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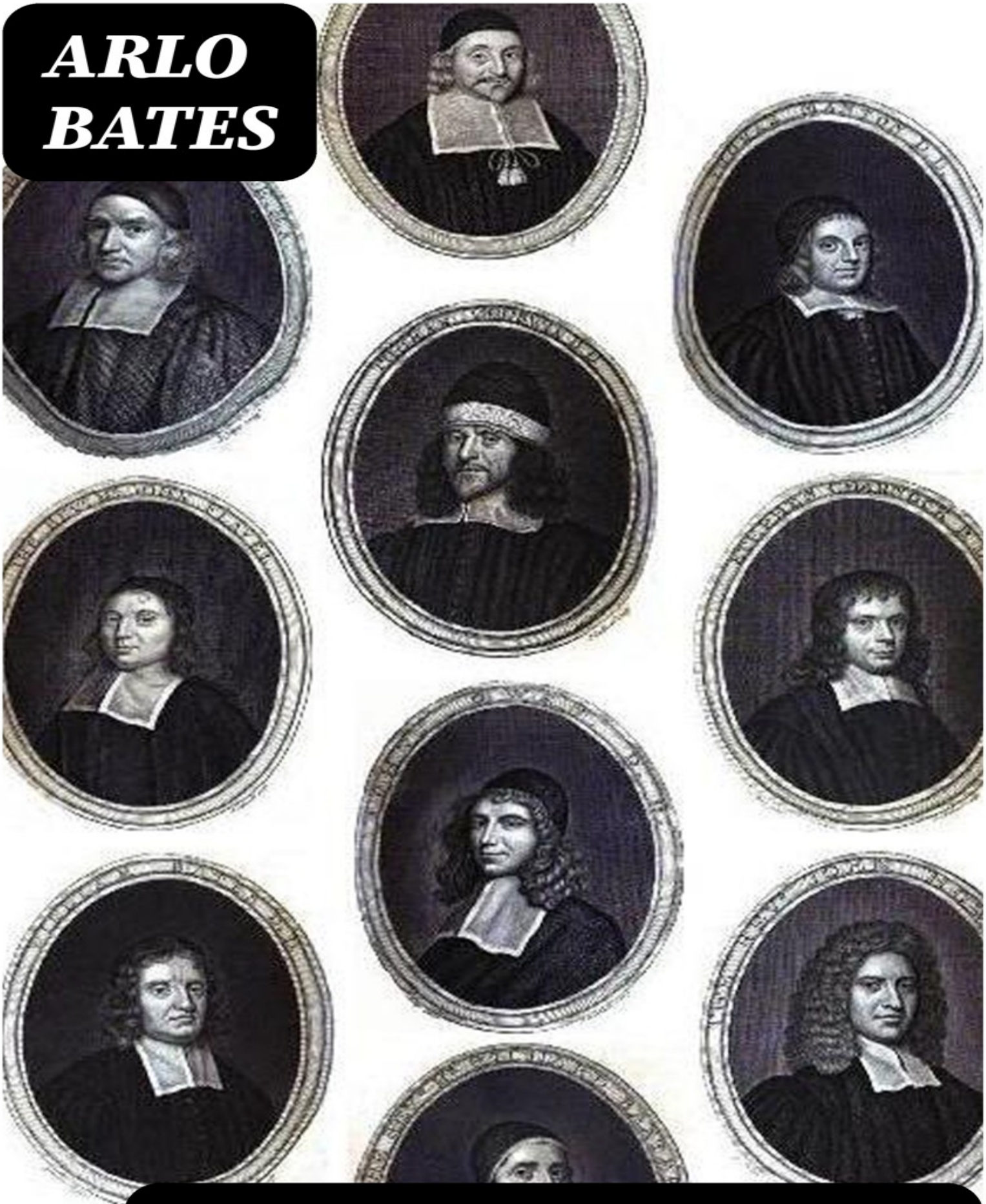

THE PURITANS

Arlo Bates

The Puritans

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AFTER SUCH A PAGAN CUT
Henry VIII., i. 3.

"We are all the children of the Puritans," Mrs. Herman said smiling.
"Of course there is an ethical strain in all of us."

Her cousin, Philip Ashe, who wore the dress of a novice from the Clergy
House of St. Mark, regarded her with a serious and doubtful glance.

"But there is so much difference between you and me," he began. Then he hesitated as if not knowing exactly how to finish his sentence.

