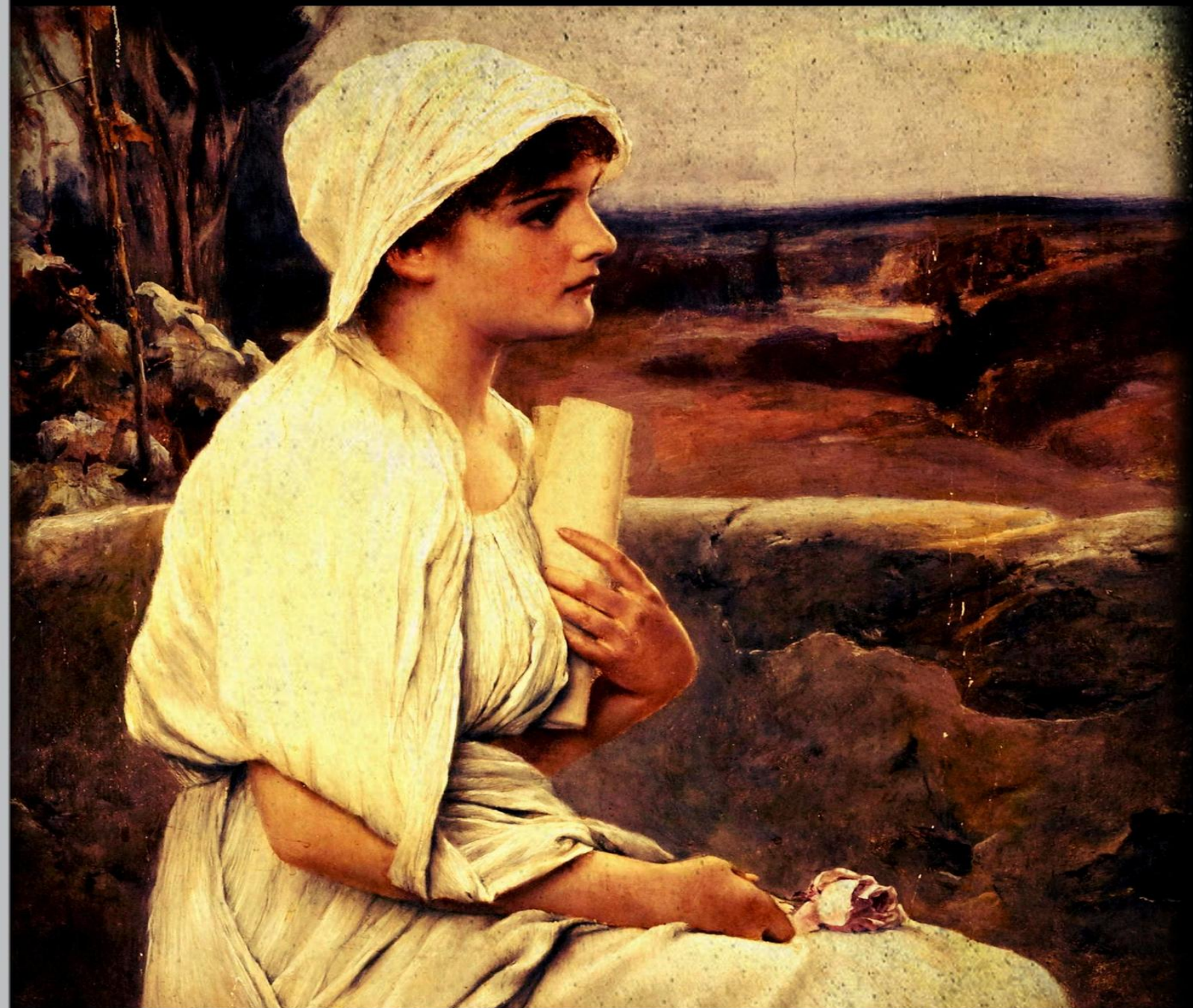


# HYPATIA

Charles Kingsley



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[Hypatia](#)

[PREFACE](#)

[CHAPTER I: THE LAURA](#)

[CHAPTER II: THE DYING WORLD](#)

[CHAPTER III: THE GOTHS](#)

[CHAPTER IV: MIRIAM](#)

[CHAPTER V: A DAY IN ALEXANDRIA](#)

[CHAPTER VI: THE NEW DIOGENES](#)

[CHAPTER VII: THOSE BY WHOM OFFENCES COME](#)

[CHAPTER VIII: THE EAST WIND](#)

[CHAPTER IX: THE SNAPPING OF THE BOW](#)

[CHAPTER X: THE INTERVIEW](#)

[CHAPTER XI: THE LAURA AGAIN](#)

[CHAPTER XII: THE BOWER OF ACRASIA](#)

[CHAPTER XIII: THE BOTTOM OF THE ABYSS](#)

[CHAPTER XIV: THE ROCKS OF THE SIRENS](#)

[CHAPTER XV: NEPHELOCOCUGIA](#)

[CHAPTER XVI: VENUS AND PALLAS](#)

[CHAPTER XVII: A STRAY GLEAM](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII: THE PREFECT TESTED](#)

[CHAPTER XIX: JEWS AGAINST CHRISTIANS](#)

[CHAPTER XX: SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER](#)

[CHAPTER XXI: THE SQUIRE-BISHOP](#)

[CHAPTER XXII: PANDEMONIUM](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII: NEMESIS](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV: LOST LAMBS](#)

[CHAPTER XXV: SEEKING AFTER A SIGN](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI: MIRIAM'S PLOT](#)

[CHAPTER XXVII: THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN](#)

[CHAPTER XXVIII: WOMAN'S LOVE](#)

