

**THE
BECKONING HAND:**

Professor Milliter's Dilemma

**By
Grant Allen**

1887

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PROFESSOR MILLITER'S DILEMMA.

The Gospel Evangelists were naturally very proud of Professor Milliter. A small and despised sect, with not many great, not many rich, not many noble among them, they could comfort themselves at least with the reflection that they numbered in their fold one of the most learned and justly famous of modern English scientific thinkers. It is true, their place of meeting at Mortiscombe was but an upper chamber in a small cottage; their local congregation consisted of hardly more than three score members; and their nickname among their orthodox churchy neighbours was the very opprobrious and very ridiculous one of "the Shivering Ranters." Still, the Gospel Evangelists felt it was a great privilege to be permitted the ministrations of so learned and eloquent a preacher as Professor Milliter. The rector of the parish was an Oxford M.A., of the usual decorously stereotyped conventional patter; but in point even of earthly knowledge and earthly consideration, said the congregation at Patmos Chapel, "he is not worthy to unloose the latchet of our pastor's shoe." For Professor Milliter was universally allowed to be the greatest living authority in England on comparative anatomy, the rising successor of Cuvier, and Owen, and Milne-Edwards, and Carpenter, in the general knowledge of animal structure.

Mortiscombe, as everybody knows, is the favourite little suburban watering-place, close by the busy streets and noisy wharves of a great English manufacturing centre. It is at Mortiscombe that the Western Counties College of Science is situated, away from the smoke and bustle of the whirring city: and it was in the Western Counties College of Science that Cyril Milliter ably filled the newly founded chair of Comparative Anatomy. When he was first appointed, indeed, people grumbled a little at the idea of a Professor at the College undertaking every Sunday to preach in a common conventicle to a low assembly of vulgar fanatics, as in their charitable Christian fashion they loved to call the Gospel Evangelists. But Cyril Milliter was a man of character and determination: he had fully made up his own mind upon theological questions; and having once cast in his lot with the obscure sect of Gospel Evangelists, to which his parents had belonged before him, he was not to be turned aside from his purpose by the coarse gibes of the ordinary public or the cynical incredulity of more cultivated but scarcely more tolerant polite society. "Not a Gospel Evangelist really and truly: you must surely be joking, Mr. Milliter," young ladies said to him at evening parties with undisguised astonishment; "why, they're just a lot of ignorant mill-hands, you know, who meet together in an upper room somewhere down in Ford's Passage to hear sermons from some ignorant lay

preacher.”

“Quite so,” Cyril Milliter would answer quietly; “and *I* am the ignorant lay preacher who has been appointed to deliver those sermons to them. I was brought up among the Gospel Evangelists as a child, and now that I am a man my mature judgment has made me still continue among them.”

Mortiscombe is well known to be a very advanced and liberal-minded place; so, after a time, people ceased to talk about the curious singularity of Cyril Milliter’s Sunday occupation. All through the week the young professor lectured to his class on dry bones and the other cheerful stock-in-trade of his own department; and on Sundays he walked down erect, Bible in hand, to his little meeting-room, and there fervently expounded the Word, as it approved itself to his soul and conscience, before the handful of earnest artisans who composed his faithful but scanty congregation. A fiery and enthusiastic preacher was Cyril Milliter, devoured with zeal for what seemed to him the right doctrine. “There is only one thing worth living for in this fallen world,” he used to say to his little group of attentive hearers, “and that is Truth. Truth, as it reveals itself in the book of nature, must be our quest during the working week: Truth, as it reveals itself in the written Word, must be our quest on these happy blessed seventh-day Sabbaths.” There was a high eager light in his eye as he spoke, mingled with a clear intellectual honesty in his sharply cut features, which gave at once the stamp of reality to that plain profession of his simple, manly, earnest creed.

One other subject, however, beside the pursuit of truth, just at that moment deeply interested Cyril Milliter; and that subject assumed bodily form in the pretty little person of Netta Leaworthy. Right in front of Cyril, as he expounded the Word every Sunday morning, sat a modest, demure, dimpled English girl, with a complexion like a blushing apple-blossom, and a mouth like the sunny side of a white-heart cherry. She was only the daughter of an intelligent mill-hand, a foreman at one of the great factories in the neighbouring city, was dainty, white-fingered, sweet-voiced little Netta; but there was a Puritan freshness and demureness and simplicity about her that fairly won the heart of the enthusiastic young professor. Society at Mortiscombe had made itself most agreeable to Cyril Milliter, in spite of his heterodoxy, as Society always does to eligible young bachelors of good education; and it had thrown its daughters decorously in his way, by asking him to all its dinners, dances, and at-homes, with most profuse and urgent hospitality. But in spite of all the wiles of the most experienced among Society’s mothers, Cyril Milliter had positively had the bad taste to fix his choice at last upon nobody better than simple, unaffected, charming little Netta.

For one sunny Sunday morning, after worship, Cyril had turned out into the fields behind the Common, for a quiet stroll among the birds and flowers: when, close by the stile in the upper meadow, he came unexpectedly upon Netta Leaworthy, alone upon the grass with her own fancies. She was pulling an ox-eye daisy carelessly to pieces as he passed, and he stopped a minute unperceived beside the hedge, to watch her deft fingers taking out one ray after another quickly from the blossom to the words of a foolish childish charm. Netta blushed crimson when she saw she was observed at that silly pastime, and Cyril thought to himself he had never seen anything in his life more lovely than the blushing girl at that moment. Learned and educated as he was, he had sprung himself from among the ranks of the many, and his heart was with them still rather than with the rich, the noble, and the mighty. "I will never marry among the daughters of Heth," he said to himself gently, as he paused beside her: "I will take to myself rather a wife and a helpmate from among the Lord's own chosen people."

"Ah, Miss Leaworthy," he went on aloud, smiling sympathetically at her embarrassment, "you are following up the last relics of a dying superstition, are you? 'One for money, two for health, three for love, and four for wealth.' Is that how the old saw goes? I thought so. And which of the four blessings now has your daisy promised you I wonder?"

The tone he spoke in was so very different from that which he had just been using in the chapel at worship that Netta felt instinctively what it foreboded; and her heart fluttered tremulously as she answered in the quietest voice she could command, "I haven't finished it yet, Mr. Milliter; I have made five rounds already, and have a lot of rays left still in the middle of the daisy."