"The difference," she responded, "is chiefly a matter of the difference between action and reaction. You and I come of much the same stock ethically. My childhood was oppressed by the weight of the Puritan creed, and the reaction from it has made me what you feel obliged to call heretic; while you, with a saint for a mother, found even Puritanism hardly strict enough for you, and have taken to semi-monasticism. We are both pushed on by the same original impulse: the stress of Puritanism."

She had been putting on her gloves as she spoke, and now rose and stood ready to go out. Philip looked at her with a troubled glance, rising also.

"I hardly know," said he slowly, "if it's right for me to go with you.
It would have been more in keeping if I adhered to the rules of the
Clergy House while I am away from it."

Mrs. Herman smiled with what seemed to him something of the tolerance one has for the whim of a child.

"And what would you be doing at the Clergy House at this time of day?" she asked. "Wouldn't it be recreation hour or something of the sort?"

He looked down. He never found himself able to be entirely at ease in answering her questions about the routine of the Clergy House.

"No," he answered. "The half hour of recreation which follows Nones would just be ended."

His cousin laughed confusingly.

"Well, then," she rejoined, "begin it over again. Tell your confessor that the woman tempted you, and you did sin. You are not in the Clergy House just now; and as I have taken the trouble to ask leave to carry you to Mrs. Gore's this afternoon, more because you wanted to see this Persian than because I cared about it, it is rather late for objections."

Philip raised his eyes to her face only to meet a glance so quizzical that he hastened to avoid it by going to the hall to don his cloak; and a few moments later they were walking up Beacon Hill.

It was one of those gloriously brilliant winter days by which Boston weather atones in an hour for a week of sullenness. Snow lay in a thin sheet over the Common, and here and there a bit of ice among the tree-branches caught the light like a glittering jewel. The streets were dotted with briskly gliding sleighs, the jingle of whose bells rang out joyously. The air was full of a vigor which made the blood stir briskly in the veins.

Philip had not for years found himself in the street with a woman. Seldom, indeed, was he abroad with a companion, except as he took the walk prescribed in the monastic regime with his friend, Maurice Wynne. For the most part he went his way alone, occupied in pious contemplation, shutting himself stubbornly in from outward sights and sounds. Now he was confused and unsettled. Since a fire had a week earlier scattered the dwellers in the Clergy House, and sent him to the home of his cousin, he had gone about like one bewildered. The world into which he was now cast was as unknown to him as if he had passed the two years spent at St. Mark's in some far island of the sea. To be in the street with a lady; to be on his way to hear he knew not what from the lips of a Persian mystic; to have in his mind memory of light talk and pleasant story; all these things made him feel as if he were drifting into a strange unknown sea of worldliness.

Yet his feeling was not entirely one of fear or of reluctance. Sensitive to the tips of his fingers, he felt the influences of the day, the sweetness of his cousin's laughter, the beauty of her face. He was exhilarated by a strange intoxication. He was conscious that more than one

passer looked curiously at them as, he in his cassock and she in her furs, they walked up Beacon Street. He felt as in boyhood he had felt when about to embark in some adventure to childhood strange and daring.

"It is a beautiful day," he said involuntarily.

"Yes," Mrs. Herman answered. "It is almost a pity to spend it indoors.
But here we are."

They had come into Mt. Vernon Street, and now turned in at a fine old house of gray stone.

"Is there any discussion at these meetings?" he asked, as they waited for the door to be opened.

"Oh, yes; often there is a good deal. You'll have ample opportunity to protest against the heresies of the heathen."

"I do not come here to speak," he replied, rather stiffly. "I only come to get some idea of how the oriental mind works."

He felt her smile to be that of one amused at him, but he could not see why she should be.

"I must give you one caution," she went on, as they entered the house. "It's the same that the magicians give to those who are present at their incantations. Be careful not to pronounce sacred words."

"But don't they use them?"

"Oh, abundantly; but they know how to use them in a fashion understood only by the initiated, so that they are harmless."

They passed up the wide staircase of Mrs. Gore's handsome, if over-furnished house. They were shown into the drawing-room, where they were met by the hostess, a

tall, superb woman of commanding presence, her head crowned with masses of snow-white hair. Coming in from the brilliant winter sunlight, Philip could not at first distinguish anything clearly. He went mechanically through his presentation to the hostess and to the Persian who was to address the meeting, and then sank into a seat. He looked curiously at the Persian, struck by the picturesque appearance of the long snow-white beard, fine as silk, which flowed down over the rich robe of the seer. The face was to Philip an enigma. To understand a foreign face it is necessary to have learned the physiognomy of the people to which it belongs, as to comprehend their speech it is necessary to have mastered their language. As he knew not whether the countenance of the old man attracted or repelled him more, and could only decide that at least it had a strange fascination.