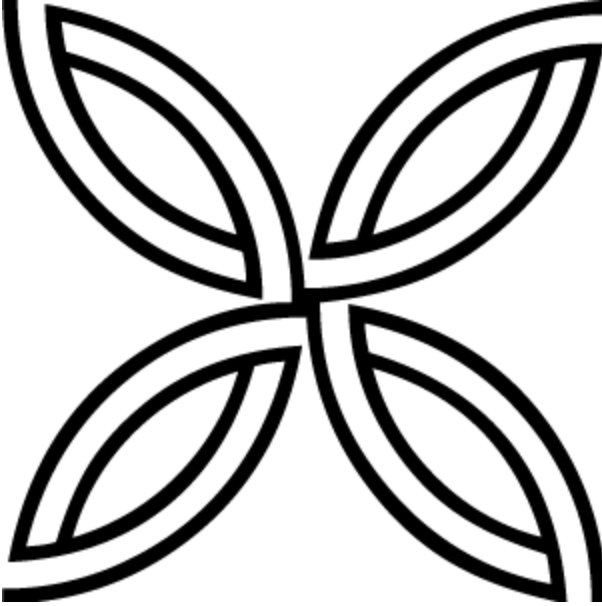
[CHAPTER XXIX: NEMESIS](#)

[CHAPTER XXX: EVERY MAN TO HIS OWN PLACE](#)

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# **Hypatia**

**Charles Kingsley**



# PREFACE

*A picture of life in the fifth century must needs contain much which will be painful to any reader, and which the young and innocent will do well to leave altogether unread. It has to represent a very hideous, though a very great, age; one of those critical and cardinal eras in the history of the human race, in which virtues and vices manifest themselves side by side—even, at times, in the same person—with the most startling openness and power. One who writes of such an era labours under a troublesome disadvantage. He dare not tell how evil people were; he will not be believed if he tells how good they were. In the present case that disadvantage is doubled; for while the sins of the Church, however heinous, were still such as admit of being expressed in words, the sins of the heathen world, against which she fought, were utterly indescribable; and the Christian apologist is thus compelled, for the sake of decency, to state the Church's case far more weakly than the facts deserve.*

*Not, be it ever remembered, that the slightest suspicion of immorality attaches either to the heroine of this book, or to the leading philosophers of her school, for several centuries. Howsoever base and profligate their disciples, or the Manichees, may have been, the great Neo-Platonists were, as Manes himself was, persons of the most rigid and ascetic virtue.*

*For a time had arrived, in which no teacher who did not put forth the most lofty pretensions to righteousness could expect a hearing. That Divine Word, who is 'The Light who lighteth every man which cometh into the world,' had awakened in the heart of mankind a moral craving never before felt in any strength, except by a few isolated philosophers or prophets. The Spirit had been poured out*



*on all flesh; and from one end of the Empire to the other, from the slave in the mill to the emperor on his throne, all hearts were either hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or learning to do homage to those who did so. And He who excited the craving, was also furnishing that which would satisfy it; and was teaching mankind, by a long and painful education, to distinguish the truth from its innumerable counterfeits, and to find, for the first time in the world's life, a good news not merely for the select few, but for all mankind without respect of rank or race.*

*For somewhat more than four hundred years, the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, born into the world almost at the same moment, had been developing themselves side by side as two great rival powers, in deadly struggle for the possession of the human race. The weapons of the Empire had been not merely an overwhelming physical force, and a ruthless lust of aggressive conquest: but, even more powerful still, an unequalled genius for organisation, and an uniform system of external law and order. This was generally a real boon to conquered nations, because it substituted a fixed and regular spoliation for the fortuitous and arbitrary miseries of savage warfare: but it arrayed, meanwhile, on the side of the Empire the wealthier citizens of every province, by allowing them their share in the plunder of the labouring masses below them. These, in the country districts, were utterly enslaved; while in the cities, nominal freedom was of little use to masses kept from starvation by the alms of the government, and drugged into brutish good humour by a vast system of public spectacles, in which the realms of nature and of art were ransacked to glut the wonder, lust, and ferocity of a degraded populace.*

*Against this vast organisation the Church had been fighting for now four hundred years, armed only with its own mighty and all-embracing message, and with the manifestation of a spirit of purity and virtue, of love and*

*self-sacrifice, which had proved itself mightier to melt and weld together the hearts of men, than all the force and terror, all the mechanical organisation, all the sensual baits with which the Empire had been contending against that Gospel in which it had recognised instinctively and at first sight, its internecine foe.*

*And now the Church had conquered. The weak things of this world had confounded the strong. In spite of the devilish cruelties of persecutors; in spite of the contaminating atmosphere of sin which surrounded her; in spite of having to form herself, not out of a race of pure and separate creatures, but by a most literal 'new birth' out of those very fallen masses who insulted and persecuted her; in spite of having to endure within herself continual outbursts of the evil passions in which her members had once indulged without cheek; in spite of a thousand counterfeits which sprang up around her and within her, claiming to be parts of her, and alluring men to themselves by that very exclusiveness and party arrogance which disproved their claim; in spite of all, she had conquered. The very emperors had arrayed themselves on her side.*

*Julian's last attempt to restore paganism by imperial influence had only proved that the old faith had lost all hold upon the hearts of the masses; at his death the great tide-wave of new opinion rolled on unchecked, and the rulers of earth were fain to swim with the stream; to accept, in words at least, the Church's laws as theirs; to acknowledge a King of kings to whom even they owed homage and obedience; and to call their own slaves their 'poorer brethren,' and often, too, their 'spiritual superiors.'*

*But if the emperors had become Christian, the Empire had not. Here and there an abuse was lopped off; or an edict was passed for the visitation of prisons and for the welfare of prisoners; or a Theodosius was recalled to justice and humanity for a while by the stern rebukes of an Ambrose. But the Empire was still the same: still a great tyranny,*