Cyril took it from her, laughingly, and went on with the rhyme—his conscience upbraiding him in an undertone of feeling meanwhile for such an unworthy paltering with old-world superstition—till he had gone twice round the spell, and finished abruptly with "Three for love!" "Love it is!" he cried gaily. "A good omen! Miss Leaworthy, we none of us love superstition: but perhaps after all it is something more than that; there may be a Hand guiding us from above, even in these everyday trifles! We must never forget, you know, that every hair of our heads is numbered."

Netta's heart fluttered still more violently within her as he looked at her so closely. Could it be that really, in spite of everything, the great, learned, good, clever young professor was going to ask her to be his wife? Netta had listened to him with joy Sunday after Sunday from his simple platform pulpit, and had felt in her heart that no man never expounded the gospel of love as beautifully as he did. She had fancied sometimes—girls cannot help fancying, be they as modest and retiring as they may—

that he really did like her just a little. And she—she had admired and wondered at him from a distance. But she could hardly believe even now that that little vague day-dream which had sometimes floated faintly before her eyes was going to be actually realized in good earnest. She could answer nothing, her heart beat so; but she looked down to the ground with a flushed and frightened look which was more eloquent in its pretty simplicity than all the resources of the most copious language.

Cyril Milliter's mind, however, was pretty well made up already on this important matter, and he had been waiting long for just such an opportunity of asking Netta whether she could love him. And now, even without asking her, he could feel at once by some subtle inner sense that his eager question was answered beforehand, and that modest, maidenly little Netta Leaworthy was quite prepared to love him dearly.

For a moment he stood there looking at her intently, and neither of them spoke. Then Netta raised her eyes from the ground for a second's flash; and Cyril's glance caught hers one instant before she bent them down again in haste to play nervously with the mangled daisy. "Netta," he said, the name thrilling through his very marrow as he uttered it, "Netta, I love you."

She stood irresolute for a while, listening to the beating of her own heart, and then her eye caught his once more, timidly, but she spoke never a syllable.

Cyril took her wee white hand in his—a lady's hand, if ever you saw one—and raised it with chivalrous tenderness to his lips. Netta allowed him to raise it and kiss it without resistance. "Then you will let me love you?" he asked quickly. Netta still did not answer, but throwing herself back on the bank by the hedgerow began to cry like a frightened child.

Cyril sat down, all tremulous beside her, took the white hand unresisted in his, and said to her gently, "Oh, Netta, what is this for?"

Then Netta answered with an effort, through her tears, "Mr. Milliter, Mr. Milliter, how can you ever tell me of this?"

"Why not, Netta? Why not, my darling? May I not ask you to be my wife? Will you have me, Netta?"

Netta looked at him timidly, with another blush, and said slowly, "No, Mr. Milliter; I cannot. I must not."

"Why not, Netta? Oh, why not? Tell me a reason."

"Because it wouldn't be right. Because it wouldn't be fair to you. Because it wouldn't be true of me. You ought to marry a lady—some one in your own rank of life, you know. It would be wrong to tie your future down to a poor nameless nobody like me, when you might marry—marry—almost any lady you chose in all

Mortiscombe.”

“Netta, you pain me. You are wronging me. You know I care nothing for such gewgaws as birth or wealth or rank or station. I would not marry one of those ladies even if she asked me. And, as to my own position in life, why, Netta, my position is yours. My parents were poor God-fearing people, like your parents; and if you will not love me, then, Netta, Netta, I say it solemnly, I will never, never marry anybody.”

Netta answered never a word; but, as any other good girl would do in her place, once more burst into a flood of tears, and looked at him earnestly from her swimming eyes in speechless doubt and trepidation.

Perhaps it was wrong of Cyril Milliter—on a Sunday, and in the public pathway too—but he simply put his strong arm gently round her waist, and kissed her a dozen times over fervidly without let or hindrance.

Then Netta put him away from her, not too hastily, but with a lingering hesitation, and said once more, “But, Mr. Milliter, I can never marry you. You will repent of this yourself by-and-by at your leisure. Just think, how could I ever marry you, when I should always be too frightened of you to call you anything but ‘Mr. Milliter!’”

“Why, Netta,” cried the young professor, with a merry laugh, “if that’s all, you’ll soon learn to call me, ‘Cyril.’”

“To call you ‘Cyril,’ Mr. Milliter! Oh dear, no, never. Why, I’ve looked at you so often in meeting, and felt so afraid of you, because you were so learned, and wise, and terrible: and I’m sure I should never learn to call you by your Christian name, whatever happened.”

“And as you can’t do that, you won’t marry me! I’m delighted to hear it, Netta—delighted to hear it; for if that’s the best reason you can conjure up against the match, I don’t think, little one, I shall find it very hard to talk you over.”

“But, Mr. Milliter, are you quite sure you won’t regret it yourself hereafter? Are you quite sure you won’t repent, when you find Society doesn’t treat you as it did, for my sake? Are you quite sure nothing will rise up hereafter between us, no spectre of class difference, or class prejudice, to divide our lives and make us unhappy?”

“Never!” Cyril Milliter answered, seizing both her hands in his eagerly, and looking up with an instinctive glance to the open heaven above them as witness. “Never, Netta, as long as I live and you live, shall any shadow of such thought step in for one moment to put us asunder.”

And Netta, too proud and pleased to plead against her own heart any longer, let him kiss her once again a lover’s kiss, and pressed his hand in answer timidly, and walked back with him blushing towards Mortiscombe, his affianced bride before the face of high heaven.

When Society at Mortiscombe first learnt that that clever young Professor Milliter was really going to marry the daughter of some factory foreman, Society commented frankly upon the matter according to the various idiosyncrasies and temperaments of its component members. Some of it was incredulous; some of it was shocked; some of it was cynical; some of it was satirical; and some of it, shame to say, was spitefully free with suggested explanations for such very strange and unbecoming conduct. But Cyril Milliter himself was such a transparently honest and straightforward man, that, whenever the subject was alluded to in his presence, he shamed the cynicism and the spitefulness of Society by answering simply, "Yes, I'm going to marry a Miss Leaworthy, a very good and sweet girl, the daughter of the foreman at the Tube Works, who is a great friend of mine and a member of my little Sunday congregation." And, somehow, when once Cyril Milliter had said that in his quiet natural way to anybody, however cynical, the somebody never cared to talk any more gossip thenceforward for ever on the subject of the professor's forthcoming marriage.

