotion around her. Some of the women paled and looked frightened when the Immortal became invisible, but they recovered quickly and smiled at each other, gathering up their skirts the while, and were ready to depart now that the show is over. For the majority it is nothing more than a " show," the presence of an Immortal from another world suggesting few ideas beyond its novelty. Dear Lady Gerard is much to be thanked, certainly, for providing the unique spectacle, is the one visible expression; and so little deeper or more worthy is to be noted that Madame Reine finds herself wondering whether English women when dressed up for Society gather-

ings are capable of genuine emotion. What kind of education is it which robs souls of awe and fear and wonder? For her own part, she looks around to see if there is someone whom she can embrace and sit by the side of with clasped hands, thinking thoughts too deep for words. She sees no one, and passes through the crowd, too pre-occupied to be pleased at the kindly-curious glances bestowed upon her.

Madame Reine retires prepared to pass a restless night. What she has witnessed excites her imagination strangely. To be able to lift one's self at will, bodily—if anything so diaphanous and *spirituelle* in human form can rightly be spoken of as body—above all mundane things, and sweep the firmament with strong pinion in a cloud of glory, lifts her beyond her waking self and into the realm of dreams, the delicious dreams of yesterday. She loves those dreams now she is famous, for they are to her soul as the cool fresh dew of early morn upon her brow when still burning with the triumphs of the night.

Now she is alone everything at Lady Gerard's disappears except the large eyes which first startled her with their cold, unsympathetic sweep, and then held her fascinated by their clear, profound depths, in which the past lay *perdu*, but quick with life and consequence. Madame is sure that La Céleste is no illusion; no illusion, she tells herself, would keep her wakeful now, searching the deep recesses of memory for the pure scenes of innocent childhood long faded from recollection. No illusion! The old memories are too precious because of their purity and the contrasts they offer to the actualities of life, and no trick of fancy would make her now, in the full tide of success, suddenly bring herself to judgment and make her live over again the days when she could have looked steadily into the Immortal's eyes and seen no dread vision. "*Mon dieu!* and is it the penalty of success on earth to lose touch of *la céleste?*" she murmurs.

Ma-Mylitta, with the long white wings, brings back to life the mystical scenes of

long ago in her peasant home, when the happy illusions of fairyland were as drops of honey from Paradise to keep the fluttering soul alive. These blessed days are gone, and now, at the very height of fame, moving in adoring circles, she tells herself she would give all, all, to be able to return once more to cold and hunger and visions of *la céleste* between the droppings of hot tears. Passionate tears then, what were they ? But now !

The dawn finds the great actress restless and moaning, and the one tragedy of her life—she thinks it so now—looming larger and larger before her. It is always so, she tells herself, when she is weakest. Nature is cowardly, she says, so to revenge herself, but it is her way, treacherous and tigerish, to torture the weak in solitude !

"*Mon Dieu ! Mais vous etes cruel de ne permettre pas le mort de mourir*," says she, sinking at last from exhaustion. If she could but weep now the cool, refreshing tears of yesterday.

Madame pours a few drops into a small

crystal glass with water. Then she writes, and tosses the scrap of paper on the table for her maid,—

"If you find me very ill, send for Fonblanque."

CHAPTER XIV

"BUT for the promptness of your maid Annette the consequences would have been serious," says Professor Fonblanque.

"Ah, I have so often warned madame! Who can count drops in the dark? And I say now it will be safer for the professor to put each dose in a separate phial." Annette speaks with habitual freedom, and jerks one cap string over her shoulder by way of emphasis.

"You are always right, my friend," says Madame Reine, languidly. Always pale in the morning, madame looks the invalid now.

Annette re-arranges the soft cushions.

"I am better now. And, Annette, my friend, I would be alone with the professor for a little while."

"I have more than once warned you," the professor commences.

"I know, dear friend, but what is one

to do when in misery ? Is life not possible on earth without misery ; or is misery the law, and happiness the accident, of being ? Why did I look into immortal eyes in which there is no forgetfulness and awaken within myself that which I would forget ? Ah, me ! "

" There is great need for forgetfulness in this world," says Professor Fonblanque, sympathetically. His pale face flushes as he adds, " The happiness of men and women largely consists in forgetting. I know it well, and that is why my anodyne is so much in request."

" Not for forgetfulness alone, and the ease which comes from oblivion, but for the new life which comes in dreams. Oh, my dear friend, could I but live for ever in the beautiful illusions which have filled my soul ! Why did Annette disturb me ; and why did you bring me back to memory and pain ? "

" The Immortals have learned the secret of forgetfulness without impairing their reason, and I would I knew it," says the

professor, referring to Ma-Mylitta's bath of Oblivion.

"Surely eternity could never be endured unless one could forget sometimes," says madame, sadly.

"Ma-Mylitta says time counts by cycles of one thousand years in Muran, and that it is the custom for an Immortal to take a bath of Oblivion once in every cycle. The bath is a subtle gas, I think, which destroys the recollection of past events but leaves the memory unimpaired for new impressions."

"There is mercy in the idea, and why may not such mercy come to Earth, when so many millions of the wretched crave for it? The waters of Lethe! Ah, my friend, but one must die first. Why cannot there be oblivion and life?"

"It is interesting to learn at first hand what happens elsewhere. It puts us on inquiry. As I understand, this bath of Oblivion is not obligatory, but the Immortal Murani find it a relief to purge their minds and begin life afresh—to be more accurate,

to begin life's experience afresh. The plan has conveniences and seems to suit the Murani constitution, though it appears there are exceptions; for instance, the Recorder of the Chronicles has not taken a bath for many thousands of years—his office needs remembrance."

"Great heaven! He must be happy, or he could not endure the burden. My dear professor, fancy a poor mortal with ten thousand years of memory upon his shoulders!"

"You have touched the pith of the matter, madame. The conditions of life amongst the Immortals are different."

"The hourly sum of misery here is so great that no human soul could bear existence for a week but for the merciful forgetfulness obtained in sleep—divine sleep. The hidden tragedy of my own heart makes me wretched when I remember."

Madame Reine rises from her cushions.

"Be tranquil, my dear madame, or I summon Annette. Oh, yes, I know the story; but you cannot forget in this world

as in Muran after the bath of Oblivion without destroying the intellect, and if madame's intellect were clouded the gaiety of nations would suffer an eclipse."

"Ah, professor, you know I am a woman."

"Yes, I know, and knowing, say you must not too often seek the aid of my science. I warn you not to rely on me too much."

"You are so good, but the temptation is great. What there is in your anodyne I do not know but its effects are magical. I forget, I escape from pain, and I revel in a new life—the life that should have been. *Mon Dieu!* But why may I not continue the dream for ever?"

"More illusion."

"No, no, not illusion; or, if illusion, then the only reality, for it enables me to support the dreary burdens of existence. If that be illusion, blessed be it."

The hectic spots on the professor's cheeks show the interest excited in him and the effort it costs him not to utter the words

uppermost in his mind. He notes the growing excitement of his patient and would check it; but the sluice gates of speech are open now for a while and she will not be restrained.

"Why should I not," she asks, "continue my dream, and pass from one reality to another until I die? Surely there should be no room in life for memories which wing their way in darkness, striking terror to the soul. Why should hateful memory survive when the hated thing is done and buried?"

"Be tranquil, my dear madame. It would be possible, I know it well, for you to live the remainder of your days passing from dream to dream, and so dwelling in the atmosphere in which you think now you can find the greatest happiness. But then, what would become of Madame Reine the great actress? Ah!"

"But for the tragedy of my life I should not have been Madame Reine. When I am under your blessed anodyne, living in illusion, I am no longer Madame Reine, it is

true, but I am happy—happy with Pierre ; living an idyllic life with Pierre, my Pierre, whom I abandoned in my rage and mocked in death. Yes, I know all that would have been ; I have lived it through the night, that delicious other life on earth, and I have seen grow up around me my children, and I have felt the warm tears and kisses of the little ones, and their tiny hands seeking, seeking ever in my bosom. I should have been Jeanne Coquelin, the wife of Pierre Coquelin, the miller, and these my children. And I am Madame Reine, actress, childless ! Have pity upon me, professor, and supply me plentifully with your magic anodyne, so that I may shake off the dread realities of life, and live ! ”

Professor Fonblanque places his hand upon his patient’s arm, and looks into her eyes with the compassionate sympathy which gives him so much control. “ No, no, madame,” says he, “ it is not for you to live in the land of shadows, one long dream just to escape the memory of one regretful act. If you had married Pierre,

the miller's son, your life at the mill would probably not have been what you now think it would have been. Pierre was only a clod, and do you think you would ever have settled down in the little mill by the side of the sluggish stream like some meek animal carrying burdens—you, the living tempest when the soul is moved ? No, no, madame, the tragedy came when it should, and you are the great tragedienne. And your husband ? "

" Monsieur ? Oh, yes, I had done him the honour to forget him."

" Then there will be no second tragedy ? "

" With monsieur, my husband, and for me ? No."

" And you play to-night ? '

" Why not ? "

" If you feel strong enough, I see no reason. On the contrary, it will be a distraction from present thoughts."

" Will you bring La Céleste ? "

" Her presence may disturb you."

" On the stage, no. It is not there that even an Immortal's eyes can wake dis-

turbing memories. No, there I am the mistress of my destiny. Let La Céleste come, and when she returns to the Immortals she may say, ' I have seen Madame Reine.' "

Then Annette is summoned.

" Is it true," she asks the professor, " that *le bon Dieu* has sent a blessed angel upon earth to warn people to confess their sins ? "

" The inhabitant of another planet is on a short visit to Earth, which is a great honour ; but I don't know of any special commission relating to confession. You can always be a good girl, Annette, and look well after your mistress."

" Monsieur is very good, and I am very happy," says Annette, curtseying.