Suddenly Ashe felt his glance called up by a familiar presence, and to his surprise saw his friend, Maurice Wynne, come into the room, accompanied by a stately, bright-eyed woman who was warmly greeted by Mrs. Gore. He wondered at the chance which had brought Maurice here as well as himself; but the calling of the meeting to order attracted his thoughts back to the business of the moment.

The Persian was the latest ethical caprice of Boston. He had come by the invitation of Mrs. Gore to bring across the ocean the knowledge of the mystic truths contained in the sacred writings of his country; and his ministrations were being received with that beautiful seriousness which is so characteristic of the town. In Boston there are many persons whose chief object in life seems to be the discovery of novel

forms of spiritual dissipation. The cycle of mystic hymns which the Persian was expounding to the select circle of devotees assembled at Mrs. Gore's was full of the most sensual images, under which the inspired Persian psalmists had concealed the highest truth. Indeed, Ashe had been told that on one occasion the hostess had been obliged to stop the reading on the ground that an occidental audience not accustomed to anything more outspoken than the Song of Solomon, and unused to the amazing grossness of oriental symbolism, could not listen to the hymn which he was pouring forth. Fortunately Philip had chanced upon a day when the text was harmless, and he could hear without blushing, whether he were spiritually edified or not.

The Persian had a voice of exquisite softness and flexibility. His every word was like a caress. There are voices which so move and stir the hearer that they arouse an emotion which for the moment may override reason; voices which appeal to the senses like beguiling music, and which conquer by a persuasive sweetness as irresistible as it is intangible. The tones of the Persian swayed Ashe so deeply that the young man felt as if swimming on a billow of melody. Philip regarded as if fascinated the slender, dusky fingers of the reader as they handled the splendidly illuminated parchment on which glowed strange characters of gold, marvelously intertwined with leaf and flower, and cunning devices in gleaming hues. He looked into the deep, liquid eyes of the old man, and saw the light in them kindle as the reading proceeded. He felt the dignity of the presence of the seer, and the richness of his flowing garment; but all these things were only the fitting

accompaniments to that beautiful voice, flowing on like a topaz brook in a meadow of daffodils.

The Persian spoke admirable English, only now and then by a slight accent betraying his nationality. He made a short address upon the antiquity of the hymn which he was that day to expound, its authorship, and its evident inspiration. Then in his wonderful voice he read:—

THE HYMN OF ISMAT.

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Yesterday, half inebriated, I passed by the quarters where the vintners dwell, to seek the daughter of an infidel who sells wine.

At the end of the street, there advanced before me a damsel, with a fairy's cheeks, who in the manner of a pagan wore her tresses dishevelled over her shoulders like a sacerdotal thread. I said: "O thou, to the arch of whose eyebrow the new moon is a slave, what quarter is this, and where is thy mansion?"

She answered: "Cast thy rosary to the ground; bind on thy shoulder the thread of paganism; throw stones at the glass of piety; and quaff from a full goblet."

"After that come before me that I may whisper a word in thine ear;—thou wilt accomplish thy journey if thou listen to my discourse."

Abandoning my heart, and rapt in ecstasy, I ran after her until I came to a place in which religion and reason forsook

me.

At a distance I beheld a company all insane and inebriated, who came boiling and roaring with ardor from the wine of love.

Without cymbals or lutes or viols, yet all filled with mirth and melody; without wine or goblet or flagon, yet all incessantly drinking.

When the cord of restraint slipped from my hand, I desired to ask her one question, but she said: "Silence!"

"This is no square temple to the gate of which thou canst arrive precipitately; this is no mosque to which thou canst come with tumult, but without knowledge. This is the banquet-house of infidels, and within it all are intoxicated; all from the dawn of eternity to the day of resurrection lost in astonishment."

"Depart thou from the cloister and take thy way to the tavern; cast off the cloak of a dervish, and wear the robe of a libertine."

I obeyed; and if thou desirest the same strain and color as Ismat, imitate him, and sell this world and the next for one drop of pure wine!

The company sat in absorbed silence while the reading went on. Nothing could be more perfect than the listening of a well-bred Boston audience, whether it is interested or not. The exquisitely modulated voice of the Persian flowed on like the tones of a magic flute, and the women sat as if fascinated by its spell.