Indeed, so fully did the young professor manage to carry public sentiment with him in the end, that when the wedding-day actually arrived, almost every carriage in all Mortiscombe was drawn up at the doors of the small chapel where the ceremony was performed; and young Mrs. Milliter had more callers during the first fortnight after her honeymoon than she knew well how to accommodate in their tiny drawing-room. In these matters, Society never takes any middle course. Either it disapproves of a "mixed marriage" altogether, in which case it crushes the unfortunate offender sternly under its iron heel; or else it rapturously adopts the bride into its own magic circle, in which case she immediately becomes a distinct somebody, in virtue of the very difference of original rank, and is invited everywhere with *empressement* as a perfect acquisition to the local community. This last was what happened with poor simple blushing little Netta, who found herself after a while so completely championed by all Mortiscombe that she soon fell into her natural place in the college circle as if to the manner born. All nice girls, of whatever class, are potentially ladies (which is more than one can honestly say for all women of the upper ranks), and after a very short time Netta became one of the most popular young married women in all Mortiscombe. When once Society had got over its first disappointment because Cyril Milliter had not rather married one of its own number, it took to Netta with the greatest cordiality. After all, there is something so very romantic, you know, in a gentleman marrying a foreman's daughter; and something so very nice and liberal, too, in one's own determination to treat her accordingly in every way like a perfect equal.

And yet, happy as she was, Netta could never be absolutely free from a pressing fear, a doubt that Cyril might not repent his choice, and feel sorry in the end for not having married a real lady. That fear pursued her through all her little triumph, and almost succeeded in making her half jealous of Cyril whenever she saw him talking at all earnestly (and he was very apt to be earnest) with other women. "They know so much more than I do," she thought to herself often; "he must feel so much more at home with them, naturally, and be able to talk to them about so many things that he can never possibly talk about with poor little me." Poor girl, it never even occurred to her that from the higher standpoint of a really learned man like Cyril Milliter the petty smattering of French and strumming of the piano, wherein alone these grand girls actually differed from her, were mere useless surface accomplishments, in no way affecting the inner intelligence or culture, which were the only things that Cyril regarded in any serious light as worthy of respect or admiration. As a matter of fact, Netta had learnt infinitely more from her Bible, her English books, her own heart, and surrounding nature, than any of these well-educated girls had learnt from their parrot-trained governesses; and she was infinitely better fitted than any of them to be a life companion for such a man as Cyril Milliter.

For the first seven or eight months of Netta's married life all went smoothly enough with the young professor and his pretty wife. But at the end of that time an event came about which gave Netta a great deal of unhappiness, and caused her for the very first time since she had ever known him to have serious doubts about Cyril's affection. And this was just how it all happened.

One Sunday morning, in the upper chamber at Patmos, Cyril had announced himself to preach a discourse in opposition to sundry wicked scientific theories which were then just beginning seriously to convulse the little world of religious Mortiscombe. Those were the days when Darwin's doctrine of evolution had lately managed to filter down little by little to the level of unintelligent society; and the inquiring working-men who made up Cyril Milliter's little congregation in the upper chamber were all eagerly reading the "Origin of Species" and the "Descent of Man." As for Cyril himself, in his austere fashion, he doubted whether any good could come even of considering such heterodox opinions. They were plainly opposed to the Truth, he held, both to the Truth as expressed in the written Word, and to the Truth as he himself clearly read it in the great open book of nature. This evolution they talked about so glibly was a dream, a romance, a mere baseless figment of the poor fallible human imagination; all the plain facts of science and of revelation were utterly irreconcilable with it, and in five years' time it would be comfortably dead and buried for ever, side by side with a great load of such other vague and hypothetical

rubbish. He could hardly understand, for his part, how sensible men could bother their heads about such nonsense for a single moment. Still, as many of his little flock had gone to hear a brilliant young lecturer who came down from London last week to expound the new doctrine at the Literary and Philosophical Institute, and as they had been much shaken in their faith by the lecturer's sophistical arguments and obvious misrepresentations of scientific principles, he would just lay before them plainly what science had to say in opposition to these fantastic and immature theorists. So on Sunday morning next, with Bible in one hand and roll of carefully executed diagrams in the other (for Cyril Milliter was no conventional formalist, afraid of shocking the sense of propriety in his congregation), he went down in militant guise to the upper chamber and delivered a fervent discourse, intended to smite the Darwinians hip and thigh with the arms of the Truth—both Scriptural and scientific—to slay the sophists outright with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon.

Cyril took for his text a single clause from the twenty-first verse of the first chapter of Genesis—"Every winged fowl after his kind." That, he said impressively, was the eternal and immutable Truth upon the matter. He would confine his attention that morning entirely to this one aspect of the case—the creation of the class of birds. "In the beginning," the Word told us, every species of bird had been created as we now see it, perfect and fully organized after its own kind. There was no room here for their boasted "development," or their hypothetical "evolution." The Darwinians would fain force upon them some old wife's tale about a monstrous lizard which gradually acquired wings and feathers, till at last, by some quaint Ovidian metamorphosis (into such childish heathenism had we finally relapsed), it grew slowly into the outward semblance of a crow or an ostrich. But that was not what the Truth told them. On the fourth day of creation, simultaneously with the fish and every living creature that moveth in the ocean, the waters brought forth "fowl that might fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." Such on this subject was the plain and incontrovertible statement of the inspired writer in the holy Scripture.

And now, how did science confirm this statement, and scatter at once to the winds the foolish, brain-spun cobwebs of our windy, vaporous, modern evolutionists? These diagrams which he held before him would sufficiently answer that important question. He would show them that there was no real community of structure in any way between the two classes of birds and reptiles. Let them observe the tail, the wings, the feathers, the breast-bone, the entire anatomy, and they would see at once that Darwin's ridiculous, ill-digested theory was wholly opposed to all the plain and demonstrable facts of nature. It was a very learned discourse, certainly;

very crushing, very overwhelming, very convincing (when you heard one side only), and not Netta alone, but the whole congregation of intelligent, inquiring artisans as well, was utterly carried away by its logic, its clearness, and its eloquent rhetoric. Last of all, Cyril Milliter raised his two white hands solemnly before him, and uttered thus his final peroration.