CHAPTER XV

The Beautiful Evil at the New Olympus, Madame Reine as Claire, the incarnate temptress. The curtain rises upon a full house, upon a thousand or so in the boxes and stalls and circle, and all the rest of the house packed with eager, expectant faces, just now well satisfied with the *flonflons* of the orchestra.

The great actress comes on early in the piece, so the smart people who have dined well are in the *fauteuils*, resting from their labours, exhaling the mixed bouquets of white wines and red, mixing naturally enough with the prevailing perfumes of their fair neighbours with gleaming white shoulders and costly gems dazzling in the artificial lights. Everywhere homage in anticipation to the favourite actress, and everywhere the superabundance of animal life and high spirits glows like kindling firewood.

The scene opens in the fine garden of an old chateau in France, in which an English gentleman lives in seclusion, plotting the disgrace and ruin of a young relative in England who has just entered on political life, with all the stars in their courses fighting in his favour. The recluse, in his library, lets the audience into dark secrets with so much earnestness and passion, and he is so self-convinced, that a contagious sympathy spreads from stall to circle, and from circle to gallery. The young man must be ruined and disgraced before his twenty-fifth birthday. But how? He counts upon his fingers the various ways in which the young men of the century go headlong to Gehenna. But there must be a tool. No, no, he himself must not appear; and the tool must be of fine quality. Where is it to be found?

The recluse rises and walks towards the window; and in every act and movement is the finished gentleman; and so fastidious is he that one doubts him capable of set purpose—strenuous, implacable and cruel.

He flicks a feather from his sleeve, and blows a moth gently through the open window, before descending into the garden.

And in the garden the recluse seeks an *allée* so sacred to contemplation that the gardener avoids it when the fine gentleman is moving; and in his walk he suddenly encounters a young woman carrying an infant. The trespasser is Claire—Claire worn and sad and travel-stained, her magnificent black hair hanging in disorder, and subdued lights in eyes ready enough to flash volcanic fire. The recluse, at first offended, sends away the panting servant from the lodge, who begs ten thousand pardons of milord for allowing the intrusion on his privacy.

This young woman with an infant gives birth to an idea; and in the garden scene which follows Claire, under all the disadvantages, shows education and refinement, and seductive wit allied with passion and fixed purpose. Her story is short. A young Englishman, the cadet of a good family, has played her false, and she, cutting herself

adrift from family and friends, has wandered where she is unknown, determined on a grand revenge, if such be possible. The infant lies on the turf, and Claire, excited, wins the silent admiration of the recluse. Has he not under his hand the very tool he wants for the ruin of Philip ? He takes her to the chateau.

The curtain falls on an audience well satisfied with Claire's capacity for working the irremediable ruin of some young man (not yet seen), but who is working his way upwards in the honourable paths of public life, and ignorant of what is being plotted against him in the South of France by a relative whom he scarcely knows, and a young woman of whose existence he is absolutely ignorant. The audience has already caught the sinister meaning of the title of the play, *The Beautiful Evil*, and is on the alert for developments.

The Immortal looks upon the house from a private box and notes the flush of interest, slight enough at first, increase and spread, whilst she is unmoved by fear, or doubt, or

expectation. Professor Fonblanque by her side waits for questions which never come from those strange lips. And he thinks, all this is enigma to one who has had no experience of human life ; but we shall see directly.

The curtain rises, and Philip is introduced, working in his room ; a messenger brings him a letter from the First Minister of the day, offering him the vacant post of assistant secretary to a Government department. Philip is twenty-three now, and the honour is unexpected. When alone Philip re-reads the precious letter with unmixed joy, and his hand trembles with genuine emotion. He advances to the footlights, and makes a good impression by his cultured yet manly bearing, and the natural manner in which he wears his heart upon his sleeve when penning a note to the Lady Gwendolen, whom he hopes to marry on reaching the, for him, most critical age of twenty-five. Who can see the shadow of disgrace upon that face ? Enters Lionel, the self-indulgent cousin of

Lady Gwendolen, home at last from long travel—the rollicking devil-may-care, brimming over with good stories of sports and loves in many lands. "A new bonnet, and away! ah, ah, dear boy! Had some trouble in France, though. Real volcano. Tell you another time. So glad you've been made something. Wouldn't suit me, ta-ta."

A very different scene takes place in a little bijou villa in London where Claire resides, discreetly educating herself for the part which she is to play. She steps from the conservatory to meet the recluse and the house is ravished; in two brief years Claire has, by careful training, become a splendid tool for the accomplishment of a sinister and hellish purpose. Philip, the rising young politician, the soul of honour, the accepted lover of the Lady Gwendolen, is within two years (before his fatal twenty-fifth birthday) to fall from his high estate, robbed of honour and disinherited. And Claire is to accomplish this by the mere force of seductive beauty. The recluse, subtle, refined and purposeful, looks critic-

ally upon Claire with the satisfaction of an artist with a *chef-d'œuvre* soon to be exhibited. Claire was won to his purpose at the old chateau, and she is to wreck upon Philip, whom she has never yet seen, the deadly injury which she would wreck upon Lionel—the gay, false, traitorous Lionel—who has done her such scathe.

"Body and soul you are my instrument, working my will, never faltering."

"Never. Look into my soul and doubt."

Claire unbares her bosom and stands confessed, the Beautiful Evil. A shudder passes through the house, and there is even pity for the innocent Philip, foredoomed to destruction.

The Immortal looks calmly on.

The third act shows the working of the spell, the sorceries by which Philip is led, step by step, struggling, repenting, falling—falling deeper after each struggle against invisible toils, but never losing his love of truth and honour. And Claire worms from him Government secrets of the first import-

ance, and whilst he sleeps in her luxurious chamber, copies public documents rifled from his custody. And the recluse, he knows what to do with them. Clerks are suspended and dismissed, and then the finger of suspicion is levelled against Philip. The fatal twenty-fifth birthday approaches and events happen with feverish haste. The fair Lady Gwendolen plays the part of the good angel, infusing moral oxygen in the empoisoned air, but Claire, beautifully voluptuous, seductively triumphant, hovers over him, her black, passionate eyes scorching the poor remnants of her victim's soul. When Philip is too weak for further resistance, his political career destroyed, Lady Gwendolen abroad, the gay Lionel in close attendance upon her, his splendid fortune imperilled by the terms of an old aunt's will, nothing left to him but a small estate, then comes the end. Claire confesses that it is she—she, the Succubus, who has drained his purse, his honour and his soul. Now he is free. Will he take his freedom ?

The Immortal is interested now. Pro-

fessor Fonblanque notes the agitation of her wings.

"Pray don't draw attention to our box," he whispers.

Philip reels like a drunken man under the blow, but recovers, and there is hope that at this supreme moment he will rise at least to the dignity of an assassin; but he is sapless, and what he has of life and fortune left he lays at Claire's feet. But Claire mocks,—

"I have a son, a bastard in France, the son of Lionel, my betrayer, and now the lover of your Lady Gwendolen."

"I'll take him also," says Philip.

And again Claire mocks, and yet again, consuming all that is living of the man, until the helpless, hopeless stare of imbecility comes from his eyes.

The curtain falls upon the triumph of the BEAUTIFUL EVIL.

The house rings with applause, the curtain rises, and Madame Reine receives her nightly incense from men willing to

stake their all to lay their heads in the lap of the sorceress.

And the Immortal ?

" Do you think the fair daughters of men could have so magnetised the sons of Muran that they remained on Earth and lost their immortality ? " she calmly asks.

" The question is too deep for me. But love, love on Earth is a great mystery still to mortals. Perhaps Immortals must come to Earth to learn it," responds the professor.

Ma-Mylitta is silent.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME wretched constituent has been worrying Sir John Gerard, or the "whips" have caught him napping when he should have been playing "follow my leader" through one door and out of the other—"Ayes" to the right, "Noes" to the left; so he has what her ladyship grimly calls his "lobby-temper" when he comes down to dinner.

"Don't be surprised if Sir John says anything rude about something or somebody," says her ladyship to Mrs Balmayn on the stairs.

Sir John doesn't want to be rude; has let off steam by giving his man notice to quit twice within five minutes, and has swallowed two "pegs" whilst dressing. The anodynes are not quite successful, and he is still sore because of the chaff he has had to take smilingly about the fair Immortal in feathers and radium. If the

Thingumbob had only called itself a *he* thing; but a *she* thing which is something and nothing, under the roof of Sir John who professes to have a keen eye for feminine points, may become trying to the temper. And Sir John has been tried to-day by flippant suggestions and hints as to the need of introducing clauses into the new Aliens Bill, prohibiting Immortals, black or white, with or without tails, the rights of domicile or asylum in Great Britain.

"And there's sense in the banter," says Sir John, relieved at finding that Ma-Mylitta has gone off to the New Olympus with Professor Fonblanque. "Just think, Balmayn, what earthly good is an Immortal upon Earth that neither eats, drinks nor sleeps, and has no vices. Where's the good for trade? Why, a good, healthy vice, my boy—"

"Makes the money fly. I know it well, Sir John," says her ladyship in a tone which gives the observation a personal application, and makes the honourable gentleman pull up short with a,—

"By gad, Balmayn, it's no good talking before women. We'll have it out directly."

Sir John professes to be uneasy as to the future. Suppose this, whatever it is, should overstay its ninety days' leave, and the radio-active something necessary to take it back to Muran should become weakened or exhausted, what's to happen? An invasion of shadows from another sphere with nothing to sell and no money to buy with, strikes Sir John's practical mind as something undesirable and may undermine something, not yet determined, in the British Constitution. Sir John prides himself on being a great stickler for the British Constitution, always referred to with rhetorical flourish; and he has compiled for ready use facts and figures proving incontestably that an English pound sterling is worth more than any other pound sterling in all creation. The British Constitution, firmly based upon the pound sterling, is Sir John's politico-economic creed in a nutshell; and he finds it a little rough on himself to be chaffed and badgered at Westminster and

the clubs about pauper aliens from some distant spheres who might be found to be very discreditable, if one only knew more about them.