*enslaving the masses, crushing national life, fattening itself and its officials on a system of world-wide robbery; and while it was paramount, there could be no hope for the human race. Nay, there were even those among the Christians who saw, like Dante afterwards, in the 'fatal gift of Constantine,' and the truce between the Church and the Empire, fresh and more deadly danger. Was not the Empire trying to extend over the Church itself that upas shadow with which it had withered up every other form of human existence; to make her, too, its stipendiary slave-official, to be pampered when obedient, and scourged whenever she dare assert a free will of her own, a law beyond that of her tyrants; to throw on her, by a refined hypocrisy, the care and support of the masses on whose lifeblood it was feeding? So thought many then, and, as I believe, not unwisely.*

*But if the social condition of the civilised world was anomalous at the beginning of the fifth century, its spiritual state was still more so. The universal fusion of races, languages, and customs, which had gone on for four centuries under the Roman rule, had produced a corresponding fusion of creeds, an universal fermentation of human thought and faith. All honest belief in the old local superstitions of paganism had been long dying out before the more palpable and material idolatry of Emperor-worship; and the gods of the nations, unable to deliver those who had trusted in them, became one by one the vassals of the 'Divus Caesar,' neglected by the philosophic rich, and only worshipped by the lower classes, where the old rites still pandered to their grosser appetites, or subserved the wealth and importance of some particular locality.*

*In the meanwhile, the minds of men, cut adrift from their ancient moorings, wandered wildly over pathless seas of speculative doubt, and especially in the more metaphysical and contemplative East, attempted to solve for themselves*



*the questions of man's relation to the unseen by those thousand schisms, heresies, and theosophies (it is a disgrace to the word philosophy to call them by it), on the records of which the student now gazes bewildered, unable alike to count or to explain their fantasies.*

*Yet even these, like every outburst of free human thought, had their use and their fruit. They brought before the minds of churchmen a thousand new questions which must be solved, unless the Church was to relinquish for ever her claims as the great teacher and satisfier of the human soul. To study these bubbles, as they formed and burst on every wave of human life; to feel, too often by sad experience, as Augustine felt, the charm of their allurements; to divide the truths at which they aimed from the falsehood which they offered as its substitute; to exhibit the Catholic Church as possessing, in the great facts which she proclaimed, full satisfaction, even for the most subtle metaphysical cravings of a diseased age;—that was the work of the time; and men were sent to do it, and aided in their labour by the very causes which had produced the intellectual revolution. The general intermixture of ideas, creeds, and races, even the mere physical facilities for intercourse between different parts of the Empire, helped to give the great Christian fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries a breadth of observation, a depth of thought, a large-hearted and large-minded patience and tolerance, such as, we may say boldly, the Church has since beheld but rarely, and the world never; at least, if we are to judge those great men by what they had, and not by what they had not, and to believe, as we are bound, that had they lived now, and not then, they would have towered as far above the heads of this generation as they did above the heads of their own. And thus an age, which, to the shallow insight of a sneerer like Gibbon, seems only a rotting and aimless chaos of sensuality and anarchy, fanaticism and hypocrisy, produced a Clement and an Athanasius, a Chrysostom and an*

*Augustine; absorbed into the sphere of Christianity all which was most valuable in the philosophies of Greece and Egypt, and in the social organisation of Rome, as an heirloom for nations yet unborn; and laid in foreign lands, by unconscious agents, the foundations of all European thought and Ethics.*

*But the health of a Church depends, not merely on the creed which it professes, not even on the wisdom and holiness of a few great ecclesiastics, but on the faith and virtue of its individual members. The mens sana must have a corpus sanum to inhabit. And even for the Western Church, the lofty future which was in store for it would have been impossible, without some infusion of new and healthier blood into the veins of a world drained and tainted by the influence of Rome.*

*And the new blood, at the era of this story, was at hand. The great tide of those Gothic nations, of which the Norwegian and the German are the purest remaining types, though every nation of Europe, from Gibraltar to St. Petersburg, owes to them the most precious elements of strength, was sweeping onward, wave over wave, in a steady south-western current, across the whole Roman territory, and only stopping and recoiling when it reached the shores of the Mediterranean. Those wild tribes were bringing with them into the magic circle of the Western Church's influence the very materials which she required for the building up of a future Christendom, and which she could find as little in the Western Empire as in the Eastern; comparative purity of morals; sacred respect for woman, for family life, law, equal justice, individual freedom, and, above all, for honesty in word and deed; bodies untainted by hereditary effeminacy, hearts earnest though genial, and blessed with a strange willingness to learn, even from those whom they despised; a brain equal to that of the Roman in practical power, and not too far behind that of the Eastern in imaginative and speculative acuteness.*

*And their strength was felt at once. Their vanguard, confined with difficulty for three centuries beyond the Eastern Alps, at the expense of sanguinary wars, had been adopted wherever it was practicable, into the service of the Empire; and the heart's core of the Roman legion was composed of Gothic officers and soldiers. But now the main body had arrived. Tribe after tribe was crowding down to the Alps, and trampling upon each other on the frontiers of the Empire. The Huns, singly their inferiors, pressed them from behind with the irresistible weight of numbers; Italy, with her rich cities and fertile lowlands, beckoned them on to plunder; as auxiliaries, they had learned their own strength and Roman weakness; a casus belli was soon found. How iniquitous was the conduct of the sons of Theodosius, in refusing the usual bounty, by which the Goths were bribed not to attack the Empire!—The whole pent-up deluge burst over the plains of Italy, and the Western Empire became from that day forth a dying idiot, while the new invaders divided Europe among themselves. The fifteen years before the time of this tale had decided the fate of Greece; the last four that of Rome itself. The countless treasures which five centuries of rapine had accumulated round the Capitol had become the prey of men clothed in sheepskins and horse-hide; and the sister of an emperor had found her beauty, virtue, and pride of race worthily matched by those of the hard-handed Northern hero who led her away from Italy as his captive and his bride, to found new kingdoms in South France and Spain, and to drive the newly-arrived Vandals across the Straits of Gibraltar into the then blooming coast-land of Northern Africa. Everywhere the mangled limbs of the Old World were seething in the Medea's caldron, to come forth whole, and young, and strong. The Longbeards, noblest of their race, had found a temporary resting-place upon the Austrian frontier, after long southward wanderings from the Swedish mountains, soon to be dispossessed again by*