“In conclusion, what proof can they offer us of their astounding assertions?” he asked, almost contemptuously. “Have they a single fact, a single jot or tittle of evidence to put in on this matter, as against the universal voice of authoritative science, from the days of Aristotle, of Linnæus, or of Cuvier, to the days of Owen, of Lyell, and of Carpenter? Not one! Whenever they can show me, living or fossil, an organism which unites in itself in any degree whatsoever the characteristics of birds and reptiles—an organism which has at once teeth and feathers; or which has a long lizard-like tail and true wings; or which combines the anatomical peculiarities I have here assigned to the one class with the anatomical peculiarities I have here assigned to the other: then, and then only, will I willingly accede to their absurd hypothesis. But they have not done it. They cannot do it. They will never do it. A great gulf eternally separates the two classes. A vast gap intervenes impassably between them. That gulf will never be lessened, that gap will never be bridged over, until Truth is finally confounded with falsehood, and the plain facts of nature and the Word are utterly forgotten in favour of the miserable, inconsistent figments of the poor fallible human imagination.”

As they walked home from worship that morning, Netta felt she had never before so greatly admired and wondered at her husband. How utterly he had crushed the feeble theory of these fanciful system-mongers, how clearly he had shown the absolute folly of their presumptuous and arrogant nonsense! Netta could not avoid telling him so, with a flush of honest pride in her beautiful face: and Cyril flushed back immediately with conscious pleasure at her wifely trust and confidence. But he was tired with the effort, he said, and must go for a little walk alone in the afternoon: a walk among the fields and the Downs, where he could commune by himself with the sights and sounds of truth-telling nature. Netta was half-piqued, indeed, that he should wish even so to go without her; but she said nothing: and so after their early dinner, Cyril started away abstractedly by himself, and took the lane behind the village that led up by steep inclines on to the heavy moorland with its fresh bracken and its purple heather.

As he walked along hastily, his mind all fiery-full of bones and fossils, he came at last to the oolite quarry on the broken hillside. Feeling tired, he turned in to rest awhile in the shade on one of the great blocks of building stone hewn out by the

workmen; and by way of occupation he began to grub away with his knife, half-unconsciously as he sat, at a long flat slab of slaty shale that projected a little from the sheer face of the fresh cutting. As he did so, he saw marks of something very like a bird's feather on its upper surface. The sight certainly surprised him a little. "Birds in the oolite," he said to himself quickly; "it's quite impossible! Birds in the oolite! this is quite a new departure. Besides, such a soft thing as a feather could never conceivably be preserved in the form of a fossil."

Still, the queer object interested him languidly, by its odd and timely connection with the subject of his morning sermon; and he looked at it again a little more closely. By Jove, yes, it *was* a feather, not a doubt in the world of that now; he could see distinctly the central shaft of a tail-quill, and the little barbed branches given off regularly on either side of it. The shale on which it was impressed was a soft, light-brown mudstone; in fact, a fragment of lithographic slate, exactly like that employed by lithographers for making pictures. He could easily see how the thing had happened; the bird had fallen into the soft mud, long ages since, before the shale had hardened, and the form of its feathers had been distinctly nature-printed, while it was still moist, upon its plastic surface. But a bird in the oolite! that was a real discovery; and, as the Gospel Evangelists were no Sabbatarians, Cyril did not scruple in the pursuit of Truth to dig away at the thin slab with his knife, till he egged it out of the rock by dexterous side pressure, and laid it triumphantly down at last for further examination on the big stone that stood before him.

Gazing in the first delight of discovery at his unexpected treasure, he saw in a moment that it was a very complete and exquisitely printed fossil. So perfect a pictorial representation of an extinct animal he had never seen before in his whole lifetime; and for the first moment or two he had no time to do anything else but admire silently the exquisite delicacy and extraordinary detail of this natural etching. But after a minute, the professional interest again asserted itself, and he began to look more carefully into the general nature of its curious and unfamiliar anatomical structure.

As he looked, Cyril Milliter felt a horrible misgiving arise suddenly within him. The creature at which he was gazing so intently was not a bird, it was a lizard. And yet—no—it was not a lizard—it was a bird. "Why—these are surely feathers—yes, tail feathers—quite unmistakable. . . . But they are not arranged in a regular fan; the quills stand in pairs, one on each side of each joint in a long tail, for all the world exactly like a lizard's. . . . Still, it must be a bird; for, see, these are wings . . . and that is certainly a bird's claw. . . . But here's the head; great heavens! what's this? . . . A jaw, with teeth in it. . . ." Cyril Milliter leaned back, distractedly, and held his

beating forehead between his two pale hands. To most scientific men it would have been merely the discovery of an interesting intermediate organism—something sure to make the reputation of a comparative anatomist; to him, it was an awful and sudden blow dealt unexpectedly from the most deadly quarter at all his deepest and most sacred principles. Religion, honour, Truth, the very fundamental basis of the universe itself—all that makes life worth living for, all that makes the world endurable—was bound up implicitly that moment for Cyril Milliter in the simple question whether the shadowy creature, printed in faint grey outline on the slab of shaly oolite before him, was or was not half bird and half lizard.

It may have been foolish of him: it may have been wrong: it may have been madness almost; but at that instant he felt dazzled and stunned by the crushing weight of the blow thus unexpectedly dealt at his whole preconceived theory of things, and at his entire mental scheme of science and theology. The universe seemed to swim aimlessly before him: he felt the solid ground knocked at once from beneath his feet, and found himself in one moment suspended alone above an awful abyss, a seething and tossing abyss of murky chaos. He had pinned all his tottering faith absolutely on that single frail support; and now the support had given way irretrievably beneath him, and blank atheism, nihilism, utter nothingness, stared him desperately in the face. In one minute, while he held his head tight between his two palms to keep it from bursting, and looked with a dull, glazed, vacant eye at the ghastly thing before him—only a few indistinct fossil bones, but to him the horriddest sight he had ever beheld—a whole world of ideas crowded itself on the instant into his teeming, swimming brain. If we could compress an infinity of thought into a single second, said Shelley once, that second would be eternity; and on the brink of such a compressed eternity Cyril Milliter was then idly sitting. It seemed to him, as he clasped his forehead tighter and tighter, that the Truth which he had been seeking, and for which he had been working and fighting so long, revealed itself to him now and there, at last, in concrete form, as a visible and tangible Lie. It was no mere petrified lizard that he saw beneath his eyes, but a whole ruined and shattered system of philosophic theology. His cosmogony was gone; his cosmos itself was dispersed and disjointed; creation, nay, the Creator Himself, seemed to fade away slowly into nonentity before him. He beheld dimly an awful vision of a great nebulous mist, drifting idly before the angry storm-cyclones of the masterless universe—drifting without a God or a ruler to guide it; bringing forth shapeless monstrosities one after another on its wrinkled surface; pregnant with ravine, and rapine, and cruelty; vast, powerful, illimitable, awful; but without one ray of light, one gleam of love, one hope of mercy, one hint of divine purpose anywhere to redeem it. It was the pessimistic nightmare of a

Lucretian system, translated hastily into terms of Cyril Milliter's own tottering and fading theosophy.