"It is only a short visit," says Balmayn, soothingly.

"A ninety days' bill and no renewal," adds Sir John, with satisfaction.

"We lose nothing, and may gain if Ma-Mylitta makes a favourable report. She says there is between many of the planets a system of intercommunication, and on her return someone may be commissioned to come and teach us the secret. Who knows what may follow? We are being exploited, Sir John, and it may be that what we see darkly, or not at all, may be made clear in the near future."

"Yaar, yaar," comes from Sir John encouragingly, his irritation vanishing; and he makes a mental note of the young Colonial's point for future use.

"We don't know what wealth there may be in the now invisible, or what happiness we pass by because we cannot see it," says

Mrs Balmayn with the strange light in her eyes that always puzzles her ladyship's practical mind. Then she adds, "Love and sympathy are, I fancy, indigenous to Earth. I would not have as cold a heart as Ma-Mylitta for a universe."

Lady Gerard's eyes have a kindly look in them, and then they moisten. "You are right, my dear, the Immortals must come to Earth to suffer."

"Well?" asks Sir John, pulling up his shirt collar.

"And then they may know what is meant by sympathy and love."

Lady Gerard announces that she has accepted invitations for Mrs Montem Brille's garden-party.

CHAPTER XVII

MARCHMONT garden-parties in royal July are more than charming and do credit to Mrs Montem Brille's genius and her husband's purse. People never tire of going to Marchmont during the season—there is always some fresh delight to be found there, some new and original audacity provided, which, having no name, always creates a sensation. Mrs Montem Brille's "sparkles" of to-day were sure to be eclipsed by herself to-morrow, and every new combination required a new-coined word to describe it.

Mrs Montem Brille adores sensations, and exhausts herself in providing them, and is never so happy as in the Marchmont gardens with young life around her in an atmosphere perfumed and gay. The advent of an Immortal in feathers, or nothing at all, affords an opportunity not to be missed, and she

besieges Lady Gerard with the pertinacity of a Japanese general.

"If the Immortal wants to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest,' a garden-party is the very place. Leave it to me, my dear Lady Gerard, I'll see that there are 'fair daughters of men' enough, and men enough dancing in attendance, to provide your strange guest with something to think about in this world, or any other for that matter." So Mrs Montem Brille, who sails away triumphantly, after gaining her point.

Mrs Montem Brille has the happy knack of always appearing in public to advantage, and is sure of flattering mention by the lady chroniclers of fashionable events for a certain originality of costume, giving piquancy, or dash, or an indefinite something to mere richness of material. Educated and travelled, Mrs Montem Brille often says things as worthy of note as her dresses, but wanting malice they are unrecorded, and her hold on Society rests upon daring originality in costume.

Marchmont has a reputation and an

atmosphere. Innocent flirtations ripen into love in its exquisite gardens, full of retreats for tender confidences and serious proposals. The match of the previous season was really settled in the bower covered with climbing roses and laurel-shaded; and the ground is consecrate to young hearts willing to hear sweet proposals from masculine lips.

Mr Montem Brille lives in a sphere in which fractions count for much in a deal, and as he is seldom seen at Society functions it is understood that his one pleasure in life is the making of money for his wife to spend. Without knowing it, the owner of Marchmont is very popular amongst ladies whose lords take a very different view of the eternal fitness of things, and vote him "fool" whenever his name is mentioned as a good example for imitation. It is sometimes whispered that the man is happy though married, and some sort of colour is given to the Society legend when Mrs Montem Brille is heard to say, "It is not always gloom upon earth."

CHAPTER XVIII

"ALL great people make little speeches on occasion," says Mrs Montem Brille, flushed with success at securing the presence of the Immortal at Marchmont. She is a little tremulous, too, when adding, "Would you mind saying a few words? Anything will do, you know. Say something about yourself; we all like that sort of thing."

There is a great crowd upon the terrace this splendid July afternoon, and every variety of feminine costume is worn in honour of the occasion. The men dancing attendance are as radiant as may be, but are dun-ducketty-brown-coloured and lustreless by way of contrast. And Ma-Mylitta, hiding her wings under a Japanese kimono, stands head and shoulders above the crowd, her glorious hair topped by a hat as divine as Bond Street can fashion it.

"Our immortal visitor will make us a

little speech," says Mrs Montem Brille, thrilling with excitement.

A flutter of fans, and twirling of sunshades, and clapping of hands follows the announcement, and then a "hush-sh" as Ma-Mylitta lifts herself, so that only the hem of her bright kimono touches the green sward. She supports herself in air, it seems, by will alone, for there is no movement perceptible to those nearest and able to detect the play of the pedal wings if set in motion.

"Unaccustomed as I am—"

"A maiden speech," says Lord Bobby, pulling his moustache. "I commenced that way myself."

"How very interesting," replies the Lady Constance, sweetly. "Did you get any further?"

"Unaccustomed as I am to addressing mortals, I pray you to forgive and forget my shortcomings. I have been requested to say a few words about myself. Well then, I would say, first of all, that every day I remain upon your very lovely planet the

better I like it ; and I assure you that if I were expelled from Muran I should like to live with you, in a garden beautiful as this. We Immortals, living in a world in which everything has eternal youth, have no conception of the beauty which comes with age and decay ; and as with us life is perfect, we have no idea of the effects of toil and suffering and bitter anguish. Neither love nor hate disturbs us ; what I have heard spoken of as ' passion ' never disturbs our tranquillity. I have a confession to make, and it will please you, because I am going to tell you that when I return to Muran I shall say that the daughters of men are still very fair to look upon."

" Splendid," says Lord Bobby, looking adoringly at the flesh rose tip of the Lady Constance's ear.

" But I must leave you soon," continues Ma-Mylitta, " for already I feel the contagion of Earth, and strange inward movements, and fancies weakening my desire to return from whence I came. You know my mission. I came to seek traces of the

lost Immortals. Oh, no, I have not found any. I am working at a theory, and when the revised edition of my *Essay Concerning Man* is ready I will see if it is possible to send advance copies to your newspapers. (Enthusiasm and more fan-fluttering.) But you must not be impatient, because I find that my original ideas concerning man, and the origin of clothes and hats, hats especially (shaking her head so that every eye is turned to the sweet thing from Bond Street), will want a good deal of revision, just what would happen, I daresay, if some of your very wise men were to write an essay concerning the Immortal Murani without ever having visited Muran. I have, however, instructed Professor Fonblanque how to prepare sensitive plates, and I will communicate with him from time to time."

"I never saw a blush upon a face if that was not one," says Lady Gerard to Mrs Balmayn. "There it is again—a faint blush, as of human vanity. And Fonblanque dying of consumption. What does it mean?"

Her ladyship drops her lorgnette into her lap, folding her hands over them ; and her round apple-face has the look of one who dreams with eyes open.

. . . . .

The Marchmont gardens are superb this afternoon. Everything perfect ; the sunshine, the flowers, the splashing waters of the fountains. The perfumed air, the rippling laughter, the seductive music, all lend their languorous spells, and amongst the gay flowers rooted to the soil, and listening to the wooing of the bees, walk the fair daughters of men, gayer still, listening to wooing of diviner quality—the wooing of young mortal lips vibrant with the inward music of hearts' passion. The gardens are filled this afternoon with an atmosphere all human, for all that lives and grows therein seems for the hour to be transformed, and to partake of the joyous consciousness in silk and lace and muslin and clinging stuffs brilliant with the blended colours of the iris.

Come, admire me ; come, drink in my

perfume, say the flowers, their petals quivering with ecstatic joy as the ardent young souls bend over them. Along the terraces, and through the maze, and between parterres of bright flowers flashing signals of intense joy, moves an ever-living stream of intense young life, rivalling in brilliancy and picturesque groupings the choicest products of Nature.

Ma-Mylitta, standing by Professor Fonblanque's side, watches the sympathetic movements of the young crossing the lawn, and there is, there seems to her, some sort of mute language in the play of fans and handkerchiefs, and the twirlings of sunshades. And then, strangely enough, she feels a sense of loneliness. All who had swarmed about with fixed gaze, with awe, and wonder and fear, seemed to be quickly satisfied with their studies of a celestial phenomenon, and to be drawn away by concerns more personal and of greater interest. Day by day has she learnt, and at this moment is she learning with something akin to pain, that there is some force at work on Earth

unknown in Muran, where life is perfect—serene as a summer sky and glorious as a sunset. She has heard of sympathy and love, and now in a bosom unthrilled through the ages there comes a pang, and then the doubt that the perfect life in Muran is not, after all, perfect, wanting as it does the vital magnetism of the heart called "Love." Then it flashes on her, as an inspiration, that perhaps the Immortals who never returned felt this loneliness in the presence of the fair daughters of men, and then there was born in them that passion which made self-sacrifice possible. Looking backward, backward through the ages, there seems something chill and cold in the perfect life; wanting nothing, hoping nothing, nothing to gain, nothing to lose; not even the exalted passion of the mad staking all upon the hazard of a die, and then, annihilation!

And Fonblanque, the hectic professor, looking always beyond, as into the world of shadows for kinship, he has left her side and is now hanging over a garden chair in a most unprofessional attitude, watching

the play of a dainty shoe from under soft garments. Of the earth, earthy; and everywhere the same. In this earthly paradise, this glorious afternoon, she, Ma-Mylitta, the Immortal, is alone. Why should she remain in a world where she is not wanted? She has only to drop this silk garment and hat upon the grass and spread her grand white wings.

"This strange animal from I don't know where is looking very intently at you, professor," says the owner of the dainty little shoe, shifting her sunshade to a more convenient angle.

"I am leaving early and may be of some service," says the professor, embarrassed at the quick, inquisitorial glance of the speaker.

"We poor women will have to combine and defend ourselves against the invisible if this sort of thing is permitted. It's quite enough for women to contend with women."