When the reading was finished, and the Persian began to comment upon the spiritual doctrine embodied in it, Ashe sat so completely absorbed in reverie that he gave no heed

to what was being said. In his ascetic life at the Clergy House he had been so far removed from the sensuous, save for that to which the services of the church appealed, that this enervating and luxurious atmosphere, this gathering to which its quasi-religious character seemed to lend an excuse, bred in him a species of intoxication. He sat like a lotus-eater, hearing not so much the words of the speaker as his musical voice, and half-drowned in the pleasure of the perfumed air, the rich colors of the room, the Persian's dress, the illuminated scroll, in the subtile delight of the presence of women, and all those seductive charms of the sense from which the church defended him.

The Persian, Mirza Gholân Rezâh, repeated in his flute-like voice: "'O thou, to the arch of whose eyebrow the new moon is a slave;'" and, hearing the words as in a dream, Philip Ashe looked across the little circle to see a woman whose beauty smote him so strongly that he drew a quick breath. To his excited mood it seemed as if the phrase were intended to describe that beautifully curved brow, brown against the fair skin, and in his heart he said over the words with a thrill: "'O thou, to the arch of whose eyebrow the new moon is a slave!'" Half unconsciously, and as if he were taken possession of by a will stronger than his own, he found himself noting the soft curve and flush of a woman's cheek, the shell-texture of her ear, and the snowy whiteness of her throat. She sat in the full light of the window behind him, leaning as she listened against a pedestal of ebony which upheld the bronze bust of a satyr peering down at her with wrinkled eyes; her throat was displayed by the backward bend of her head, and showed the whiter by

contrast with the black gown she wore. Philip's breath came more quickly, and his head seemed to swim. Sensitive to beauty, and starved by asceticism, he was in a moment completely overcome.

Suddenly he felt the regard of his friend Maurice resting upon him with a questioning glance, and it was as if the thought of his heart were laid bare. Philip made a strong effort, and fixed his look and his attention upon the speaker, who was deep in oriental mysticism.

"It is written in the Desâtir," Mirza Gholân Rezâh was saying, "that purity is of two kinds, the real and the formal. 'The real consists in not binding the heart to evil: the formal in cleansing away what appears evil to the view.' The ultimate spirit, that inner flame from the treasure-house of flames, is not affected by the outward, by the apparent. What though the outer man fall into sin? What though he throw stones at the glass of piety and quaff the wine of sensuality from a full goblet? The flame within the tabernacle is still pure and undefined because it is undefilable."

Ashe looked around the circle in astonishment, wondering if it were possible that in a Christian civilization these doctrines could be proclaimed without rebuke. His neighbors sat in attitudes of close attention; they were evidently listening, but their faces showed no indignation. On the lips of Wynne Philip fancied he detected a faint curl of derisive amusement, but nowhere else could he perceive any display of emotion, unless—He had avoided looking at the lady in black, feeling that to do so were to play with temptation; but the attraction was too strong for him, and

he glanced at her with a look of which the swiftness showed how strongly she affected him. It seemed to him that there was a faint flush of indignation upon her face; and he cast down his eyes, smitten by the conviction that there was an intimate sympathy between his feeling and hers.

"This is the word of enlightenment which the damsel, the personification of wisdom, whispered into the ear of the seeker," continued the persuasive voice of the Persian. "It is the heart-truth of all religion. It is the word which initiates man into the divine mysteries. 'Thou wilt accomplish thy journey if thou listen to my discourse.' Life is affected by many accidents; but none of them reaches the godhead within. The divine inebriation of spiritual truth comes with the realization of this fact. The flame within man, which is above his consciousness, is not to be touched by the acts of the body. These things which men call sin are not of the slightest feather-weight to the soul in the innermost tabernacle. It is of no real consequence," the speaker went on, warming with his theme until his velvety eyes shone, "what the outer man may do. We waste our efforts in this childish care about apparent righteousness. The real purity is above our acts. Let the man do what he pleases; the soul is not thereby touched or altered."

Ashe sat upright in his chair, hardly conscious where he was. It seemed to him monstrous to remain acquiescent and to hear without protest this juggling with the souls of men. The instinct to save his fellows which underlies all genuine impulse toward the priesthood was too strong in him not to respond to the challenge which every word of the Persian

offered. Almost without knowing it, he found himself interrupting the speaker.

"If that is the teaching of the Persian scriptures," he said, "it is impious and wicked. Even were it true that there were a flame from the Supreme dwelling within us, unmanifested and undeniable, it is evidently not with this that we have to do in our earthly life. It is with the soul of which we are conscious, the being which we do know. This may be lost by defilement. To this the sin of the body is death. I, I myself, I, the being that is aware of itself, am no less the one that is morally responsible for what is done in the world by me."