*the advancing Huns, and, crossing the Alps, to give their name for ever to the plains of Lombardy. A few more tumultuous years, and the Franks would find themselves lords of the Lower Rhineland; and before the hairs of Hypatia's scholars had grown gray, the mythic Hengist and Horsa would have landed on the shores of Kent, and an English nation have begun its world-wide life.*

*But some great Providence forbade to our race, triumphant in every other quarter, a footing beyond the Mediterranean, or even in Constantinople, which to this day preserves in Europe the faith and manners of Asia. The Eastern World seemed barred, by some stern doom, from the only influence which could have regenerated it. Every attempt of the Gothic races to establish themselves beyond the sea, whether in the form of an organised kingdom, as the Vandals attempted in Africa; or of a mere band of brigands, as did the Goths in Asia Minor, under Gainas; or of a praetorian guard, as did the Varangens of the middle age; or as religious invaders, as did the Crusaders, ended only in the corruption and disappearance of the colonists. That extraordinary reform in morals, which, according to Salvian and his contemporaries, the Vandal conquerors worked in North Africa, availed them nothing; they lost more than they gave. Climate, bad example, and the luxury of power degraded them in one century into a race of helpless and debauched slave-holders, doomed to utter extermination before the semi-Gothic armies of Belisarius; and with them vanished the last chance that the Gothic races would exercise on the Eastern World the same stern yet wholesome discipline under which the Western had been restored to life.*

*The Egyptian and Syrian Churches, therefore, were destined to labour not for themselves, but for us. The signs of disease and decrepitude were already but too manifest in them. That very peculiar turn of the Graeco-Eastern mind, which made them the great thinkers of the then world, had*

*the effect of drawing them away from practice to speculation; and the races of Egypt and Syria were effeminate, over-civilised, exhausted by centuries during which no infusion of fresh blood had come to renew the stock. Morbid, self-conscious, physically indolent, incapable then, as now, of personal or political freedom, they afforded material out of which fanatics might easily be made, but not citizens of the kingdom of God. The very ideas of family and national life—those two divine roots of the Church, severed from which she is certain to wither away into that most godless and most cruel of spectres, a religious world—had perished in the East from the evil influence of the universal practice of slaveholding, as well as from the degradation of that Jewish nation which had been for ages the great witness for those ideas; and all classes, like their forefather Adam—like, indeed, ‘the old Adam’ in every man and in every age—were shifting the blame of sin from their own consciences to human relationships and duties—and therein, to the God who had appointed them; and saying as of old, ‘The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ The passionate Eastern character, like all weak ones, found total abstinence easier than temperance, religious thought more pleasant than godly action; and a monastic world grew up all over the East, of such vastness that in Egypt it was said to rival in numbers the lay population, producing, with an enormous decrease in the actual amount of moral evil, an equally great enervation and decrease of the population. Such a people could offer no resistance to the steadily-increasing tyranny of the Eastern Empire. In vain did such men as Chrysostom and Basil oppose their personal influence to the hideous intrigues and villainies of the Byzantine court; the ever-downward career of Eastern Christianity went on unchecked for two more miserable centuries, side by side with the upward development of the Western Church; and, while the successors of the great Saint Gregory were*

*converting and civilising a new-born Europe, the Churches of the East were vanishing before Mohammedan invaders, strong by living trust in that living God, whom the Christians, while they hated and persecuted each other for arguments about Him, were denying and blaspheming in every action of their lives.*

*But at the period whereof this story treats, the Graeco-Eastern mind was still in the middle of its great work. That wonderful metaphysic subtlety, which, in phrases and definitions too often unmeaning to our grosser intellect, saw the symbols of the most important spiritual realities, and felt that on the distinction between homoousios and homoiousios might hang the solution of the whole problem of humanity, was set to battle in Alexandria, the ancient stronghold of Greek philosophy, with the effete remains of the very scientific thought to which it owed its extraordinary culture. Monastic isolation from family and national duties especially fitted the fathers of that period for the task, by giving them leisure, if nothing else, to face questions with a lifelong earnestness impossible to the more social and practical Northern mind. Our duty is, instead of sneering at them as pedantic dreamers, to thank Heaven that men were found, just at the time when they were wanted, to do for us what we could never have done for ourselves; to leave to us, as a precious heirloom, bought most truly with the lifeblood of their race, a metaphysic at once Christian and scientific, every attempt to improve on which has hitherto been found a failure; and to battle victoriously with that strange brood of theoretic monsters begotten by effete Greek philosophy upon Egyptian symbolism, Chaldee astrology, Parsee dualism, Brahminic spiritualism-graceful and gorgeous phantoms, whereof somewhat more will be said in the coming chapters. I have, in my sketch of Hypatia and her fate, closely followed authentic history, especially Socrates' account of the closing scene, as given in Book vii. Para 15, of his*



*Ecclesiastical History* . I am inclined, however, for various historical reasons, to date her death two years earlier than he does. The tradition that she was the wife of Isidore, the philosopher, I reject with Gibbon, as a palpable anachronism of at least fifty years (Isidore's master, Proclus, not having been born till the year before Hypatia's death), contradicted, moreover, by the very author of it, Photius, who says distinctly, after comparing Hypatia and Isidore, that Isidore married a certain 'Domna.' No hint, moreover, of her having been married appears in any contemporary authors; and the name of Isidore nowhere occurs among those of the many mutual friends to whom Synesius sends messages in his letters to Hypatia, in which, if anywhere, we should find mention of a husband, had one existed. To Synesius's most charming letters, as well as to those of Isidore, the good Abbot of Pelusium, I beg leave to refer those readers who wish for further information about the private life of the fifth century.