"I agree, the competition is keen."

"Very, take my word for it; but then every woman knows that she is dealing with

woman ; that her rival will one day grow old and wrinkled and ugly, and be good enough to die ; but this new invasion is an outrage."

Professor Fonblanque smiles ; he is not taking the energetic lady of the dainty shoe seriously.

" An outrage ; yes, I mean it. This Muran, wherever it is, is getting over-populated, perhaps—the last census showing that there are too many women there ; and as they can't be killed off, being immortal (the more the pity), they are to be dumped down here. Women must agitate if this sort of thing goes on."

" Immortals without money, though direct from Paradise, can never come into serious competition with the women of our own day. At least, I think so," says the professor.

" I am relieved. Go to the lonely Immortal," says the owner of the dainty shoe.

Lord Bobby, wearying with the chaste contemplation of pink ears, spies the pro-

fessor moving away, and deserts the side of the Lady Constance on some slight pretext. The Lady of the Dainty Shoe makes play with Lord Bobby with her fan and eyes of heavenly blue, until her scattered adorers have time to realise the situation and crowd around her. She has her little court on the green sward, and her throne is flanked by gay tulips blazing in the sunshine. And Ma-Mylitta looks and longs to learn the secret of the charm which to this woman is as light to nature, and as potent, drawing all men unto her. It must have been, she thinks, some charm like this which in days gone by cast its spell over the Immortal sons of Muran and held them captive until they could no longer mount. The subtlety of it. The Lady of the Dainty Shoe, to her unsophisticated eyes, is the same as all the rest, in delicate rainbow tints, exhaling sweet perfumes, and sighing, and purring, and making play with handkerchief and fan and eye. And yet, around her, and around her only is the hungry look, and passion ill-concealed, and that secret longing

for opportunity to do battle and carry off the thing of beauty most coveted as the spoil of conquest.

All around the gardens Ma-Mylitta now sees the smiling faces of the afternoon flushed or drooping, and neglected maidens seeking in each other's eyes sympathy born of the sense of wrong and courage to endure it. And the wonder of it all in these virgin souls that the Lady of the Dainty Shoe should have such power! And then the pleasant gardens empty quickly, leaving the Lady of the Dainty Shoe in undisturbed possession of her adorers.

Professor Fonblanque, divining the Immortal's thought, says, "There is always a shadow on human happiness."

"Would you say," asks Ma-Mylitta, "that the fair daughters of men in the olden times were like her?"

"Fair women were always fair, and men as burning flax in their hands. That is the whole story in a nutshell."

CHAPTER XIX

"THERE was nothing in the Marchmont gardens this afternoon to put me out of love with your hat," says Lady Gerard, complacently, who fancied herself responsible to Mrs Montem Brille and Society for procuring something worthy of the occasion.

"Am I so very human already?" asks Ma-Mylitta.

The tone, rather than the words, is significant, and her ladyship's impression that the Immortal is showing an amiable weakness towards some of the vanities, deepens. At the garden-party this singular being, who first appeared before her in white feathers and a nimbus, most certainly blushed with the self-consciousness of a young maiden wearing a Bond Street triumph for the first time; and now she was anxious to know what effect she produced. "Am I so very human?" was only another form of asking, "Was it *chic?*"

"Decidedly becoming, my dear, and some said it was just sweet, a perfect dream. With us poor weak humans the approval of a hat is a higher compliment than the praise of many virtues."

"Did women wear hats when the Immortals came upon Earth in the olden days?" asks Ma-Mylitta.

"I never heard; and our knowledge of hats and original draperies is, I fancy, somewhat—well, somewhat scanty. Before the invention of needles and cottons costumes were naturally simple—fig leaves and skewers, my dear, is all that the poets have been able to do for us; and, you know, the best of them left too much to imagination to suit modern ideas. If you wish to see what the poets dreamed in canvas and marble, go to the galleries. Your education will certainly not be finished until you've seen the most celebrated galleries. There are very talented people about who make studies of fig leaves and skewers, and write no end of fine things, and are very popular. Allegory and a fig leaf is 'high art,' I be-

lieve ; but I confess to a weakness for good Welsh flannel."

"I wonder," says Ma-Mylitta, "if the wearing of clothes and a hat makes one wish to be human. In the gardens to-day I was so much alone that I really felt a longing to become human and altogether like the rest. Is there any quality in Earth, I wonder, which makes captive those who touch it ?"

"Like bird lime," suggests her ladyship.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder. Many a fine bird has been caught on well-limed twigs. And you're only feathers."

"And radium," says the Immortal.

"But only a limited supply."

"True, ninety days, and so little done."

"You must come again, and again, and yet again."

"But Ha-Sabat only issues a permit to the same person once in a thousand years. And then—"

"Everything will be so different. Who knows ? Mortals may have found out your secret and become immortal."

"Then it will be pleasant to dwell with you."

Lady Gerard eyes her strange visitor curiously, but with a growing fear that Ma-Mylitta may yield to earth contagion and shed her wings. What is to happen then? And the fear increases when Ma-Mylitta says,—

"I really wonder if I shall ever wish to become as one of you."

"As woman I can give you a sign," says her ladyship.

Ma-Mylitta is all attention.

"When you feel you want a flirtation."

"Flirtation! Ah, yes, and what is 'flirtation'?"

"To have lived so long; a woman, and not to know," says her ladyship with the slightest suspicion of banter in her tone. And then she adds, "Perhaps you possess the thing but not the word for it, like oysters their pearls."

"Tell me what it is, so I may judge."

"Flirtation," says her ladyship reflectively—"flirtation is a science, woman's

science for learning the real nature of man."

"A very old science?"

"As old as woman. At first it may only have been an instinct; but it soon developed with the introduction of fig leaves and skewers."

"Then the fair daughters of men flirted with the Immortals?"

"No doubt. Given a male biped, and it is woman's instinct to attract it. But you should be human to understand a thing which has so many shades of meaning and is yet always the same," says her ladyship, somewhat at a loss to make herself clear. Then, suddenly, "If you had the eyes to see it, and a human heart to understand, there was plenty of flirtation going on at Mrs Montem Brille's to-day."

"That is why I was so lonely when all were gay. Only a sparrow came and hovered around me, and I was so glad of the attention."

"I daresay the birds and the flowers know what is going on. For a young girl

flirtation is the sunshine in which hearts open, and expand, and give out perfume, like the flowers. She learns her science best when happiest. When the miserable flirt, tragedy is on the wing."

"And when a young girl marries?"

"She needs all the knowledge she ever acquired, and is ever able to acquire, to live and not die. If you were one of us you would see around you starving eyes straining for their loves to come again from strange embraces. You must at least be human to see and understand, and you'd then know that we poor mortals never could endure immortality on Earth."

"For a young girl flirtation is as sunshine; and when she is married?"

"A smile between tears, a seductive joy between bitters."

"Let us go by steps," says Ma-Mylitta.

"There are but two," says her ladyship, holding up her fingers: "one, flirtation and marriage; two, flirtation and divorce. Marriage is a sort of Society glue which sticks people together until the divorce

court sets them free. Flirting glues and unglues, if you can read the riddle."

Ma-Mylitta looks puzzled, and has the abstracted air of one far away, thinking, perhaps, if there is anything in Muran society which glues and unglues. Nothing apparently comes to her mind, and she confesses that the riddle is too hard for her.

CHAPTER XX

"SIR JOHN is anxious that you should not leave our planet without paying a visit to *the* House. I was there once and found the Terrace very pleasant indeed; but as for the Chamber!" Lady Gerard makes play with her hands more eloquent than words.

Mrs Pertinax, wife of the honourable member for Moatby, shuts up her tablets with a snap, and offers her services to act as guide, interpreter and friend to Ma-Mylitta. She is well aware of her ladyship's aversion to the House of Commons and all appertaining thereto; but her own tastes are different, and she is a pretty regular attendant behind the Grille. Being keen on politics, Mrs Pertinax tries to make up for the deficiencies of her good-tempered husband, and it is understood that when he speaks it is her voice that is really heard.

Mrs Pertinax has this afternoon interviewed the Immortal with the view of ascertaining something which may be of future value as to the social and political status of women in another world. "We hope for great things by-and-by," says the honourable member's wife, after demonstrating that the world—England in particular—is just one thousand years behind where it should and would be if women had only been permitted their full rights, and a little over. "Men with wings!" says she disdainfully, and shuts her tablets with a snap.

"There's Pertinax, the honourable member for Moatby, you see him with his hands in his pockets, lolling on the green cushions. What's he there for but to walk in and out of the division lobbies? And here am I, full of statistics and blue-books and parliamentary papers, pushed behind these open bars as some unclean thing. Tell it in Muran that you, an Immortal, have been condemned to this cage simply because you call yourself 'woman.'"

"Suppose I were to sit on one of the green benches?" asks Ma-Mylitta.

"It would be a glorious precedent, but I fear the English Constitution would be imperilled," says Mrs Pertinax in a whisper, but turning pale at the audacity of the proposal. She confessed to herself sadly at times that she was wanting in courage, but remedied the defect, as far as possible, by snappish remarks on men, manners and morals.

"When the Chamber is full, which rarely happens, there's plenty of room for brains. Look at Pertinax; see how he swells downwards, and yet he's better furnished upwards than most of them. There's Gerard, with his hat cocked on one side—that's *his* intellectual pose.

"There's the top of Mr Speaker's chair. He's there, poor man, in wig and gown, silk stockings and shoe buckles; but we can't see him. Oh, no, that would be too much for poor giddy women! They might fall in love with the wig or the shoe buckles! Mr Speaker sits with his back to us, and

though it's not thought good manners to sit with your back to the ladies, it's House of Commons manners, and that's something in extenuation. In the other Chamber, where the cushions are red, they are more civil, and the women may look at the Lord Chancellor's little fat legs dangling from the woolsack.