Led away by his strong feeling, Philip began vehemently; but the consciousness of the attention of all the company, and of the searching look of Mirza, made the ardent young man falter. He was a stranger, unaccustomed to the ways of these folk who had come together to play with the highest truths as they might play with tennis-balls. He felt a sudden chill, as if upon his hot enthusiasm had blown an icy blast.

Yet when he cast a glance around as if in appeal, he saw nothing of disapproval or of scorn. He had evidently offended nobody by his outburst. He ventured to look at the unknown in black, and she rewarded him with a glance so full of sympathy that for an instant he lost the thread of what the Persian, in tones as soft and unruffled as ever, was saying in reply to his words. He gathered himself up to hear and to answer, and there followed a discussion in which a number of those present joined; a discussion full of cleverness and the adroit handling of words, yet which left Philip in the confusion of being made to realize that what to him were vital truths were to those about him merely so

many hypotheses upon which to found argument. There were more women than men present, and Ashe was amazed at their cleverness and their shallow reasoning; at the ease and naturalness with which they played this game of intellectual gymnastics, and at the apparent failure to pierce to anything like depth. It was evident that while everything was uttered with an air of the most profound seriousness, it would not do to be really in earnest. He began to understand what Helen had meant when she warned him not to pronounce sacred words in this strange assembly.

When the meeting broke up, the ladies rose to exchange greetings, to chat together of engagements in society and such trifles of life. Ashe, still full of the excitement of what he had done, followed his cousin out of the drawing-room in silence. As they were descending the wide staircase, some one behind said:—

"Are you going away without speaking to me, Helen?"

Ashe and Mrs. Herman both turned, and found themselves face to face with the lady in black, who stood on the broad landing.

"My dear Edith," Mrs. Herman answered, "I am so little used to this sort of thing that I didn't know whether it was proper to stop to speak with one's friends. I thought that we might be expected to go out as if we'd been in church. I came only to bring my cousin. May I present Mr. Ashe; Mrs. Fenton."

"I was so glad that you said what you did this afternoon, Mr. Ashe," Mrs. Fenton said, extending her hand. "I felt just as you did, and I was rejoiced that somebody had the courage to protest against that dreadful paganism."

Philip was too shy and too enraptured to be able to reply intelligibly, but as they were borne forward by the tide of departing guests he was spared the need of answer. At the foot of the stairway he was stopped again by Maurice Wynne, and presented to Mrs. Staggchase, his friend's cousin and hostess for the time being; but his whole mind was taken up by the image of Mrs. Fenton, and in his ears like a refrain rang the words of the Persian hymn: "O thou, to the arch of whose eyebrow the new moon is a slave!"

II

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THERE BEGINS CONFUSION
Henry VI., iv. 1.

That afternoon at Mrs. Gore's had been no less significant to Maurice Wynne than to Philip Ashe. His was a less spiritual, less highly wrought nature, but in the effect which the change from the atmosphere of the Clergy House to the Persian's lecture had upon him, the experience of Maurice was much the same. He too was attracted by a woman. He gave his thoughts up to the woman much more frankly than would have been possible for his friend. She was young, perhaps twenty, and exquisite with clear skin and soft, warm coloring. Her wide-open eyes were as dark and velvety as the broad petals of a pansy with the dew still on

them; her cheeks were tinged with a hue like that which spreads in a glass of pure water into which has fallen a drop of red wine; her forehead was low and white, and from it her hair sprang up in two little arches before it fell waving away over her temples; her lips were pouting and provokingly suggestive of kisses. The whole face was of the type which comes so near to the ideal that the least sentimentality of expression would have spoiled it. Happily the big eyes and the ripe, red mouth were both suggestive of demure humor. There was a mirthful air about the dimple which came and went in the left cheek like Cupid peeping mischievously from the folds of his mother's robe. A boa of long-haired black fur lay carelessly about her neck, pushed back so that a touch of red and gold brocade showed where she had loosened her coat. Maurice noted that she seemed to care as little for the lecture as he did, and he gave himself up to the delight of watching her.

When the company broke up Mrs. Staggchase spoke almost immediately to the beautiful creature who so charmed him.

"How do you do, Miss Morison," Mrs. Staggchase said; "I must say that I am surprised that cousin Anna brought you to a place where the doctrine is so far removed from mind-cure. My dear Anna," she continued, turning to a lady whom Wynne knew by name as Mrs. Frostwinch and as an attendant at the Church of the Nativity, "you are a living miracle. You know you are dead, and you have no business consorting with the living in this way."