I cannot hope that these pages will be altogether free from anachronisms and errors. I can only say that I have laboured honestly and industriously to discover the truth, even in its minutest details, and to sketch the age, its manners and its literature, as I found them-altogether artificial, slipshod, effete, resembling far more the times of Louis Quinze than those of Sophocles and Plato. And so I send forth this little sketch, ready to give my hearty thanks to any reviewer, who, by exposing my mistakes, shall teach me and the public somewhat more about the last struggle between the Young Church and the Old World.



# CHAPTER I: THE LAURA

In the four hundred and thirteenth year of the Christian Era, some three hundred miles above Alexandria, the young monk Philammon was sitting on the edge of a low range of inland cliffs, crested with drifting sand. Behind him the desert sand-waste stretched, lifeless, interminable, reflecting its lurid glare on the horizon of the cloudless vault of blue. At his feet the sand dripped and trickled, in yellow rivulets, from crack to crack and ledge to ledge, or whirled past him in tiny jets of yellow smoke, before the fitful summer airs. Here and there, upon the face of the cliffs which walled in the opposite side of the narrow glen below, were cavernous tombs, huge old quarries, with obelisks and half-cut pillars, standing as the workmen had left them centuries before; the sand was slipping down and piling up around them, their heads were frosted with the arid snow; everywhere was silence, desolation—the grave of a dead nation, in a dying land. And there he sat musing above it all, full of life and youth and health and beauty—a young Apollo of the desert. His only clothing was a ragged sheep-skin, bound with a leathern girdle. His long black locks, unshorn from childhood, waved and glistened in the sun; a rich dark down on cheek and chin showed the spring of healthful manhood; his hard hands and sinewy sunburnt limbs told of labour and endurance; his flashing eyes and beetling brow, of daring, fancy, passion, thought, which had no sphere of action in such a place. What did his glorious young humanity alone among the tombs?

So perhaps he, too, thought, as he passed his hand across his brow, as if to sweep away some gathering dream, and sighing, rose and wandered along the cliffs, peering downward at every point and cranny, in search of fuel for the monastery from whence he came.

Simple as was the material which he sought, consisting chiefly of the low arid desert shrubs, with now and then a fragment of wood from some deserted quarry or ruin, it was becoming scarcer and scarcer round Abbot Pambo's Laura at Scetis; and long before Philammon had collected his daily quantity, he had strayed farther from his home than he had ever been before.

Suddenly, at a turn of the glen, he came upon a sight new to him....a temple carved in the sandstone cliff; and in front a smooth platform, strewn with beams and mouldering tools, and here and there a skull bleaching among the sand, perhaps of some workman slaughtered at his labour in one of the thousand wars of old. The abbot, his spiritual father—indeed, the only father whom he knew, for his earliest recollections were of the Laura and the old man's cell—had strictly forbidden him to enter, even to approach any of those relics of ancient idolatry: but a broad terrace-road led down to the platform from the table-land above; the plentiful supply of fuel was too tempting to be passed by.... He would go down, gather a few sticks, and then return, to tell the abbot of the treasure which he had found, and consult him as to the propriety of revisiting it.

So down he went, hardly daring to raise his eyes to the alluring iniquities of the painted imagery which, gaudy in crimson and blue, still blazed out upon the desolate solitude, uninjured by that rainless air. But he was young, and youth is curious; and the devil, at least in the fifth century, busy with young brains. Now Philammon believed most utterly in the devil, and night and day devoutly prayed to be delivered from him; so he crossed himself, and ejaculated, honestly enough, 'Lord, turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity!'.... and looked nevertheless....

And who could have helped looking at those four colossal kings, who sat there grim and motionless, their huge hands laid upon their knees in everlasting self-assured repose, seeming to bear up the mountain on their stately heads? A

sense of awe, weakness, all but fear, came over him. He dare not stoop to take up the wood at his feet, their great stern eyes watched him so steadily.

Round their knees and round their thrones were mystic characters engraved, symbol after symbol, line below line—the ancient wisdom of the Egyptians, wherein Moses the man of God was learned of old—why should not he know it too? What awful secrets might not be hidden there about the great world, past, present, and future, of which he knew only so small a speck? Those kings who sat there, they had known it all; their sharp lips seem parting, ready to speak to him.... Oh that they would speak for once!.... and yet that grim sneering smile, that seemed to look down on him from the heights of their power and wisdom, with calm contempt.... him, the poor youth, picking up the leaving and rags of their past majesty .... He dared look at them no more.