"It's all very simple. The Right is the Government, the Left is the Opposition. The Right has all the good things, and the Left has all the pangs of hunger. They turn about sometimes, by way of a change, and if a change doesn't come soon the Left will die of starvation; you can't expect them to live for ever on the smell of the others' good things. There is the Prime Minister opposite that box, which is the symbol of power and plenty."

"And yet he seemed so sorry to be a politician when he might have been a philosopher," says Ma-Mylitta.

"Crocodile's tears, don't you believe him. His friends would set up his political epitaph to-morrow with great joy, and leave him

free to hunt the slipper in metaphysical links until his wings begin to sprout. There's C.-B., the leader of the Opposition, he'd willingly act the sexton. Have you met him anywhere ? "

" No, not yet."

" You may ; and if you ask him if he has wings he'll tell you he's not quite sure. He's never quite sure of anything, except that he's out in the cold and has a longing for the good things on the other side of the table. If he's only starved long enough he may become dangerous. Pertinax is one of his supporters, but they're at low water just now ; and if you shook both of them you wouldn't find a threepenny bit between 'em. If a clever little woman were only in C.-B.'s place, Daddy-long-legs 'ud jump ! " Mrs Pertinax sighs, and her eyes take a greenish tint, and glitter.

" The Chamber is rapidly filling," observes Ma-Mylitta.

" And so is this Cage, the hole ! Somebody is going to badger Daddy-long-legs, and most have come to take lessons in fence.

He's first-class at fence ; but if women only had their rights, and there were a few in the House, he'd have something to learn. No man on earth can equal a clever little woman at fence," says Mrs Pertinax, confidently, and with an air of self-satisfaction.

" That's the Strangers' Gallery opposite. It's always full when a sparring match is expected. Bless you, British electors wouldn't take the trouble to vote if a sparring match wasn't got up now and again. They enjoy it."

" Who is that with cherubic face grown old, and arms crossed ? " asks Ma-Mylitta.

" That's a man you should talk to about wings. He makes his own, and puts them on and off on occasion. People have come to find out that they are artificial ; but some still think he'll fly a bit yet. Just now he's making tabernacles of green twigs, and he hops in and out when he's tired of ploughing lonely furrows in sands."

Ma-Mylitta looks attentively at the big blue eyes prematurely weary with the things that are.

"It's all through his sitting on red cushions," says Mrs Pertinax with genuine regret. "You don't understand, perhaps; the difference between the red and the green is everything to a politician. In the House of Lords the cushions are red; and here, as you see, they are green. In this country green is the proper colour for a man to sit on if ever he is to do great things. Believe me, red is fatal."

"You will be so good as to explain to me."

"Certainly, but I wish these women would cease chattering and giggling." Mrs Pertinax looks around angrily but only hears "how-doos," and "so glads," and "just sweets," and catches a few smiles and nods intended for she knows not whom. Then she composes herself with an air of contempt for the well-dressed sisterhood purring at each other in the Cage.

"The reds, and the greens, and their influences. Well, then, the young man who is so unhappy as to be obliged to sit on the red is never allowed to sit on the green.

The noble lord opposite never had the chance of sitting on the green, and can only come here as a stranger and gaze, a dumb spectator amidst the rumblings of revolution. When old enough to sit anywhere he was compelled to sit on the red and watch the greens play with great things."

"And the reds?"

"Oh, they are a very superior lot. The greens work in the glow of a forge, and hammer their material at white heat. Live sparks fly, and the music of the hammers excite; but the reds work in a cool atmosphere, with cold tools on cold iron, filing away a bit here and a bit there."

"And the man of promise with folded arms?"

"Never had the good fortune to sit on the green, where the power lies and throbs, so he comes here, as a stranger, to warm his hands at the glowing fires in the nation's workshop."

Mrs Pertinax suddenly notices a movement around her, and that the Chamber is emptying. The occupants of the Cage are

fluttering and rustling and making haste to get away; and then Mrs Pertinax learns that the expected sparring match has been adroitly postponed to some convenient season by the Prime Minister, who, it seems, met the right honourable gentleman opposite behind the Speaker's chair and smiled away his resolution.

"The birds of the Cage have all flown to the Terrace, where we shall find them limed fast enough to all the empty heads with nothing better to do. If women were only admitted to Parliament there would soon be a Terrace reform and husbands sent home to tea," says Mrs Pertinax, leading the way.

It is delicious on the Terrace—the air so cool, the sunshine on the river—and honourable members, no longer yawning and weary, listen to the small talk of pretty prattlers promenading to and fro. Suddenly, the electric bells tinkle, and all the men scatter, leaving their fair friends to their own devices, but promising hastily to return as soon as the division is over.

Mrs Pertinax watches the not unfamiliar scene with open disdain for the pretty birds so lately limed and now left stupidly staring at one another, or at nothing at all, not knowing what to do with their freedom. "The men will come back again fast enough," says she, "as soon as they have rushed through the lobbies and voted about something, they know not what. How should they? the empty heads, out here on the Terrace, instead of being inside, listening to what is going on. If there were only a few clever little women inside the empty heads might stay away altogether and the nation be the better for it. If you think of tracing the descendants of the Immortals in this place you're vastly mistaken," says the wife of the honourable member for Moatby, with an oratorical flourish full of intention.

"But can you help me to discover the secret of woman's influence over man? If you can, then I may understand why the Murani of old renounced their immortality (as they seem to have done, for I can find

no trace of them) to remain on Earth with the fair daughters of men ? ”

“ No, I can’t. Woman’s influence is a mystery. We can say it is, and apply it, without knowing anything of its real nature, just as we apply electricity, without knowing much about it. A nod of the head, a lift of the eye, a flutter, a sigh, and a man is spell-bound and carried captive into captivity. If your Immortals were like the rest of our empty heads you’d know just as much of the secret as I.”

CHAPTER XXI

MRS PERTINAX desires the honour of introducing Ma-Mylitta to the lady president of the New Society for the Regeneration of Man, and explains that the society is called "new" of set purpose, because it is intended to study and treat the subject from new standpoints, and, as opportunity occurs, introduce new methods. A *seance* is to be held in the president's drawing-room, and it is not impossible, Mrs Pertinax suggests, that something useful may be learnt for the new and revised edition of the *Essay Concerning Man* which is to appear in due season. The wife of the honourable member for Moatby adds that she, herself, is not likely to learn much, having studied her own husband more attentively than even he knows, or suspects, for the last twenty years. He has no wings, she is certain; and all the married ladies of her

acquaintance say the same of their husbands ; and it is a relief to them to be so sure of the fact.

" And why ? " asks Ma-Mylitta, preparing to go out.

" Because they might fly away. It's difficult enough to keep husbands within bounds now, and once give them wings—"

Mrs Pertinax is at a loss for language with which to explain the consequences teeming in her active brain.

" But if women had wings also ? "

" To play perpetual hide-and-seek with throughout the universe ? All the houses would be to let. Motors are bad enough, but wings would be fatal. Fancy Pertinax having a twenty-four hours' start of me after I had given him a piece of my mind ! Where should I find him ? Believe me, wings on earth would be a fatal gift to the human race."

Dr Constantia Browne, always spoken of as Dr Constantia, the first president of the New Society, delivers an address this afternoon to a select few, in which she says

that the proper medium for the study of Man is through virginal eyes, and the study should not commence too early. The popular impressions of man, handed down from generation to generation, are altogether false, and should be forgotten, in order that the study may ultimately rank amongst the exact sciences. During the ages Man has talked about himself, saying what a fine fellow he is, and no one contradicting him he has been taken at his word. Man has, therefore, ticketed himself and put himself on the market at his own valuation. Then mothers and wives, poor silly things! never ceased saying that the price wasn't high enough, that the men were too modest and put the price too low, and telling little girls to stop playing with their dolls and look up at masculine grandeur with adoring reverence, as at passing suns. Then came the meek-eyed virgins full of dreams, singing songs of praise and adulation, until the men actually believed that what they said of themselves, and what was said of them, was true.

"There has been quite enough of this sort of thing," says Dr Constantia with a disdainful wave of the hand, "and it is quite time that male bipeds should have the conceit taken out of them, be put in their proper place in creation, and marked at true market values. And who were the proper persons to do this? Why, women like the members present, who had reached discretion, and looked upon their subject, Man, with sharp, clear eyes, and had the courage to speak out."

Dr Constantia pauses for the applause which comes from all the members of the society, who clap and seek in each other's faces the strength necessary to endure martyrdom, if need be, in so glorious a cause.

"We must educate the nations to see Man as he is," continues Dr Constantia, "and then we shall see the true emancipation of Woman. Emancipated from what? From the eternal adoration of shams—sham bravery, which we know is cowardice; sham honour, which we know is treachery;

sham sacrifice, which we know is self-glorification. And we, we women, have taught ourselves to bow down and worship these shams, powder-puff in hand to hide our shame, but got up in the first style of art, and offering the incense of whole distilleries to conciliate and flatter and win a smile, fleeting as a winter sunbeam, cruel and inconstant." Then the lady president takes " the little man-god " to pieces, and scrapes and puts him together again, and marks him down so cheap that many of the virginal eyes onlooking are moved to pity and wish to take one at the price.

The regeneration of the male biped is to follow this taking of conceit out of him and the lowering of his market price, and the lady president elaborates a scheme, which she claims to be original, for the evolution of Man from the low standard where he really is to the high, high standard he may attain under the new system.

" An old maid's man," whispers Mrs Pertinax, discreetly. " They're all alike, and always the worst."

Then cups of tea are handed round, and Dr Constantia informs Ma-Mylitta that Man is to be studied by the New Society systematically, and that her own lectures will be illustrated with very fine drawings from the classical periods. The state of affairs in Muran specially interests her, though her own desire to get there ultimately is somewhat damped on learning that no sex problems exist in Murani society.

