

The Twilight of the Gods

By Richard Garnett

Truth fails not, but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime.

I

The fourth Christian century was far past its meridian, when, high above the summit of the supreme peak of Caucasus, a magnificent eagle came sailing on broad fans into the blue, and his shadow skimmed the glittering snow as it had done day by day for thousands of years. A human figure—or it might be superhuman, for his mien seemed more than mortal—lifted from the crag, to which he hung suspended by massy gyves and rivets, eyes mournful with the presentiment of pain. The eagle's screech clanged on the wind, as with outstretched neck he stooped earthward in ever narrowing circles; his huge quills already creaked in his victim's ears, whose flesh crept and shrank, and involuntary convulsions agitated his hands and feet. Then happened what all these millenniums had never witnessed. No thunderbolt had blazed forth from that dome of cloudless blue; no marksman had approached the inaccessible spot; yet, without vestige of hurt, the eagle dropped lifeless, falling sheer down into the unfathomable abyss below. At the same moment the bonds of the captive snapped asunder, and, projected by an impetus which kept him clear of the perpendicular precipice, he alighted at an infinite depth on a sun-flecked greensward amid young ash and oak, where he long lay deprived of sense and motion.

The sun fell, dew gathered on the grass, moonshine glimpsed through the leaves, stars peeped timidly at the prostrate figure, which remained prostrate and unconscious still. But as sunlight was born anew in the East a thrill passed over the slumberer, and he became conscious, first of an indescribably delicious feeling of restful ease, then of a gnawing pang, acute as the beak of the eagle for which he at first mistook it. But his wrists, though still encumbered with bonds and trailing fetters, were otherwise at liberty, and eagle there was none. Marvelling at his inward and invisible foe, he struggled to his feet, and found himself contending with a faintness and dizziness heretofore utterly unknown to him. He dimly felt himself in the midst of things grown wonderful by estrangement and distance. No grass, no flower, no leaf had met his eye for thousands of years, nothing but the impenetrable azure, the transient cloud, sun, moon, and star, the lightning flash, the glittering peaks of ice, and the solitary eagle. There seemed more wonder in a blade of grass than in all these things, but all was blotted in a dizzy swoon, and it needed his utmost effort to understand that a light sound hard by, rapidly growing more distinct, was indeed a footfall. With a violent effort he steadied himself by grasping a tree, and had hardly accomplished so much when a tall dark maiden, straight as an arrow, slim as an antelope, wildly beautiful as a Dryad, but liker a Maenad with her aspect of mingled disdain and dismay, and step hasty as of one pursuing or pursued, suddenly checked her speed on perceiving him.

"Who art thou?" he exclaimed.

"Gods! Thou speakest Greek!"

"What else should I speak?"

"What else? From whom save thee, since I closed my father's eyes, have I heard the tongue of Homer and Plato?"

"Who is Homer? Who is Plato?"

The maiden regarded him with a look of the deepest astonishment.

“Surely,” she said, “thy gift has been bestowed upon thee to little purpose. Say not, at least, that thou usest the speech of the Gods to blaspheme them. Thou art surely yet a votary of Zeus?”

“I a votary of Zeus!” exclaimed the stranger. “By these fetters, no!” And, weak as he was, the forest rang with his disdainful laughter.

“Farewell,” said the maiden, as with dilating form and kindling eye she gathered up her robes. “I parley with thee no more. Thou art ten-fold more detestable than the howling mob down yonder, intent on rapine and destruction. They know no better, and can no other. But thou, apt in speaking the sacred tongue yet brutally ignorant of its treasures, knowing the father of the Gods only to revile him! Let me pass.”

The stranger, if willing to hinder her, seemed little able. His eyes closed, his limbs relaxed, and without a cry he sank senseless on the sward.

In an instant the maiden was kneeling by his side. Hastily undoing a basket she carried on her arm, she drew forth a leather flask, and, supporting the sunken head with one hand, poured a stream of wine through the lips with the other. As the gurgling purple coursed down his throat the sufferer opened his eyes, and thanked her silently with a smile of exquisite sweetness. Removing the large leaves which shaded the contents of the basket, she disclosed ripe figs and pomegranates, honey-comb and snow-white curd, lying close to each other in tempting array. The stranger took of each alternately, and the basket was well-nigh emptied ere his appetite seemed assuaged.