So he looked past them into the temple halls; into a lustrous abyss of cool green shade, deepening on and inward, pillar after pillar, vista after vista, into deepest night. And dimly through the gloom he could descry, on every wall and column, gorgeous arabesques, long lines of pictured story; triumphs and labours; rows of captives in foreign and fantastic dresses, leading strange animals, bearing the tributes of unknown lands; rows of ladies at feasts, their heads crowned with garlands, the fragrant lotus-flower in every hand, while slaves brought wine and perfumes, and children sat upon their knees, and husbands by their side; and dancing girls, in transparent robes and golden girdles, tossed their tawny limbs wildly among the throng.... What was the meaning of it all? Why had it all been? Why had it gone on thus, the great world, century after century, millennium after millennium, eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, and knowing nothing better... how could they know anything better? Their forefathers had lost the light ages and ages

before they were born.... And Christ had not come for ages and ages after they were dead.... How could they know?.... And yet they were all in hell.... every one of them. Every one of these ladies who sat there, with her bushy locks, and garlands, and jewelled collars, and lotus-flowers, and gauzy dress, displaying all her slender limbs—who, perhaps, when she was alive, smiled so sweetly, and went so gaily, and had children, and friends, and never once thought of what was going to happen to her—what must happen to her.... She was in hell.... Burning for ever, and ever, and ever, there below his feet. He stared down on the rocky floors. If he could but see through them.... and the eye of faith could see through them.... he should behold her writhing and twisting among the flickering flame, scorched, glowing.... in everlasting agony, such as the thought of enduring for a moment made him shudder. He had burnt his hands once, when a palm-leaf but caught fire.... He recollected what that was like.... She was enduring ten thousand times more than that for ever. He should hear her shrieking in vain for a drop of water to cool her tongue.... He had never heard a human being shriek but once.... a boy bathing on the opposite Nile bank, whom a crocodile had dragged down.... and that scream, faint and distant as it came across the mighty tide, had rung intolerable in his ears for days.... and to think of all which echoed through those vaults of fire—for ever! Was the thought bearable!—was it possible! Millions upon millions burning forever for Adam's fall .... Could God be just in that?....

It was the temptation of a fiend! He had entered the unhallowed precincts, where devils still lingered about their ancient shrines; he had let his eyes devour the abominations of the heathen, and given place to the devil. He would flee home to confess it all to his father. He would punish him as he deserved, pray for him, forgive him. And yet could he tell him all? Could he, dare he confess to him the whole truth—the insatiable craving to know the



mysteries of learning—to see the great roaring world of men, which had been growing up in him slowly, month after month, till now it had assumed this fearful shape? He could stay no longer in the desert. This world which sent all souls to hell—was it as bad as monks declared it was? It must be, else how could such be the fruit of it? But it was too awful a thought to be taken on trust. No; he must go and see.

Filled with such fearful questionings, half-inarticulate and vague, like the thoughts of a child, the untutored youth went wandering on, till he reached the edge of the cliff below which lay his home. It lay pleasantly enough, that lonely Laura, or lane of rude Cyclopean cells, under the perpetual shadow of the southern wall of crags, amid its grove of ancient date-trees. A branching cavern in the cliff supplied the purposes of a chapel, a storehouse, and a hospital; while on the sunny slope across the glen lay the common gardens of the brotherhood, green with millet, maize, and beans, among which a tiny streamlet, husbanded and guided with the most thrifty care, wandered down from the cliff foot, and spread perpetual verdure over the little plot which voluntary and fraternal labour had painfully redeemed from the inroads of the all-devouring sand. For that garden, like everything else in the Laura, except each brother's seven feet of stone sleeping-hut, was the common property, and therefore the common care and joy of all. For the common good, as well as for his own, each man had toiled up the glen with his palm-leaf basket of black mud from the river Nile, over whose broad sheet of silver the glen's mouth yawned abrupt. For the common good, each man had swept the ledges clear of sand, and sown in the scanty artificial soil, the harvest of which all were to share alike. To buy clothes, books, and chapel furniture for the common necessities, education, and worship, each man sat, day after day, week after week, his mind full of high and heavenly thoughts, weaving the leaves of their little palm-copse into baskets, which an aged

monk exchanged for goods with the more prosperous and frequented monasteries of the opposite bank. Thither Philammon rowed the old man over, week by week, in a light canoe of papyrus, and fished, as he sat waiting for him, for the common meal. A simple, happy, gentle life was that of the Laura, all portioned out by rules and methods, which were held hardly less sacred than those of the Scriptures, on which they were supposed (and not so wrongly either) to have been framed. Each man had food and raiment, shelter on earth, friends and counsellors, living trust in the continual care of Almighty God; and, blazing before his eyes, by day and night, the hope of everlasting glory beyond all poets' dreams.... And what more would man have had in those days? Thither they had fled out of cities, compared with which Paris is earnest and Gomorrha chaste,—out of a rotten, infernal, dying world of tyrants and slaves, hypocrites and wantons,—to ponder undisturbed on duty and on judgment, on death and eternity, heaven and hell; to find a common creed, a common interest, a common hope, common duties, pleasures, and sorrows.... True, they had many of them fled from the post where God had placed them, when they fled from man into the Thebaid waste.... What sort of post and what sort of an age they were, from which those old monks fled, we shall see, perhaps, before this tale is told out.

'Thou art late, son,' said the abbot, steadfastly working away at his palm-basket, as Philammon approached.

'Fuel is scarce, and I was forced to go far.'

'A monk should not answer till he is questioned. I did not ask the reason. Where didst thou find that wood?'

'Before the temple, far up the glen.'

'The temple! What didst thou see there?'

No answer. Pambo looked up with his keen black eye.

'Thou hast entered it, and lusted after its abominations.'

'I—I did not enter; but I looked—'

'And what didst thou see? Women?'

Philammon was silent.

‘ Have I not bidden you never to look on the face of women? Are they not the firstfruits of the devil, the authors of all evil, the subtlest of all Satan’s snares? Are they not accursed for ever, for the deceit of their first mother, by whom sin entered into the world? A woman first opened the gates of hell; and, until this day, they are the portresses thereof. Unhappy boy! What hast thou done?’