"It is those whom you call dead that are really living," Mrs. Frostwinch retorted smiling. "I brought Berenice so that

she might see the vanity of it all."

Mrs. Staggchase presented Maurice to the ladies, and after they had spoken on the stairs with one and another acquaintance, and Maurice had exchanged a word with his friend Ashe, it chanced that the four left the house together. Wynne found himself behind with Miss Morison, while his cousin and Mrs. Frostwinch walked on in advance. He was seized with a delightful sense of elation at his position, yet so little was he accustomed to society that he knew not what to say to her. He was keenly aware that she was glancing askance at his garb, and after a moment of silence he broke out abruptly in the most naively unconscious fashion:—

"I am a novice at the Clergy House of St. Mark."

A beautiful color flushed up in Miss Morison's dark cheek; and Wynne realized how unconventional he had been in replying to a question which had not been spoken.

"Is it a Catholic order?" she asked, with an evident effort not to look confused.

"It is not Roman," he responded. "We believe that it is catholic."

"Oh," said she vaguely; and the conversation lapsed.

They walked a moment in silence, and then Maurice made another effort.

"Has Mrs. Frostwinch been ill?" he asked. "Mrs. Staggchase spoke of her as a miracle."

"Ill!" echoed Miss Morison; "she has been wholly given up by the physicians. She has some horrible internal trouble; and a consultation of the best doctors in town decided that she could not live a week. That was two months ago."

"But I don't understand," he said in surprise. "What happened?"

"A miracle," the other replied smiling. "You believe in miracles, of course."

"But what sort of a miracle?"

"Faith-cure."

"Faith-cure!" repeated he in astonishment. "Do you mean that Mrs.
Frostwinch has been raised from a death-bed by that sort of jugglery?"

His companion shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't think it would raise you in her estimation if she heard you. The facts are as I tell you. She dismissed her doctors when they said they could do nothing for her, and took into her house a mind-cure woman, a Mrs. Crapps. Some power has put her on her feet. Wouldn't you do the same thing in her place?"

Wynne looked bewildered at Mrs. Frostwinch walking before him in a shimmer of Boston respectability. He had an uneasy feeling that he was passing from one pitfall to another. He was keenly conscious of the richness of the voice of the girl by his side, so that he felt that it was not easy for him to disagree with anything which she said. He let her remark pass without reply.

"For my part," she went on frankly, "I don't in the least believe in the thing as a matter of theory; but practically I have a superstition about it, because I've seen Cousin Anna. She was helpless, in agony, dying; and now she is as well as I am. If I were ill"—

She broke off with a pretty little gesture as they came within hearing of the others, who had halted at Mrs. Frostwinch's gate. Wynne said good-by absently, and went on his way down the hill like a man in a dream.

"Well," Mrs. Staggchase said, "you have seen one of Boston's ethical debauches; what do you think of it?"

"It was confusing," he returned. "I couldn't make out what it was for."

"For? To amuse us. We are the children of the Puritans, you know, and have inherited a twist toward the ethical and the supernatural so strong that we have to have these things served up even in our amusements."

"Then I think that it is wicked," Maurice said.

"Oh, no; we must not be narrow. It isn't wrong to amuse one's self; and if we play with the religion of the Persians, why is it worse than to play with the mythologies of the Greeks or Romans? You wouldn't think it any harm to jest about classical theology."

Wynne turned toward her with a smile on his strong, handsome face.

"Why do you try to tangle me up in words?" he asked.

Mrs. Staggchase did not turn toward him, but looked before with face entirely unchanged as she replied:—

"I am not trying to entangle you in words, but if I were it would be all part of the play. You are undergoing your period of temptation. I am the tempter in default of a better. In the old fashion of temptations it wouldn't do to have the tempter old and plain. Then you were expected to fall in love; now we deal in snares more subtle."

Maurice laughed, but somewhat unmirthfully. There was to him something bewildering and worldly about his cousin; and he had come to feel that he could never be at all sure where in the end the most harmless beginning of talk might lead him.

"What then is the modern way of temptation?" he inquired.

"It shows how much faith we have in its power," she replied, as they waited on the corner of Charles Street for a carriage to pass, "that I don't in the least mind giving you full warning. Did you know the lady in that carriage, by the way?"

"It was Mrs. Wilson, wasn't it?"

"Yes; Mrs. Chauncy Wilson. You have seen her at the Church of the
Nativity, I suppose. She is one phase of the temptation."

"I don't in the least understand."