The observant maiden, meanwhile, felt her mood strangely altered.

“So have I imaged Ulysses to myself,” she thought as she gazed on the stranger’s goodly form, full of vigour, though not without traces of age, the massive brow, the kindly mouth, the expression of far-seeing wisdom. “Such a man ignorant of letters, and a contemner of Zeus!”

The stranger’s eloquent thanks roused her from a reverie. The Greek tongue fell upon her ear like the sweetest music, and she grieved when its flow was interrupted by a question addressed directly to herself.

“Can a God feel hunger and thirst?”

“Surely no,” she rejoined.

“I should have said the same yesterday,” returned the stranger.

“Wherefore not to-day?”

“Dear maiden,” responded he, with winning voice and manner, “we must know each other better ere my tale can gain credence with thee. Do thou rather unfold what thine own speech has left dark to me. Why the language of the Gods, as should seem, is here understood by thee and me alone; what foes Zeus has here other than myself; what is the profane crowd of which thou didst speak; and why, alone and defenceless, thou ascendest this mountain. Think of me, if thou wilt, as one fallen from the clouds.”

“Strange man,” returned the maiden, “who knowest Homer’s speech and not Homer’s self, who renoucest Zeus and resemblest him, hear my tale ere I require thine. Yesterday I should have called myself the last priestess of Apollo in this fallen land, to-day I have neither shrine nor altar. Moved by I know not what madness, my countrymen have long ago forsaken the worship of the Gods. The temples crumbled into ruin, prayer was no longer offered or sacrifice made as of old, the priestly revenues were plundered; the sacred vessels carried away; the voices of oracles became dumb; the divine tongue of Greece was forgotten, its scrolls of wisdom mouldered unread, and the deluded people turned to human mechanics and fishermen. One faithful servant of Apollo remained, my father; but ‘tis seven days since he closed his eyes for

ever. It was time, for yesternoon the heralds proclaimed by order of the King that Zeus and the Olympians should be named no more in Caucasia.”

“Ha!” interrupted the stranger, “I see it all. Said I not so?” he shouted, gazing into the sky as if his eyes could pierce and his voice reach beyond the drifting clouds. “But to thy own tale,” he added, turning with a gesture of command to the astonished Elenko.

“It is soon told,” she said. “I knew that it was death to serve the Gods any more, yet none the less in my little temple did fire burn upon Apollo’s altar this morning. Scarcely was it kindled ere I became aware of a ruffianly mob thronging to sack and spoil. I was ready for death, but not at their hands. I caught up this basket, and escaped up the mountain. On its inaccessible summit, it is reported, hangs Prometheus, whom Zeus (let me bow in awe before his inscrutable counsels) doomed for his benevolence to mankind. To him, as Æschylus sings, Jo of old found her way, and from him received monition and knowledge of what should come to pass. I will try if courage and some favouring God will guide me to him; if not, I will die as near Heaven as I may attain. Tell me on thy part what thou wilt, and let me depart. If thou art indeed Zeus’s enemy, thou wilt find enough on thy side down yonder.”

“I have been Zeus’s enemy,” returned the stranger, mildly and gravely, “I am so no longer. Immortal hate befits not the mortal I feel myself to have become. Nor needest thou ascend the peak further. Maiden, I am Prometheus!”

II

It is a prerogative of the Gods that, when they do speak sooth, mortals must needs believe them. Elenko hence felt no incredulity at the revelation of Prometheus, or sought other confirmation than the bonds and broken links of chain at his wrists and ankles.

“Now,” he cried, or rather shouted, “is the prophecy fulfilled with which of old I admonished the Gods in the halls of Olympus. I told them that Zeus should beget a child mightier than himself, who should send him and them the way he had sent his father. I knew not that this child was already begotten, and that his name was Man. It has taken Man ages to assert himself, nor has he yet, as it would seem, done more than enthrone a new idol in the place of the old. But for the old, behold the last traces of its authority in these fetters, of which the first smith will rid me. Expect no thunderbolt, dear maiden; none will come: nor shall I regain the immortality of which I feel myself bereaved since yesterday.”

“Is this no sorrow to thee?” asked Elenko.