Mrs Pertinax sneers politely enough over her cup at the lady president's exposition, and wonders that virginal eyes should have seen so much, and so clearly.

And the members crowd around the Immortal, affectionately pressing her to let down her glorious hair, of which they have heard so much, and when this is done, the boldest spirits snip furtively for the possession of precious relics, but without success, for the hair re-unites and is whole again. But the flowing robe suffers, to the great chagrin of Mrs Pertinax, who perceives it, and is so touched in her honour and her temper that she will not speak again, save

to Dr Constantia, who is innocent of the outrage.

And there is another innocent present who slips into Ma-Mylitta's hand a paper with the humble request that she will read it. "It is an 'Allegory,'" she says, and quivers with delight at bare acceptance. In a whisper she explains her presence, not being a member of the New Society for the Regeneration of Man.

Ma-Mylitta reads, as the carriage rolls towards St James's Park,—

THE LIVING TOMB OF CUPID

"The little God of Love was one day caught napping in a shady grove by Mother Eve, after her expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and when still very wroth with Adam for attempting to screen himself behind her weakness. The little dimpled god was very tired, his wings drooped, as well they might, for he had roamed, and roamed, over the still desolate earth, carrying his quiver full of arrows and his bow, without meeting a single human being at

whom to discharge a shaft. His eyelashes were wet with tears, he was so desolate and aweary of the world; and he had thrown himself down upon the cool grass to sleep before spreading his wings and returning whence he came.

"Eve, forgetting her own sorrow, gently lifts the sleeping god, not knowing who he is, and wraps him in her long silken tresses, as in a shawl, protecting his cherubic loveliness from the wind and sun. And as she presses the sweet burden to her breast all anger passes, so that she salutes Adam all radiant and lets him look upon the little sleeping god, smiling now in unconscious slumber.

"And Adam says, 'This is an Immortal, I know it by his wings, and I will make a throne of gold and lay thereon a swan, and the little god shall live in state between the pure white wings.'

"Then Adam turned, and sought the gold to make the throne.

"The little god awoke, and would free himself from Eve's tresses, and spread his

wings as though to fly, only Eve would not have it so, but opened her heart and entombed him there.

"And then to Adam she became more radiant and beautiful than ever, and he searched for pearls and precious stones and laid them at her feet, saying, 'If thou art frail thou are lovely.' The little god fluttered as he heard, sending blush-rose tints over Eve's fair form, and then the first marriage.

"And Eve kept the God of Love close in her heart and would not let him go; but to every daughter she gave him as a gift, saying, 'When you feel the fluttering of wings then you will know!'

"And so it came to pass, and every woman's heart is now the living tomb of Love."

Mrs Pertinax mutters something uncomplimentary about musty old maids, and madness, and the regeneration of man, and the great good fortune of Pertinax to have fallen into such sensible hands as her

own! But Lady Gerard, when she hears the allegory later, forgives the spoiling of the loose silken gown by the relic hunters, for she has had her romance and still remembers, like a true daughter of Eve, when the little god first fluttered his tiny wings within her bosom. Her eyes are moist.

"I do not understand the allegory," says Ma-Mylitta.

"You Immortals are superior to emotion, but every mortal woman will understand that Love was the first great capture made by the first mother, and that every daughter born of her has a share of the spoil as an inheritance."

"And the Immortal with wings was hidden in her heart?"

"That is the allegory."

"Could that have been the fate of the Immortals from Muran whom I seek?"

"That would depend very much on themselves. If they knew how to make love to the fair daughters of men, I should not be surprised if they were entangled in somebody's long tresses, and then im-

prisoned in somebody's soft heart, and so liked it that they never wished for release."

"I fear my leave will have expired before I shall have mastered the true meaning of this allegory," says Ma-Mylitta, reflectively.

"If you only had a little earth in your composition the riddle would be easy," says Lady Gerard.

CHAPTER XXII

"HAS the charming Celestial made any progress in her search for the lost Immortals?" inquires Madame Reine of Professor Fonblanque a few days after Ma-Mylitta's visit to the New Olympus.

"A useless mission, I fear, but not more so than many undertaken by us poor mortals. How many have gone in search of the Lost Ten Tribes and Solomon's Seal; and how many are searching even now for the Garden of Eden? After all, historical and scientific research is of the greatest value, and I can't conceive an Immortal better employed than clearing up the doubtful. If I were only immortal," says the professor, pathetically, placing his hand to his side.

"Is the Celestial here?" asks madame with sudden energy.

"No. When she is present I know it."

"Then I may speak. This Immortal comes to you and sees you suffer?"

"Yes."

"And does she say, 'I have healing in my wings'?"

"It would be too great a sacrifice. I would not permit it. If she were to exhaust her stores of vital energy on my behalf, and heal me, she probably would not be able to return to Muran, and then there would be another lost Immortal. My life has its limits, and I would not borrow a few years at such a sacrifice."

"But she never offers to make it—she, who can generate an atmosphere which you could breathe, and live, sees you suffer, and makes no sign. Oh, I knew it, I knew it. I knew she had no sympathy when I was playing 'Claire,' no sympathy or pity for Philip. If she had I must have seen it in those wonderful eyes. If she had only once a passion I must have seen it kindle and blaze forth, even if covered over by the cold scoriæ of eternal ages. What, immortal

and no sympathy, no love, no soul ; a fig for such a life ! ”

“ The Murani have an entirely different constitution—there is no waste, no decay, or, if there is decay, it is made good even before it becomes apparent. All our human passions and emotions mean so much decay, and the most passionate burn out quickest. With some people life is of such slow combustion that it seems almost miraculous it ever burns out.”

“ I would not have immortality at such a price. No, no. Let my pulse beat, my heart throb, my soul blaze ; and then, come what will, in my worst agony I shall know joy. But this immortality, cold and pulseless, I would not fling it to a rat.” Madame makes a gesture of profound disdain.

“ Immortals may do very well without emotions, and if we poor mortals were not so well endowed there would be less suffering,” says the professor.

“ A life without emotion would not suit humanity. What, would you have a sea

without tide, or current, or storm? A black and putrid sea, killing all life. No, my friend, whilst we live there is enjoyment; and remorse and agony, bitter and deathless, are raptures compared with the dull placidity of life which cannot feel."

"And yet, how many millions seek the aid of science hourly for that interval of quiet which is best secured by this absence of emotion! Even Madame Reine seeks forgetfulness."

"Forgetfulness, yes. Make me to forget and then I live in sweet illusion, the one true, possible paradise on earth. But what of this immortal life in which there is no illusion, nothing to look forward to but the bath of Oblivion every thousand years? I know well that your Immortal could make but little of the play the other night, and that the fascination of Claire for Philip was lost upon her. An audience of Immortals, such Immortals, would enrage me, and I should scream."

Professor Fonblanque smiles at madame's revolt at the presence of a cold, unsympa-

thetic spectator at the theatre. Her vanity was wounded at Ma-Mylitta's steady, untouched gaze when she was doing her best, as Claire, to show how great an influence a fair daughter of Man might have upon destiny. Thinking that Ma-Mylitta would see in Philip one of the lost Murani, Madame Reine had done her best to show how, upon earth, the seductions of sex might lead to utter self-abandonment. All the spectators understood but this one, who seemed as far off as ever from understanding what could have induced the lost Immortals to remain with the fair daughters of men until they no longer had the power to return to their own planet.

"I suppose," says the professor, after a pause, "I suppose ordinary Immortals would be very greatly puzzled to understand what goes on in this little world of ours. Why do people weep for joy and weep for sadness? and why is love born of a kiss extinguished with a breath?"

"We know well enough, my friend, and so would these Murani if once they tasted

of the passion born of earth. If the atmosphere of Muran preserves from decay, surely the dust of Earth may inspire the voluptuous thrills of passionate longings and deep tragedies. Why should the lost Immortals have remained with the fair daughters of men but to enjoy the sweet vibrations of the new life! What would happen, think you, if this Immortal were to take back sufficient earth to give the passionless, immaculate Murani the pleasurable sensation of a human love?"

"I do not know," says the professor, rising.

"Nor I, but I can guess," says madame.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE London season is in full swing, and Professor Fonblanque in great request amongst fair patients wanting their nerves steadied to go the pace and stagger to the finish in the first rank. It's all a matter of nerves nowadays, and the professor has a great reputation in the West End for giving sleep and forgetfulness and pleasant dreams. Only to have one of "Fonblanque's sleeps" when tired out and irritable and heart torn by the ceaseless play of many passions, is one of the luxuries of life, and patients have come to rely too largely upon the physician who alone seems able to give a sleep of moments the duration of centuries crowded with sweet illusion. No sadness, no remorse, no unsatisfied longings in "Fonblanque's sleeps;" and the miserable come to him at times beseeching to be kept in a perpetual state of bliss, never once more

to awaken to the actualities of life with its dreary rounds of cloying pleasures and bitter anguish. The inward consciousness brought into activity during sleep produced the sense of supernal joys; and the professor will have it that what men and women see of themselves and others upon earth is only deceptive likenesses of themselves, and that their true selves are unaffected by the play of things wrongly counted real, the same as ocean depths are undisturbed by the shallow-crested waves passing over with storm accompaniments. The professor runs the gauntlet between scientists, who label him "mystic," and some very good people who profess to be profoundly unhappy at the thought that poor mortals can be otherwise than as corrupt and vile and hopeless as they seem upon the surface.

And the professor, with hectic flush and perpetual pain stoically endured, moves amongst his fair patients, this hot day in July, a god of healing and of comfort. Such wells of pure delight gush forth from

souls just returned from the magical land of dreams that it seems a pity for them to awake once more, and once more suffer the anguish of tight boots, and crowd the German baths in the first days of repentance. They are so fresh now, the old stains of remorseful tears wiped away, and hope abounding that they are patched up for the end of the season, when the mountain and the sea will do the rest.