He took the thing up again into his trembling hands, and examined it a second time more closely. No, there could be no shadow of a doubt about it: his professional skill and knowledge told him that much in a single moment. Nor could he temporize and palter with the discovery, as some of his elder brethren would have been tempted to do; his brain was too young, and fresh, and vigorous, and logical not to permit of ready modification before the evidence of new facts. Come what might, he must be loyal to the Truth. This thing, this horrid thing that he held visibly before him, was a fact, a positive fact: a set of real bones, representing a real animal, that had once lived and breathed and flown about veritably upon this planet of ours, and that was yet neither a true bird nor a true lizard, but a half-way house and intermediate link between those two now widely divergent classes. Cyril Milliter's mind was at once too honest and too intelligent to leave room for any doubts, or evasions, or prevarications with itself upon that fundamental subject. He saw quite clearly and instantly that it was the very thing the possibility of whose existence he had so stoutly denied that self-same morning. And he could not go back upon his own words, "Whenever they show me an organism which unites in itself the characteristics of birds and reptiles, then, and then only, will I accede to their absurd hypothesis." The organism he had asked for lay now before him, and he knew himself in fact a converted evolutionist, encumbered with all the other hideous corollaries which his own peculiar logic had been accustomed to tack on mentally to that hated creed. He almost felt as if he ought in pure consistency to go off at once and murder somebody, as the practical outcome of his own theories. For had he not often boldly asserted that evolutionism was inconsistent with Theism, and that without Theism, any real morality or any true right-doing of any kind was absolutely impossible?

At last, after long sitting and anxious pondering, Cyril Milliter rose to go home, carrying a heavy heart along with him. And then the question began to press itself practically upon him, What could he ever do with this horrible discovery? His first impulse was to dash the thing to pieces against the rock, and go away stealthily, saying naught about the matter to any man. But his inborn reverence for the Truth made him shrink back in horror, a moment later, from this suggestion of Satan, as he thought it—this wicked notion of suppressing a most important and conclusive piece of scientific evidence. His next idea was simply to leave it where it was, thus shuffling off the responsibility of publishing it or destroying it upon the next comer who chanced by accident to enter the quarry. After all, he said to himself, hypocritically,

he wasn't absolutely bound to tell anybody else a word about it; he could leave it there, and it would be in much the same position, as far as science was concerned, as it would have been if he hadn't happened to catch sight of it accidentally as it lay that morning in the mother stone. But again his conscience told him next moment that such casuistry was dishonest and unworthy; he had found the thing, and, come what might, he ought to abide by the awful consequences. If he left it lying there in the quarry, one of the workmen would probably smash it up carelessly with a blow of his pick to-morrow morning—this unique survivor of a forgotten world—and to abandon it to such a fate as that would be at least as wicked as to break it to pieces himself of set purpose, besides being a great deal more sneakish and cowardly. No, whatever else he did, it was at any rate his plain duty to preserve the specimen, and to prevent it from being carelessly or wilfully destroyed.

On the other hand, he couldn't bear, either, to display it openly, and thereby become, as the matter envisaged itself to his mind, a direct preacher of evolutionism—that is to say, of irreligion and immorality. With what face could he ever rise and exhibit at a scientific meeting this evident proof that the whole universe was a black chaos, a gross materialistic blunder, a festering mass of blank corruption, without purpose, soul, or informing righteousness? His entire moral being rose up within him in bitter revolt at the bare notion of such cold-blooded treachery. To give a long-winded Latin classificatory name, forsooth, to a thing that would destroy the faith of ages! At last, after long pondering, he determined to carry the slab carefully home inside his coat, and hide it away sedulously for the present in the cupboard of his little physiological laboratory. He would think the matter over, he would take time to consider, he would ask humbly for light and guidance. But of whom? Well, well, at any rate, there was no necessity for precipitate action. To Cyril Milliter's excited fancy, the whole future of human thought and belief seemed bound up inextricably at that moment in the little slab of lithographic slate that lay before him; and he felt that he need be in no hurry to let loose the demon of scepticism and sin (as it appeared to him) into the peaceful midst of a still happily trusting and unsuspecting humanity.

He put his hand into his pocket, casually, to pull out his handkerchief for a covering to the thing, and, as he did so, his fingers happened to touch the familiar clasp of his little pocket Bible. The touch thrilled him strangely, and inspired him at once with a fresh courage. After all, he had the Truth there also, and he couldn't surely be doing wrong in consulting its best and most lasting interests. It was for the sake of the Truth that he meant for the present to conceal his compromising fossil. So he wrapped up the slab as far as he was able in his handkerchief, and hid it away, rather clumsily, under the left side of his coat. It bulged a little, no doubt; but by

keeping his arm flat to his side he was able to cover it over decently somehow. Thus he walked back quickly to Mortiscombe, feeling more like a thief with a stolen purse in his pocket than he had ever before felt in the whole course of his earthly existence.

When he reached his own house, he would not ring, lest Netta should run to open the door for him, and throw her arms round him, and feel the horrid thing (how could he show it even to Netta after this morning's sermon?), but he went round to the back door, opened it softly, and glided as quietly as he could into the laboratory. Not show it to Netta—that was bad: he had always hitherto shown her and told her absolutely everything. How about the Truth? He was doing this, he believed, for the Truth's sake; and yet, the very first thing that it imposed upon him was the necessity for an ugly bit of unwonted concealment. Not without many misgivings, but convinced on the whole that he was acting for the best, he locked the slab of oolite up, hurriedly and furtively, in the corner cupboard.

He had hardly got it safely locked up out of sight, and seated himself as carelessly as he could in his easy chair, when Netta knocked softly at the door. She always knocked before entering, by force of habit, for when Cyril was performing delicate experiments it often disturbed him, or spoilt the result, to have the door opened suddenly. Netta had seen him coming, and wondered why he had slunk round by the back door: now she wondered still more why he did not "report himself," as he used to call it, by running to kiss her and announce his return.

"Come in," he said gravely, in answer to the knock; and Netta entered.

Cyril jumped up and kissed her tenderly, but her quick woman's eye saw at once that there was something serious the matter. "You didn't ring, Cyril darling," she said, half reproachfully, "and you didn't come to kiss your wife."