‘ They were but painted on the walls.’

‘ Ah!’ said the abbot, as if suddenly relieved from a heavy burden. ‘But how knewest thou them to be women, when thou hast never yet, unless thou liest—which I believe not of thee—seen the face of a daughter of Eve?’

‘ Perhaps—perhaps,’ said Philammon, as if suddenly relieved by a new suggestion—‘perhaps they were only devils. They must have been, I think, for they were so very beautiful.’

‘ Ah! how knowest thou that devils are beautiful?’

‘ I was launching the boat, a week ago, with Father Aufugus; and on the bank,...not very near,...there were two creatures....with long hair, and striped all over the lower half of their bodies with black, and red, and yellow....and they were gathering flowers on the shore. Father Aufugus turned away; but I.... I could not help thinking them the most beautiful things that I had ever seen....so I asked him why he turned away; and he said that those were the same sort of devils which tempted the blessed St. Anthony. Then I recollected having heard it read aloud, how Satan tempted Anthony in the shape of a beautiful woman.... And so.... and so.... those figures on the wall were very like.... and I thought they might be....’

And the poor boy, who considered that he was making confession of a deadly and shameful sin, blushed scarlet, and stammered, and at last stopped.

‘ And thou thoughtest them beautiful? Oh utter corruption of the flesh!—oh subtilty of Satan! The Lord forgive thee, as

I do, my poor child; henceforth thou goest not beyond the garden walls.'

'Not beyond the walls! Impossible! I cannot! If thou wert not my father, I would say, I will not!—I must have liberty!—I must see for myself—I must judge for myself, what this world is of which you all talk so bitterly. I long for no pomps and vanities. I will promise you this moment, if you will, never to re-enter a heathen temple—to hide my face in the dust whenever I approach a woman. But I must—I must see the world; I must see the great mother-church in Alexandria, and the patriarch, and his clergy. If they can serve God in the city, why not I? I could do more for God there than here .... Not that I despise this work—not that I am ungrateful to you—oh, never, never that!—but I pant for the battle. Let me go! I am not discontented with you, but with myself. I know that obedience is noble; but danger is nobler still. If you have seen the world, why should not I? If you have fled from it because you found it too evil to live in, why should not I, and return to you here of my own will, never to leave you? And yet Cyril and his clergy have not fled from it....'

Desperately and breathlessly did Philammon drive this speech out of his inmost heart; and then waited, expecting the good abbot to strike him on the spot. If he had, the young man would have submitted patiently; so would any man, however venerable, in that monastery. Why not? Duly, after long companionship, thought, and prayer, they had elected Pambo for their abbot—Abba—father—the wisest, eldest-hearted and headed of them—if he was that, it was time that he should be obeyed. And obeyed he was, with a loyal, reasonable love, and yet with an implicit, soldier-like obedience, which many a king and conqueror might envy. Were they cowards and slaves? The Roman legionaries should be good judges on that point. They used to say that no armed barbarian, Goth or Vandal, Moor or Spaniard, was so terrible as the unarmed monk of the Thebaid.

Twice the old man lifted his staff to strike; twice he laid it down again; and then, slowly rising, left Philammon kneeling there, and moved away deliberately, and with eyes fixed on the ground, to the house of the brother Aufugus.

Every one in the Laura honoured Aufugus. There was a mystery about him which heightened the charm of his surpassing sanctity, his childlike sweetness and humility. It was whispered—when the monks seldom and cautiously did whisper together in their lonely walks—that he had been once a great man; that he had come from a great city—perhaps from Rome itself. And the simple monks were proud to think that they had among them a man who had seen Rome. At least, Abbot Pambo respected him. He was never beaten; never even reproved—perhaps he never required it; but still it was the meed of all; and was not the abbot a little partial? Yet, certainly, when Theophilus sent up a messenger from Alexandria, rousing every Laura with the news of the sack of Rome by Alaric, did not Pambo take him first to the cell of Aufugus, and sit with him there three whole hours in secret consultation, before he told the awful story to the rest of the brotherhood? And did not Aufugus himself give letters to the messenger, written with his own hand, containing, as was said, deep secrets of worldly policy, known only to himself? So, when the little lane of holy men, each peering stealthily over his plaiting work from the doorway of his sandstone cell, saw the abbot, after his unwonted passion, leave the culprit kneeling, and take his way toward the sage's dwelling, they judged that something strange and delicate had befallen the common weal, and each wished, without envy, that he were as wise as the man whose counsel was to solve the difficulty.

For an hour or more the abbot remained there, talking earnestly and low; and then a solemn sound as of the two old men praying with sobs and tears; and every brother bowed his head, and whispered a hope that He whom they served might guide them for the good of the Laura, and of

His Church, and of the great heathen world beyond; and still Philammon knelt motionless, awaiting his sentence; his heart filled—who can tell how? ‘The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy.’ So thought he as he knelt; and so think I, too, knowing that in the pettiest character there are unfathomable depths, which the poet, all-seeing though he may pretend to be, can never analyse, but must only dimly guess at, and still more dimly sketch them by the actions which they beget.

At last Pambo returned, deliberate, still, and slow, as he had gone, and seating himself within his cell, spoke—

‘ And the youngest said, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to my share.... And he took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. Thou shalt go, my son. But first come after me, and speak with Aufugus.’