The professor is in his room, leisurely cutting the leaves of a new review, when he becomes aware of the presence of the Immortal. The visits of this strange being are more and more frequent as the time draws nigh when she must depart, or remain earth-bound like those of her kind whom she seeks, and finds not. Ma-Mylitta comes and goes now without warning or announcement, but the professor knows when she is present, though invisible, as certain as he knows the presence of anything in his room.

She is visible now, standing beside a marble bust of Hunter, with wings folded

and the scarlet rings glowing over each bosom. It may be only fancy, but the professor thinks the scarlet grows more intensely bright as the days pass, a warning and a reminder, perhaps, that the time limit is approaching.

"Dr Riddle is very hard to convince," says the professor, as though continuing a conversation. "He is unwilling to accept you as a fact, and yet here you are. It is incredible to him that you should have travelled from Muran to Earth in a point of time."

"As I came so I return—in a point of time. It only requires a little imagination to believe a fact."

"But may you not have been under some illusion yourself, and have fancied that you traversed through space, from atmosphere to atmosphere, in the twinkling of an eye, and yet have taken a very considerable time doing the distance?"

"It is a fact and no illusion; and why should my word be doubted because what I do is outside the experience of mortals

living in an atmosphere in which all things decay and will is feeble ? Everything depends on atmosphere ; if you had here but the atmosphere of Muran, you, too, might be immortal." Then she adds quickly, " If you could but come with me ! "

The professor's bright eyes become brighter, and his whole being thrills with joy. How often has he asked himself these last few days whether it would be possible to shuffle off the little ponderable matter confining him to Earth and accompany the Immortal to another sphere ? It would be splendid to be able to take to Muran the twentieth-century ideas of a little globe which has apparently been left to develop itself in tears and bitter agony towards ideals still afar off. And who knows ? He might be allowed to return again, bringing with him secrets which would hasten the development of poor humanity and bring about the Golden Age which the poets have mistakenly placed in the past. What has been but a secret thought takes form in the words, " If you could but come with

me!" The professor can only sigh, "Would that be possible?"

Ma-Mylitta is herself perplexed by the simple question suggested by words used without apparent intention, and rapidly she plays her shoulder wings as though marking time to thought. The strange light which always comes with this movement of the wings encircles the professor, and a sense of healing passes through his frame. It may be only fancy, but the sensation is glorious. If it were but to continue a new lease of life would be his, and he understands now what the Immortal means by atmosphere giving perpetual youth, when a passing breath of the storage brought from Muran makes him feel a new man, and gives the flush upon his pale cheek a deeper and a richer tint.

Ma-Mylitta suddenly stops the play of her wings and says, "No, it is not possible." She takes no notice of the change which within a few moments has been wrought in the appearance of the professor, who is left in doubt whether the indifference is apparent

or real ; or whether the want of observation in such a case is but natural in a being living perpetually in an atmosphere which preserves all things from decay.

" If I but possessed this secret, and could use it, what power for good would be mine ! " reflects Professor Fonblanque.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS MONTEM BRILLE has just driven from Park Lane, where she has seen the presents, and she gives Lady Gerard her views on the happy pair who are to be united to-morrow.

"It will be something for your Immortal to talk about on her return," says Mrs Montem Brille, who seldom misses a wedding, which she looks on as the natural ending of romance commenced or carried on in the Marchmont gardens.

No, Lady Gerard does not intend going, but Mrs Montem Brille may take Ma-Mylitta and explain to her the meaning of a ceremony which must be a little difficult for a rational being to understand who comes from a world in which there is no such thing as marriage. Her ladyship is a little out of sorts this morning, for Sir John has taken it into his head to be

scandalised at the uncertain habits of a visitor who comes and goes without knocking and gives no account of her movements. Sir John has certainly been very trying of late, and made her fear that some accident may prevent Ma-Mylitta returning to her native planet. Lady Gerard is not in the mood this morning to discuss wedding presents and trousseau, being inclined to look upon marriage as upon a fruit having its sour side, and the sour side pressed to her own lips.

"I will take her with pleasure. Isn't it a duty we owe a stranger interested in the history and habits of mortals?"

"I suppose so," says her ladyship, absently.

"Because, my dear Lady Gerard, the next time she comes, if she come again, marriage, as we now possess it, may be as obsolete as my grandmother's bonnet."

Her ladyship forgets Sir John and is interested.

"What is the last new thing?" she inquires.

"It's only talked about, you know, but you're to take one another on a yearly tenancy, with a quarter's notice; or else on a short lease, with the option of renewal. Quite regular and all that; but so convenient, just as you take a house."

"Would not weekly arrangements be more convenient still?"

"Like lodgings?"

"Yes. There would be such scope for chaste advertisements. Quite regular, of course."

"We are safe, though we may live to be old-fashioned," says Mrs Montem Brille, laughing.

. . . . . .

"Now it's all over," whispers Mrs Montem Brille to Ma-Mylitta as the bride and bridegroom disappear into the vestry and the church is filled with the incense of sweet sound.

"And the two are made one?"

"That is the idea—beautiful, isn't it? This is the proper ending of all true love," says Mrs Montem Brille, radiantly.

"But where is the bond of union?"

"Oh, that's mystic and invisible. No one quite understands it; but it is there."

"When the Immortals came from Muran and wooed the fair daughters of men, and made wives of them, they sacrificed their immortality. The bride to-day is beautiful and fair, and has the bridegroom made any sacrifice to obtain possession?"

Mrs Montem Brill reserves her answer until once more in the carriage.

"The Hon. Jack Candy, that's the bridegroom, you know, sacrificed the privilege of wearing the King's uniform, at his friends' expense, it is true, but then it suited his style of beauty; and with his uniform he sacrificed his chance of becoming a Field-Marshal, and then getting a peerage with a cheque of six figures for doing his duty. And then the plumes upon his hat! I don't know much about these things, but feathers go a long way with some men. Jack Candy has sacrificed all this, and, as a reward, his debts are paid, and he draws a

monthly allowance for ‘ spiffs,’ and ‘ spiffs ’ are the things which men who do nothing want to keep them in good temper.”

“ And the man is the woman’s, body and soul ? ”

“ Sometimes,” replies Mrs Montem Brille, cautiously.

“ Then what becomes of the mystic and invisible bond of union ? ”

“ Oh, that’s dissolved in another place. Now that you have seen the mystic knot tied, we will go to the Law Courts and see Sir Francis Jeune untie it. I think the proper word is ‘ dissolve,’ so that a marriage once dissolved is as though it had never been. All fiction, you know,” says Mrs Montem Brille, pulling the check-string and giving a direction.

And then she grows eloquent upon the bride’s costume, and the exquisite beauty of the lace, which might have been worked by invisible fingers, so fine and so precious is it. But the Immortal is untouched by the eloquence ; so she halts and takes herself silently to task for indulging in such

"frivol" before a being from another sphere on a mission of historical inquiry and research.

. . . . .

"That's Sir Francis," says Mrs Montem Brille, indicating a lonely figure on the bench having the sad and weary look of a man in despair of ever hearing the truth again from mortal lips. "Some people say he should be canonised and known as Saint Francis, because he passes so much of his time amongst sinners."

They are in a very prosaic Court, stuffy and dingy, with grey oak benches and whitewashed walls to typify the hue and spirit of the law.

A fair-haired woman, the bloom of maidenhood not long past, is standing rigidly upright in a square oak box, and looks towards Sir Francis with mute agony in her light blue eyes, beseeching to be spared the bitter shame of open confession which is being wrung from her by a black-gowned inquisitor in pedantic wig and faultless bands and cuffs. If her story is

true why had she not complained sooner ? The secret must come from the little palpitating heart. Sir Francis cannot help her, though he sees the beads of perspiration gathering quickly upon her forehead. Her one little secret watered with such bitter tears, and she a woman ! Everyone is against her.

" Answer the question," says Sir Francis. " Why did you forgive your husband on the third occasion ? "

" Because I loved him so," comes from blanched lips ; and the tortured heart is empty.

Outside the Court the hum of polite conversation in Society tones fills the corridors, and there is a constant whisking to and fro of dainty skirts, sending up clouds of fine, dry dust. Well-gloved men dance attendance upon their lady-loves resting impatiently in badly-lighted window recesses waiting for the stupid case before Sir Francis to end and the real play to begin, for which they have secured tickets as for a popular matinee, the principal

players being very fine persons in a very fine world. The air is heavy with perfumes, and there is little to remind one of the outer working world but the smell of honest tar which some weather-bronzed sailor leaves behind him as he tacks uneasily through the sauntering, simpering crowd of gay butterflies and takes refuge in an adjoining Court, set apart for wrecks of another sort.

Some of the idlers are already seated at little round tables, discussing ham and chicken and sparkling wines ; and hovering round them are their own sleek flunkies, with eyes to future keyholes, and compromising acts, and teaching one another how best to betray the masters and mistresses they now wait on with well-drilled obsequiousness.

Mrs Montem Brille passes with half-averted face, the dreadful sound of a broken heart ringing in her ears. There is the Lady of the Dainty Shoe surrounded by her friends, as in the Marchmont gardens, ready to fetch and carry, and Mrs Montem Brille feels shame and hastens away, hoping

that the Immortal by her side may not have seen.

" When shall I forget the cry of that poor tortured soul ?—' Because I loved him so ! ' " is all that she can say during the return drive.

Ma-Mylitta is busy with her own thoughts.

" I see that on Earth the woman sometimes makes the sacrifice. I wonder if the fair daughters of men made sacrifices to secure the immortal Murani, and were content when they got them ? "

The carriage stops, and Ma-Mylitta's gown and hat are on the seat. Mrs Montem Brille remembers that there was a slight movement by her side, of which she took no notice, and she now delivers the articles with stammering apologies, which, however, to her great relief, are quite unnecessary, the Gerard household, having recovered their nerves, being too well drilled to be astonished at anything. And my lady is not at home.