"No," Cyril answered, trying to look quite at his ease (a thing at which the most innocent man in the world is always the worst possible performer), "I was in a hurry to get back here, as there was something in the way of my work I wanted particularly to see about."

"Why, Cyril," Netta answered in surprise; "your work! It's Sunday."

Cyril blushed crimson. "So it is," he answered hastily; "upon my word, I'd quite forgotten it. Goodness gracious, Netta, shall I have to go down to meeting and preach again to those people this evening?"

"Preach again? Of course you will, Cyril. You always do, dear, don't you?"

Cyril started back with a sigh. "I can't go to-night, Netta darling," he said wearily. "I can't preach to-night. I'm too tired and out of sorts—I'm not at all in the humour for preaching. We must send down somehow or other, and put off the brethren."

Netta looked at him in blank dismay. She felt in her heart there was something wrong, but she wouldn't for worlds ask Cyril what it was, unless he chose to tell her of his own accord. Still, she couldn't help reading in his eyes that there was something the matter: and the more she looked into them, the more poor Cyril winced and blinked and looked the other way in the vain attempt to seem unconcerned at her searching scrutiny. "I'll send Mary down with a little written notice," she said at last, "to fix on the door: 'Mr. Milliter regrets he will be unable, through indisposition, to attend worship at Patmos this evening.' Will that do, Cyril?"

"Yes," he answered uneasily. "That'll do, darling. I don't feel quite well, I'm afraid, somehow, after my unusual exertions this morning."

Netta looked at him hard, but said nothing.

They went into the drawing-room and for a while they both pretended to be reading. Then the maid brought up the little tea-tray, and Cyril was obliged to lay down the book he had been using as a screen for his crimson face, and to look once more straight across the room at Netta.

"Cyril," the little wife began again, as she took over his cup of tea to his easy chair by the bow window, and set it down quietly on the tiny round table beside him, "where did you go this afternoon?"

"On the Downs, darling."

"And whom did you meet there?"

"Nobody, Netta."

"Nobody, Cyril?"

"No, nobody."

Netta knew she could trust his word implicitly, and asked him no further. Still, a dreadful cloud was slowly rising up before her. She felt too much confidence in Cyril to be really jealous of him in any serious way; but her fears, womanlike, took that personal shape in which she fancied somebody or something must be weaning away her husband's love gradually from her. Had he seen some girl at a distance on the Downs, some one of the Mortiscombe ladies, with whom perhaps he had had some little flirtation in the days gone by—some lady whom he thought now would have made him a more suitable, companionable wife than poor little Netta? Had he wandered about alone, saying to himself that he had thrown himself away, and sacrificed his future prospects for a pure, romantic boyish fancy? Had he got tired of her little, simple, homely ways? Had he come back to the house, heartsick and disappointed, and gone by himself into the working laboratory on purpose to avoid her? Why was he so silent? Why did he seem so preoccupied? Why would he not look her straight in the face? Cyril could have done nothing to be ashamed of, that

Netta felt quite sure about, but why did he behave as if he was ashamed of himself—as if there was something or other in his mind he couldn't tell her?

Meanwhile, poor Cyril was not less unhappy, though in a very different and more masculine fashion. He wasn't thinking so much of Netta (except when she looked at him so hard and curiously), but of the broken gods of his poor little scientific and theological pantheon. He was passing through a tempest of doubt and hesitation, compelled to conceal it under the calm demeanour of everyday life. That horrid, wicked, system-destroying fossil was never for a moment out of his mind. At times he hated and loathed the godless thing with all the concentrated force of his ardent nature. Ought he to harbour it under the shelter of his hospitable roof? Ought he to give it the deadly chance of bearing its terrible witness before the eyes of an innocent world? Ought he not to get up rather in the dead of night, and burn it to ashes or grind it to powder—a cruel, wicked, deceiving, anti-scriptural fossil that it was? Then again at other times the love of Truth came uppermost once more to chill his fiery indignation. Could the eternal hills lie to him? Could the evidence of his own senses deceive him? Was not the creature there palpably and visibly present, a veritable record of real existence; and ought he not loyally and reverently to accept its evidence, at whatever violence to his own most cherished and sacred convictions? If the universe was in reality quite other than what he had always hitherto thought it; if the doctrines he had first learned and then taught as certain and holy were proved by plain facts to be mere ancient and fading delusions, was it not his bounden duty manfully to resign his life-long day-dream, and to accept the Truth as it now presented itself to him by the infallible evidence of mute nature, that cannot possibly or conceivably lie to us?

The evening wore away slowly, and Cyril and Netta said little to one another, each absorbed in their own thoughts and doubts and perplexities. At last bedtime came, but not much sleep for either. Cyril lay awake, looking out into the darkness which seemed now to involve the whole physical and spiritual world; seeing in fancy a vast chaotic clashing universe, battling and colliding for ever against itself, without one ray of hope, or light, or gladness left in it anywhere. Netta lay awake, too, wondering what could have come over Cyril; and seeing nothing but a darkened world, in which Cyril's love was taken away from her, and all was cold, and dull, and cheerless. Each in imagination had lost the keystone of their own particular special universe.

Throughout the next week, Cyril went on mechanically with his daily work, but struggling all the time against the dreadful doubt that was rising now irresistibly within him. Whenever he came home from college, he went straight to his laboratory,

locked the door, and took the skeleton out of the cupboard. It was only a very small skeleton indeed, and a fossil one at that; but if it had been a murdered man, and he the murderer, it could hardly have weighed more terribly than it actually did upon Cyril Milliter's mind and conscience. Yet it somehow fascinated him; and in all his spare time he was working away at the comparative anatomy of his singular specimen. He had no doubts at all about it now: he knew it perfectly for what it was—an intermediate form between birds and reptiles. Meanwhile, he could not dare to talk about it even to Netta; and Netta, though the feeling that there was something wrong somewhere deepened upon her daily, would not say a word upon the subject to Cyril. But she had discovered one thing—that the secret, whatever it was, lay closed up in the laboratory cupboard; and as her fears exaggerated her doubts, she grew afraid at last almost to enter the room which held that terrible, unspeakable mystery.

Thus more than a fortnight passed away, and Cyril and Netta grew daily less and less at home with one another. At last, one evening, when Cyril seemed gloomier and more silent than ever, Netta could bear the suspense no longer. Rising up hastily from her seat, without one word of warning, she went over to her husband with a half-despairing gesture of alarm, and, flinging her arms around him with desperate force, she cried passionately through her blinding tears, "Cyril, Cyril, Cyril, you must tell me all about it."