Philammon, like everyone else, loved Aufugus; and when the abbot retired and left the two alone together, he felt no dread or shame about unburdening his whole heart to him. Long and passionately he spoke, in answer to the gentle questions of the old man, who, without the rigidity or pedantic solemnity of the monk, interrupted the youth, and let himself be interrupted in return, gracefully, genially, almost playfully. And yet there was a melancholy about his tone as he answered to the youth’s appeal—

‘ Tertullian, Origen, Clement, Cyprian—all these moved in the world; all these and many more beside, whose names we honour, whose prayers we invoke, were learned in the wisdom of the heathen, and fought and laboured, unspotted, in the world; and why not I? Cyril the patriarch himself, was he not called from the caves of Nitria to sit on the throne of Alexandria?’

Slowly the old man lifted his band, and putting back the thick locks of the kneeling youth, gazed, with soft pitying eyes, long and earnestly into his face.



‘ And thou wouldst see the world, poor fool? And thou wouldst see the world?’

‘ I would convert the world!’

‘ Thou must know it first. And shall I tell thee what that world is like, which seems to thee so easy to convert? Here I sit, the poor unknown old monk, until I die, fasting and praying, if perhaps God will have mercy on my soul: but little thou knowest how I have seen it. Little thou knowest, or thou wouldst be well content to rest here till the end. I was Arsenius.... Ah! vain old man that I am! Thou hast never heard that name, at which once queens would whisper and grow pale. Vanitas vanitatum! omnia vanitas! And yet he, at whose frown half the world trembles, has trembled himself at mine. I was the tutor of Arcadius.’

‘ The Emperor of Byzantium?’

‘ Even so, my son, even so. There I saw the world which thou wouldst see. And what saw I? Even what thou wilt see. Eunuchs the tyrants of their own sovereigns. Bishops kissing the feet of parricides and harlots. Saints tearing saints in pieces for a word, while sinners cheer them on to the unnatural fight. Liars thanked for lying, hypocrites taking pride in their hypocrisy. The many sold and butchered for the malice, the caprice, the vanity of the few. The plunderers of the poor plundered in their turn by worse devourers than themselves. Every attempt at reform the parent of worse scandals; every mercy begetting fresh cruelties; every persecutor silenced, only to enable others to persecute him in their turn: every devil who is exorcised, returning with seven others worse than himself; falsehood and selfishness, spite and lust, confusion seven times confounded, Satan casting out Satan everywhere—from the emperor who wantons on his throne, to the slave who blasphemes beneath his fetters.’

‘ If Satan cast out Satan, his kingdom shall not stand.’

‘ In the world to come. But in this world it shall stand and conquer, even worse and worse, until the end. These are

the last days spoken of by the prophets,—the beginning of woes such as never have been on the earth before—"On earth distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for the dread of those things which are coming on the earth." I have seen it long. Year after year I have watched them coming nearer and ever nearer in their course like the whirling sand-storms of the desert, which sweep past the caravan, and past again, and yet overwhelm it after all—that black flood of the northern barbarians. I foretold it; I prayed against it; but, like Cassandra's of old, my prophecy and my prayers were alike unheard. My pupil spurned my warnings. The lusts of youth, the intrigues of courtiers, were stronger than the warning voice of God; then I ceased to hope; I ceased to pray for the glorious city, for I knew that her sentence was gone forth; I saw her in the spirit, even as St. John saw her in the Revelations; her, and her sins, and her ruin. And I fled secretly at night, and buried myself here in the desert, to await the end of the world. Night and day I pray the Lord to accomplish His elect, and to hasten His kingdom. Morning by morning I look up trembling, and yet in hope, for the sign of the Son of man in heaven, when the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the skies pass away like a scroll, and the fountains of the nether fire burst up around our feet, and the end of all shall come. And thou wouldst go into the world from which I fled?'

' If the harvest be at hand, the Lord needs labourers. If the times be awful, I should be doing awful things in them. Send me, and let that day find me, where I long to be, in the forefront of the battle of the Lord.'

' The Lord's voice be obeyed! Thou shalt go. Here are letters to Cyril the patriarch. He will love thee for my sake: and for thine own sake, too, I trust. Thou goest of our free will as well as thine own. The abbot and I have watched thee long, knowing that the Lord had need of such as thee

elsewhere. We did but prove thee, to see by thy readiness to obey, whether thou wert fit to rule. Go, and God be with thee. Covet no man's gold or silver. Neither eat flesh nor drink wine, but live as thou hast lived—a Nazarite of the Lord. Fear not the face of man; but look not on the face of woman. In an evil hour came they into the world, the mothers of all mischiefs which I have seen under the sun. Come; the abbot waits for us at the gate.'

With tears of surprise, joy, sorrow, almost of dread, Philammon hung back.

'Nay—come. Why shouldst thou break thy brethren's hearts and ours by many leave-takings! Bring from the storehouse a week's provision of dried dates and millet. The papyrus boat lies at the ferry; thou shalt descend in it. The Lord will replace it for us when we need it. Speak with no man on the river except the monks of God. When thou hast gone five days' journey downward, ask for the mouth of the canal of Alexandria. Once in the city, any monk will guide thee to the archbishop. Send us news of thy welfare by some holy mouth. Come.'

Silently they paced together down the glen to the lonely beach of the great stream. Pambo was there already, his white hair glittering in the rising moon, as with slow and feeble arms he launched the light canoe. Philammon flung himself at the old men's feet, and besought, with many tears, their forgiveness and their blessing. 'We have nothing to forgive. Follow thou thine inward call. If it be of the flesh, it will avenge itself; if it be of the Spirit, who are we that we should fight against God? Farewell.' A few minutes more, and the youth and his canoe were lessening down the rapid stream in the golden summer twilight. Again a minute, and the swift southern night had fallen, and all was dark but the cold glare of the moon on the river, and on the rock-faces, and on the two old men, as they knelt upon the beach, and with their heads upon each other's shoulders,

like two children, sobbed and prayed together for the lost darling of their age.