CHAPTER XXV

"I HOPED you would come, and that was why I ventured to put my address on the paper which I handed you at Dr Constantia's. No, I am not at all frightened, and I like you so much better without a gown and hat," says Miss Moulton with a look of adoration towards her visitor, but with such trembling in her low musical voice as belies the assurance of her words. "We shall not be interrupted here; so few come to see an Old Maid."

Miss Moulton's modest apartment overlooks the garden of a square which has seen better days, but is now parcelled out into residential flats. She has a fine view of the sky from the window, in front of which is her writing-table, and at times the blue heavens open to her. She has been writing something to-day with the intention of sending it to a magazine, but will probably

bury it in one of the deep drawers which she calls her "catacombs." She sees so much of her inner self in what she writes that she shrinks from another seeing what she has written, and it goes into the "catacombs," with the secret hope that some day the virgin thoughts of Miss Moulton will have a joyful resurrection.

"My time is limited, and I have done so little," says Ma-Mylitta, taking the Old Maid's hand in her own. "I thought my task would be easy if once I came to Earth; but I shall return without tracing the Immortals, or knowing why they put off immortality and remained in a planet where everything suffers and decays."

"It is a wonderful story; a romance of the angels," says Miss Moulton.

"But the motive. What was the motive?"

"It is so long ago, and the world has changed, perhaps, but according to all the stories the inhabitants of other planets were very fond of coming to Earth and staying with the fair daughters of men."

"But they returned again, according to the stories. Professor Fonblanque hunted them up for me in the vain hope of finding something to throw light on the fate of the immortal Murani. There is nothing to help me. What, what could have been the motive for so great a sacrifice?"

"Surely it was love—love which accounts for all the sacrifices worthy of the name which have taken place since the beginning. Surely you know this, for you cannot live in a loveless world." Miss Moulton fixes her eyes with mute compassion on the face of the Immortal, and then apologises hastily for the mere suggestion.

"When you enter on the perfect life you will know that there is no need for love. In Muran everything in Nature is so finely balanced that we know neither sympathy nor sacrifice, love nor hate, we neither marry nor are given in marriage. Now I know that on Earth everything is, of set purpose, arranged upon a different plan. You can hardly conceive how out of place an Immortal feels here."

"Have you felt nothing of sympathy and compassion," asks Miss Moulton, lifting her eyes with the hope of witnessing some emotion; but lowering them instantly on encountering the profound gaze which seems to have swallowed up all the past and has no sunlight in it. Her own heart is set beating and she is disappointed that the reality is so different from her vision. Is perfection, then, so very cold and hard?

Ma-Mylitta goes to the window and looks upward, as though to assure herself that Muran is still in the universe and that her will to reach it is not weakening. She has certainly no intention of being stranded on a planet wherein people seem to delight in killing themselves off early by indulging in emotions. Then turning, she says,—

"You will be delighted with Muran, if ever you get there."

Miss Moulton looks towards her "catacombs" with blank despair. All these dreams of hers in which she has gone up and down the endless ladder, laying bare

her heart and meeting with eternal love upon warm lips, all these dreams are but illusion, and her happiness in dreaming waking dreams must be for ever gone, she fears. She, too, walks towards the window and looks upwards, but sees nothing, the inward light being quenched. If the Immortals of old were like this one, then the daughters of men would surely have never kept them to themselves. Two sides to every bargain, and Old Maid though she be, she will not yield without a struggle the paradise to come, with tears and kisses, for cold perfection, tearless and loveless.

"If you have never felt as mortals feel you will never understand the thrill which your lost Immortals felt when they said, 'We will become mortal if we can but taste of love.' There is the secret of what you wish to know."

"The problem may be solved in accordance with your suggestion," says Ma-Mylitta.

"Let me hear the problem and I may help you."

"It is very short. Three Immortals come to Earth and remain until their radio-active powers are spent so that they cannot return. Being on Earth they adapt themselves to new conditions and they become as mortals—eating and drinking and sleeping, and, as mortals, breathing an atmosphere which does not make good the waste of vital energy. They are mortal, and the fair daughters of men do the rest."

"And why not?"

"I fear I must return with an insufficient answer. If love were life—"

"It is," interrupts Miss Moulton, eagerly.

"But I have just come from your Divorce Court. Were there always divorces?"

"There is always the false, and if your Immortals had kindled love and then returned to Muran they would have been false; but to show that they were true they made a sacrifice, and the greater the sacrifice the greater the truth. Was it not an act worthy of Immortals to teach men that woman's love was worthy of the greatest

sacrifice, even immortal life? Oh, I believe it!"

"And if Immortals come on Earth again, do you think they will remain and say immortality is well lost for love?"

"If they come we shall know. I am content to know that there was always love in this world; and when love dies the end will come."

"I have my answer," says the Immortal, and the spirit of combat which had kept up Miss Moulton suddenly deserts her as she thinks she has been too egotistical. A film comes over her bright blue eyes, and she turns her head to clear them and then to offer some meet apology; but her mysterious visitor has gone.

"I don't care," says she, "if it is all illusion. It's real to me, and I have said my say, if only to myself. I have known sorrow but I have loved," and she presses a medallion to her lips. "If I am an Old Maid I am not soured, and the fault is not thine, my love, my love!"

CHAPTER XXVI

LADY GERARD receives the Immortal's announcement that her departure is near at hand with an inward satisfaction which will, against all effort, show itself ; for Sir John has talked so much to her, and at her, in his best House of Commons style, about "future liabilities contingent on undetermined events," that the prospect of hearing the phrase no more is a relief to her. Sir John is, in fact, a little nervous lest the nominal hospitality which her ladyship has given will be turned to advantage by the Opposition at the next General Election, and the Whips have made him plainly understand that the idea of a strange being, neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring, becoming chargeable to the great British Empire, has aroused parochial instincts which may be dangerous. "The smallest fraction turns the scale when the pocket is

touched," say the wire-pullers, and Sir John is nervous.

"If the worst happen, I suppose some of the show people will be glad to take charge of an Immortal that has seen better days," says Sir John to her ladyship in one of his aggravating moods.

"Do not be frightened; the Immortal will not exceed her days of grace," says her ladyship, flushing, her generous instincts uppermost.

CHAPTER XXVII

"AND you go?" says Professor Fonblanque.

"New sensations creep over me, and I feel that Earth has mysterious attractions. My time is limited and my will weakens; and now I know that if I remain I shall become mortal."

"A mortal who has lived through the ages! Were you to become one of us, feeling like us, what a power you would become in a world longing and waiting for someone to explain the mysteries of the universe. You carry in your wings the secret of healing, and if you were human, and knew what it is to suffer and to be made whole, you would say it is no ignoble thing for an Immortal to remain on Earth and relieve those who suffer."

The professor meets the Immortal's gaze without flinching, so earnest is he, and this

is his last opportunity to learn something of the great secret which Ma-Mylitta possesses without appreciating, or apparently caring to appreciate, its supreme importance to humanity. Then he adds,—

"I felt a new life when last I was enveloped in the luminous rays which you produce at will. Can you not leave me this one secret?"

"You breathed the atmosphere of Muran, that is all. I have told you that I am charged with it; but there is a limit to the supply, and already I feel a weakening of energy and I must go."

"But is there nothing upon Earth, no gas which may be made to yield the same blessed results, so that those who breathe may become whole?"

"The earth teems with it," replies the Immortal.

Professor Fonblanque pales with suppressed excitement. He is surely on the brink of a grand discovery, and trembles. The Immortal moves her wings and light appears.

"This is the secret, I have none other. It is life, and the earth teems with it."

"Life?"

"Yes, the life which every living cell on earth possesses; but in Muran it is our atmosphere, and we are immortal."

"Life itself! And how may I capture it? Take life from life and it ceases to be life."

"And keep me from Muran and I cease to be immortal. How can I then save myself from the fate of those I seek?"

The professor is disappointed. Everything is so elusive.

"And have you sufficient energy in reserve to carry you to-night through boundless space?" he asks.

"Yes, but I may not remain one moment beyond my allotted time."

"And that is short?"

"When I leave you I return."

"And I?"

The professor folds his arms upon his table and hides his face. A secret longing comes over him. Can he, too, say good-bye

to Earth and soar with this Immortal? He is so weak that he trembles with the thought and a longing which have all the violence of a great passion.

The Immortal bends over him with folded wings and hears a deep sob, and there is born in her a feeling of compassion. There is no speech, but she knows what is passing in another soul, and the strange desire comes over her to comfort, and to say, "If separation is so bitter, I will remain with you." The Old Maid's allegory of the Living Tomb of Love flashes across her mind, and instinctively she places a hand over the scarlet circles of her snow-white wings and feels an unknown quiver. Is this Love? Is it to be her fate to love on Earth and lose her place in Muran?

The professor moves not.

The Immortal opens her great wings, and fans and fans until the whole chamber is filled with luminous rays, and the bowed head is encircled with transcendent glory. Still he moves not. An unknown dread comes over her as she looks upon the silent

figure, and she agitates her wings faster and faster yet, without a thought that she may be spending recklessly the reserves of radio-active force which are to take her home again. All that she wants is to lift the bowed head and open eyes and lips closed and silent. Still he moves not, and she is alone with a mystery unknown in Muran.

She stands alone and is desolate, her grand hair of Venetian gold covering her folded wings.

"I love, and now I know why the lost Immortals remained with the fair daughters of men."

. . . . . .

The hour for departure has come, and Lady Gerard and all who are in the secret witness the final upward flight, and are spellbound as they think of the tremendous journey through space to the planet which they have learnt to know as Muran.

Mrs Montem Brille declares that she sees two figures in the air, but others say it is only reflected light.

Professor Fonblanque is discovered in his

room with head bowed upon his folded arms, and Mrs Montem Brille now says that the Romance in Radium, which she is sure commenced in the Marchmont gardens, will surely be continued, though she doesn't know where.

THE END

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(See page 5.)

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