"About what, darling?" Cyril asked, trembling with half-conscious hypocrisy, for he knew in his heart at once what she meant as well as she did.

"Cyril," she cried again, looking him straight in the face steadily, "you have a secret that you will not tell me."

"Darling," he answered, smoothing her hair tenderly with his hand, "it is no secret. It is nothing. You would think nothing of it if you knew. It's the merest trifle possible. But I can't tell you. I can *not* tell you."

"But you must, Cyril," Netta cried bitterly. "You had never any secret from me, I know, till that dreadful Sunday, when you went out alone, and wouldn't even let me go with you. Then you came back stealthily by the back door, and never told me. And you brought something with you: of that I'm certain. And you've got the something locked up carefully in the laboratory cupboard. I don't know how I found it all out exactly, but I have found it out, and I can't bear the suspense any longer, and so you *must* tell me all about it. Oh, Cyril, dear Cyril, do, do tell me all about it!"

Cyril faltered—faltered visibly; but even so, he dare not tell her. His own faith was going too terribly fast already; could he let hers go too, in one dreadful collapse

and confusion? It never occurred to him that the fossil would mean little or nothing to poor Netta; he couldn't help thinking of it as though every human being on earth would regard it with the same serious solemnity and awe as he himself did. "I cannot tell you, Netta," he said, very gently but very firmly. "No, I dare not tell you. Some day, perhaps, but not now. I must not tell you."

The answer roused all Netta's worst fears more terribly than ever. For a moment she almost began to doubt Cyril. In her terror and perplexity she was still too proud to ask him further; and she went back from her husband, feeling stung and repulsed by his cruel answer, and made as though she did not care at all for his strange refusal. She took up a scientific paper from the heap on the table, and pretended to begin reading it. Cyril rose and tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away with an impatient gesture. "Never," she said haughtily. "Never, Cyril, until you choose to tell me your private secret."

Cyril sank back gloomily into his chair, folded his hands into one another in a despondent fashion, and looked hard at the vacant ceiling without uttering a single word.

As Netta held the paper aimlessly before her that minute, by the merest chance her eye happened to fall upon her husband's name printed in the article that lay open casually at the middle page. Even at that supreme moment of chagrin and torturing doubt, she could not pass by Cyril's name in print without stopping to read what was said about him. As she did so, she saw that the article began by hostile criticism of the position he had taken up on the distinction between birds and reptiles in a recent paper contributed to the Transactions of the Linnæan Society. She rose from her place silently, put the paper into his hands and pointed to the paragraph with her white forefinger, but never uttered a single syllable. Cyril took it from her mechanically, and read on, not half thinking what he was reading, till he came to a passage which attracted his attention perforce, because it ran somewhat after this fashion—

"Professor Milliter would have written a little less confidently had he been aware that almost while his words were passing through the press a very singular discovery bearing upon this exact subject was being laid before the Academy of Sciences at Berlin. Dr. Hermann von Meyer has just exhibited to that body a slab of lithographic slate from the famous oolitic quarry at Solenhofen, containing the impression of a most remarkable organism, which he has named *Archæopteryx lithographica*. This extraordinary creature has the feathers of a bird with the tail of a lizard; it is entirely destitute of an *os coccygis*; it has apparently two conical teeth in the upper jaw; and its foot is that of a characteristic percher." And so forth for more than a column, full

of those minute anatomical points which Cyril had himself carefully noticed in the anatomy of his own English specimen.

As he read and re-read that awful paragraph, Netta looking on at him half angrily all the time, he grew more and more certain every moment that the German professor had simultaneously made the very same discovery as himself. He drew a long sigh of relief. The worst was over; the murder was out, then; it was not to be he who should bear the responsibility of publishing to the world the existence and peculiarities of that wicked and hateful fossil. A cold-blooded German geologist had done so already, with no more trace of remorse and punctiliousness in the business than if it had been the merest old oyster-shell or spider or commonplace cockroach! He could hardly keep in his excited feelings; the strain of personal responsibility at least was lightened; and though the universe remained as black as ever, he could at any rate wash his own hands of the horrid creature. Unmanly as it may seem, he burst suddenly into tears, and stepped across the room to throw his arms round Netta's neck. To his surprise—or he scarcely remembered that she could not yet realize the situation—Netta repelled him with both hands stretched angrily before her, palm outwards.

“Netta,” he said, imploringly, recognizing immediately what it was she meant, “come with me now into the laboratory, and see what it is that I have got in the cupboard.”

Netta, all trembling and wondering, followed him in a perfect flutter of doubt and anxiety. Cyril slowly unlocked the cupboard, then unfastened a small drawer, and last of all took out a long flat object, wrapped up mysteriously in a clean handkerchief. He laid it down reluctantly upon the table, and Netta, amazed and puzzled, beheld a small smooth slab of soft clay-stone, scored with what seemed like the fossil marks of a few insignificant bones and feathers. The little woman drew a long breath.

“Well, Cyril?” she said interrogatively, looking at it in a dubious mood.

“Why, Netta,” cried her husband, half angry at her incomprehensible calmness, “don't you see what it is? It's terrible, terrible!”

“A fossil, Cyril, isn't it? A bird, I should say.”

“No, not a bird, Netta; nor yet a lizard; but that half-way thing, that intermediate link you read about just now over yonder in the paper.”

“But why do you hide it, Cyril? You haven't taken it anywhere from a museum.”

“Oh, Netta! Don't you understand? Don't you see the implications? It's a creature, half bird and half reptile, and it proves, absolutely proves, Netta, beyond the faintest possibility of a doubt, that the evolutionists are quite right—quite

scientific. And if it once comes to be generally recognized, I don't know, I'm sure, what is ever to become of religion and of science. We shall every one of us have to go and turn evolutionists!"

It is very sad to relate, but poor Netta, her pent-up feelings all let loose by the smallness of the evil, as it seemed to her, actually began to smile, and then to laugh merrily, in the very face of this awful revelation. "Then you haven't really got tired of me, Cyril?" she cried eagerly. "You're not in love with somebody else? You don't regret ever having married me?"

Cyril stared at her in mute surprise. What possible connection could these questions have with the momentous principles bound up implicitly in the nature-printed skeleton of *Archæopteryx lithographica*? It was a moment or so before he could grasp the association of ideas in her womanly little brain, and understand the real origin of her natural wife-like fears and hesitations.