"I didn't in the least suppose that you would. You will in time. My part of the temptation is to show you all sorts of ethical jugglery, the spiritual and intellectual gymnastics such as the Bostonians love; to persuade you that all religion is only a sort of pastime, and that the particular high-church sort which you especially affect is but one of a great many entertaining ways of killing time."

"Cousin Diana!" he exclaimed, genuinely shocked.

"I hope that you understand," she continued unmoved. "I shall exhibit a very pretty collection of fads to you if we see them all."

"But suppose," he said slowly, "that I refused to go with you?"

"But you won't," returned she, with that curious smile which always teased him with its suggestion of irony. "In the first place you couldn't be so impolite as to refuse me. A woman may always lead a man into questionable paths if she puts it to his sense of chivalry not to desert her. In the second, the spirit of the age is a good deal stronger in you than you realize, and the truth is that you wouldn't be left behind for anything. In the third, you could hardly be so cowardly as to run away from the temptation that is to prove whether you were really born to be a priest."

"That was decided when I entered the Clergy House."

"Nonsense; nothing of the sort, my dear boy. The only thing that was decided then was that you thought you were. Wait and see our ethical and religious raree-shows. We had the Persian to-day; to-morrow I'm to take you to a spiritualist sitting at Mrs. Rangely's. She hates to have me come, so I mustn't miss that. Then there are the mind-cure, Theosophy, and a dozen other things; not to mention the semi-irreligions, like Nationalism. You will be as the gods, knowing good and evil, by the time we are half way round the circle,—though it is perhaps somewhat doubtful if you know them apart."

She spoke in her light, railing way, as if the matter were one of the smallest possible consequence, and yet Wynne grew every moment more and more uncomfortable. He had never seen his cousin in just this mood, and could not tell whether she were mocking him or warning him. He seized upon the first pretext which presented itself to his mind, and endeavored to change the subject.

"Who is Mrs. Rangely?" he asked. "A medium?"

"Oh, bless you, no. She is not so bad as a medium; she is only a New Yorker. Do you think we'd go to real mediums? Although," she added, "there are plenty who do go. I think that it is shocking bad form."

"But you speak as if"—

"As if spiritualism were one of the recognized ethical games, that's all. It is played pretty well at Mrs. Rangely's, I'm told. They say that the little Mrs. Singleton she's got hold of is very clever."

"Mrs. Singleton," Maurice repeated, "why, it can't be Alice, brother John's widow, can it? She married a Singleton for a second husband, and she claimed to be a medium."

"Did she really? It will be amusing if you find your relatives in the business."

"She wasn't a very close relative. John was only my half-brother, you know, and he lived but six months after he married her. She is clever enough and tricky enough to be capable of anything."

"Well," Mrs. Staggchase said, as they turned in at her door, "if it is she it will give you an excellent chance to do missionary work."

They entered the wide, handsome hall, and with an abrupt movement the hostess turned toward her cousin.

"I assure you," she said, "that I am in earnest about your temptation. I want to see what sort of stuff you are made of, and I give you fair warning. Now go and read your breviary, or whatever it is that you sham monks read, while I have tea and then rest before I dress."

Maurice had no reply to offer. He watched in silence as she passed up the broad stairway, smiling to herself as she

went. He followed slowly a moment later, and seeking his room remained plunged in a reverie at which the severe walls of the Clergy House might have been startled; a reverie disquieted, changing, half-fearful; and yet through which with strange fascination came a longing to see more of the surprising world into which chance had introduced him, and above all to meet again the dark, glowing girl with whom he had that afternoon walked.

III

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AS FALSE AS STAIRS OF SAND
Merchant of Venice, v. 2.

It was cold and gray next morning when Maurice took his way toward a Catholic church in the North End. He had been there before for confession, and had been not a little elated in his secret heart that he had been able to go through the act of confession and to receive absolution without betraying the fact that he was not a Romanist. He had studied the forms of confession, the acts of contrition, and whatever was necessary to the part, and for some months had gone on in this singular course. To his Superior at the Clergy House he confessed the same sins, but Maurice had a feeling that the absolution of the Roman priest was more effective than that of his own church. He was not conscious

of any intention of becoming a Catholic, but there was a fascination in playing at being one; and Wynne, who could not understand how the folk of Boston could play with ethical truths, was yet able thus to juggle with religion with no misgiving.

This morning he enjoyed the spiritual intoxication of the confessional as never before. He half consciously allowed himself to dwell upon the image of the beautiful Miss Morison to the end that he might the more effectively pour out his contrition for that sin. He was so eloquent in the confessional that he admired himself both for his penitence and for the words in which he set it forth. He floated as it were in a sea of mingled sensuousness and repentance, and he hoped that the penance imposed would be heavy enough to show that the priest had been impressed with the magnitude of the sin of which he had been guilty in allowing his thoughts, consecrated to the holy life of the priesthood, to dwell upon a woman.

It was one of those absurd anomalies of which life is full that while Maurice sometimes slighted a little the penances imposed by his own Superior, he had never in the least abated the rigor of any laid upon him by the Catholic priest. It was perhaps that he felt his honor concerned in the latter case. This morning the penance was satisfactorily heavy, and he came out of the church with a buoyant step, full of a certain boyish elation. He had a fresh and delightful sense of the reality of religion now that he had actually sinned and been forgiven.

Next to being forgiven for a sin there is perhaps nothing more satisfactory than to repeat the transgression, and if

Maurice had not formulated this fact in theory he was to be acquainted with it in practice. As he walked along in the now bright forenoon, filled with the enjoyment of moral cleanness, he suddenly started with the thrill of delicious temptation. Just before him a lady had come around a corner, and was walking quietly along, in whom at a glance he recognized Miss Morison. There came into his cheek, which even his double penances had not made thin, a flush of pleasure. He quickened his steps, and in a moment had overtaken her.

"Good morning," he said, raising his ecclesiastical hat with an air which savored somewhat of worldliness. "Isn't it a beautiful day?"

She started at his salutation, but instantly recognized him.

"Good morning," she responded. "I didn't expect to find anybody I knew in this part of the town."

"It isn't one where young ladies as a rule walk for pleasure, I suppose," Maurice said, falling into step, and walking beside her.

"I am very sure that I don't," Miss Morison replied with a toss of her head. "I do it because I was bullied into being a visitor for the Associated Charities, and I go once a week to tell some poor folk down here that I am no better than they are. They know that I don't believe it, and I have my doubts if they even believe it themselves, only they wouldn't be foolish enough to prevaricate about it. Oh, it's a great and noble work that I'm engaged in!"

There was something exhilarating about her as she tossed her pretty head. Wynne laughed without knowing

just why, except that she intoxicated him with delight.

"You don't speak of your work with much enthusiasm," said he.

"Enthusiasm!" she retorted. "Why should I? It's abominable. I hate it, the people I visit hate it, and there's nobody pleased but the managers, who can set down so many more visits paid to the worthy poor, and make a better showing in their annual report. For my part I am tired of the worthy poor; and if I must keep on slumming, I'd like to try the unworthy poor a while. I'm sure they'd be more interesting."

She spoke with a pretty air of recklessness, as if she were conscious that this was not the strain in which to address one of his cloth. There was not a little vexation under her lightness of manner, however, and Wynne was not so dull as not to perceive that something had gone amiss.

"But philanthropy," he began, "is surely"—

"Your cousin," she interrupted, "declares that only the eye of Omniscience can possibly distinguish between what passes for philanthropy and what is sheer egotism."

He laughed in spite of himself, feeling that he ought to be shocked.

"But what," he asked, "has impressed this view of things upon you this morning in particular?"

His companion made a droll little gesture with both her hands.

"Of course I show it," she said; "though you needn't have reminded me that I have lost my temper."

"I beg your pardon," began Maurice in confusion, "I"—

"Oh, you haven't done anything wrong," she interrupted, "the trouble is entirely with me. I've been making a fool of myself at the instigation of the powers that rule over my charitable career, and I don't like the feeling."

They walked on a moment without further speech. Maurice said to himself with a thrill of contrition that he would double the penance laid upon him, and he endeavored not to be conscious of the thought which followed that the delight of this companionship was worth the price which he should thus pay for it.

"This is what happened," Miss Morison said at length. "I don't quite know whether to laugh or to cry with vexation. There's a poor widow who has had all sorts of trials and tribulations. Indeed, she's been a miracle of ill luck ever since I began to have the honor to assure her weekly that I'm no better than she is. It may be that the fib isn't lucky."

She turned to flash a bright glance into the face of her companion as she spoke, and he tried to clear away the look of gravity so quickly that she might not perceive it.

"Oh," she cried; "now I have shocked you! I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it."

"No," he replied, "you didn't really shock me. It only seemed to me a pity that you should be working with so little heart and under direction that doesn't seem entirely wise."

"Wise!" she echoed scornfully. "There's a benevolent gentleman who insisted upon giving this old woman five dollars. It was all against the rules of the Associated Charities, for which he said he didn't care a fig. That's the advantage of being a man! And what do you think the old