"Oh, Cyril," she said again, after a minute's pause, looking at the tell-tale fossil with another bright girlish smile, "is it only that? Only that wretched little creature? Oh, darling, I am so happy!" And she threw her arms around his neck of her own accord, and kissed him fervently twice or thrice over.

Cyril was pleased indeed that she had recovered her trust in him so readily, but amazed beyond measure that she could look at that horrible anti-scriptural fossil absolutely without the slightest symptom of flinching. "What a blessed thing it must be," he thought to himself, "to be born a woman! Here's the whole universe going to rack and ruin, physically and spiritually, before her very eyes, and she doesn't care a fig as soon as she's quite satisfied in her own mind that her own particular husband hasn't incomprehensibly fallen in love with one or other of the Mortiscombe ladies!" It was gratifying to his personal feelings, doubtless; but it wasn't at all complimentary, one must admit, to the general constitution of the universe.

"What ought I to do with it, Netta?" he asked her simply, pointing to the fossil; glad to have any companionship, even if so unsympathetic, in his hitherto unspoken doubts and difficulties.

"Do with it? Why, show it to the Geological Society, of course, Cyril. It's the Truth, you know, dearest, and why on earth should you wish to conceal it? The Truth shall make you perfect."

Cyril looked at her with mingled astonishment and admiration. "Oh, Netta," he answered, sighing profoundly, "if only I could take it as quietly as you do! If only I had faith as a grain of mustard-seed! But I have been reduced almost to abject despair by this crushing piece of deadly evidence. It seems to me to proclaim aloud that the evolutionists are all completely right at bottom, and that everything we have

ever loved and cherished and hoped for, turns out an utter and absolute delusion.”

“Then I should say you were still bound, for all that, to accept the evidence,” said Netta quietly. “However, for my part, I may be very stupid and silly, and all that sort of thing, you know, but it doesn’t seem to me as if it really mattered twopence either way.”

Cyril looked at her again with fresh admiration. That was a point of view that had not yet even occurred to him as within the bounds of possibility. He had gone on repeating over and over again to his congregation and to himself that if evolution were true, religion and morality were mere phantoms, until at last he had ceased to think any other proposition on the subject could be even thinkable. That a man might instantly accept the evidence of his strange fossil, and yet be after all an indifferent honest citizen in spite of it, was an idea that had really never yet presented itself to him. And he blushed now to think that, in spite of all his frequent professions of utter fidelity, Netta had proved herself at last more loyal to the Truth in both aspects than he himself had done. Her simple little womanly faith had never faltered for a moment in either direction.

That night was a very happy one for Netta: it was a somewhat happier one than of late, even for Cyril. He had got rid of the cloud between himself and his wife: he had made at least one person a confidante of his horrid secret: and, above all, he had learnt that some bold and ruthless German geologist had taken off his own shoulders the responsibility of announcing the dreadful discovery.

Still, it was some time before Cyril quite recovered from the gloomy view of things generally into which his chance unearthing of the strange fossil had temporarily thrown him. Two things mainly contributed to this result.

The first was that a few Sundays later he made up his mind he ought in common honesty to exhibit his compromising fossil to the congregation in the upper chamber, and make a public recantation of his recent confident but untenable statements. He did so with much misgiving, impelled by a growing belief that after all he must trust everything implicitly to the Truth. It cost him a pang, too, to go back upon his own deliberate words, so lately spoken; but he faced it out, for the Truth’s sake, like an honest man, as he had always tried to be—save for those few days when the wicked little slab of slate lay carefully hidden away in the inmost recesses of the laboratory cupboard. To his immense surprise, once more, the brethren seemed to think little more of it than Netta herself had done. Perhaps they were not so logical or thorough-going as the young professor: perhaps they had more of unquestioning faith: perhaps they had less of solid dogmatic leaven; but in any case they seemed singularly little troubled by the new and startling geological discovery. However, they

were all much struck by the professor's honesty of purpose in making a straightforward recantation of his admitted blunder; he had acted honest and honourable, they said, like a man, and they liked him better for it in the end, than if he'd preached, and hedged, and shilly-shallied to them about it for a whole year of Sundays together. Now, the mere fact that his good congregation didn't mind the fossil much reacted healthily on Cyril Milliter, who began to suspect that perhaps after all he had been exaggerating the religions importance of speculative opinions on the precise nature of the cosmogony.

The second thing was that, shortly after the great discovery, he happened to make the acquaintance of the brilliant young evolutionist from London, and found to his surprise that on the whole most of their opinions agreed with remarkable unanimity. True, the young evolutionist was not a Gospel Evangelist, and did not feel any profound interest in the literal or mystical interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. But in all essentials he was as deeply spiritual as Cyril Milliter himself; and the more Cyril saw of him and talked with him, the more did he begin to suspect that the truth may in reality have many facets, and that all men may not happen to see it in exactly the self-same aspect. It dawned upon him slowly that all the illumination in the world might not be entirely confined to the narrow circle of the Gospel Evangelists. Even those terrible evolutionists themselves, it seemed, were not necessarily wholly given over to cutting throats or robbing churches. They might have their desires and aspirations, their faith and their hope and their charity, exactly like other people, only perhaps in a slightly different and more definite direction. In the end, Cyril and his former bugbear became bosom friends, and both worked together amicably side by side in the self-same laboratory at the College of Science.

To this day, Professor Milliter still continues to preach weekly to the Gospel Evangelists, though both he and they have broadened a good deal, in a gradual and almost imperceptible fashion, with the general broadening of ideas and opinions that has been taking place by slow degrees around us during the last two decades. His views are no doubt a good deal less dogmatic and a good deal more wide and liberal now than formerly. Netta and he live happily and usefully together; and over the mantelpiece of his neat little study, in the cottage at Mortiscombe, stands a slab of polished slate containing a very interesting oolitic fossil, of which the professor has learnt at last to be extremely proud, the first discovered and most perfect existing specimen of *Archæopteryx lithographica*. He can hardly resist a quiet smile himself, nowadays, when he remembers how he once kept that harmless piece of pictured stone wrapt up carefully in a folded handkerchief in his laboratory cupboard for some weeks together, as though it had been a highly dangerous and very

explosive lump of moral dynamite, calculated to effect at one fell swoop the complete religious and ethical disintegration of the entire divine universe.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.

A cover was created for this Ebook.

[The end of *The Beckoning Hand: Professor Milliter's Dilemma* by Grant Allen]