“Has not my immortality been one of pain?” answered Prometheus. “Now I feel no pain, and dread one only.”

“And that is?”

“The pain of missing a certain fellow-mortal,” answered Prometheus, with a look so expressive that the hitherto unawed maiden cast her eyes to the ground. Hastening away from the conversation to which, nevertheless, she inly purposed to return,

“Is Man, then, the maker of Deity?” she asked.

“Can the source of his being originate in himself?” asked Prometheus. “To assert this were self-contradiction, and pride inflated to madness. But of the more exalted beings who have like him emanated from the common principle of all existence, Man, since his advent on the earth, though not the creator, is the preserver or the destroyer. He looks up to them, and they are; he out-grows them, and they art not. For the barbarian and Triballian gods there is no return; but the Olympians, if dead as deities, survive as impersonations of Man’s highest conceptions of the

beautiful. Languid and spectral indeed must be their existence in this barbarian age; but better days are in store for them.”

“And for thee, Prometheus?”

“There is now no place,” replied he, “for an impeacher of the Gods. My cause is won, my part is played. I am rewarded for my love of man by myself becoming human. When I shall have proved myself also mortal I may haply traverse realms which Zeus never knew, with, I would hope, Elenko by my side.”

Elenko’s countenance expressed her full readiness to accompany Prometheus as far beyond the limits of the phenomenal world as he might please to conduct her. A thought soon troubled her delicious reverie, and she inquired:

“Peradventure, then, the creed which I have execrated may be truer and better than that which I have professed?”

“If born in wiser brains and truer hearts, aye,” answered Prometheus, “but of this I can have no knowledge. It seems from thy tale to have begun but ill. Yet Saturn mutilated his father, and his reign was the Golden Age.”

While conversing, hand locked in hand, they had been strolling aimlessly down the mountain. Turning an abrupt bend in the path, they suddenly found themselves in presence of an assembly of early Christians.

These confessors were making the most of Elenko’s dilapidated temple, whose smoking shell threw up a sable column in the background. The effigies of Apollo and the Muses had been dragged forth, and were being diligently broken up with mallets and hammers. Others of the sacrilegious throng were rending scrolls, or dividing vestments, or firing the grove of laurel that environed the shrine, or pelting the affrighted birds as they flew forth. The sacred vessels, however, at least those of gold and silver, appeared safe in the guardianship of an episcopal personage of shrewd and jovial aspect, under whose inspection they were being piled up by a troop of sturdy young ecclesiastics, the only weapon-bearers among the rabble. Elenko stood riveted to the ground. Prometheus, to her amazement, rushed forward to one of the groups with a loud “By all the Gods and Goddesses!” Following his movements, she saw that the object of his interest was an enormous dead eagle carried by one of the mob. The multitude, startled by his cry and his emotion, gazed eagerly at the strangers, and instantly a shout went up:

“The heathen woman!”

“With a heathen man!”

And clubs began to be brandished, and stones to be picked up from the ground.

Prometheus, to whom the shouts were unintelligible, looked wistfully at Elenko. As their eyes met, Elenko’s countenance, which had hitherto been all disdain and defiance, assumed an expression of irresolution. A stone struck Prometheus on the temple, drawing blood; a hundred hands went up, each weighted with a missile.

“Do as I,” cried Elenko to him, and crossed herself.

Prometheus imitated her, not unsuccessfully for a novice.

The uplifted arms were stayed, some even sank down.

By this time the Bishop had hustled to the front, and addressed a torrent of questions to Prometheus, who merely shook his head, and turned to inspect the eagle.

“Brethren,” said the Bishop, “I smell a miracle!” And, turning to Elenko, he rapidly proceeded to cross-examine her.

“Thou wert the priestess of this temple?”

“I was.”

“Thou didst leave it this morning a heathen?”

“I did.”

“Thou returnest a Christian?”

Elenko blushed fire, her throat swelled, her heart beat violently. All her soul seemed concentrated in the gaze she fastened on the pale and bleeding Prometheus. She remained silent—but she crossed herself.

“Who then has persuaded thee to renounce Apollo?”

Elenko pointed to Prometheus. “An enemy of Zeus, then?”

“Zeus has not such another enemy in the world.”

“I knew it, I was sure of it,” exclaimed the Bishop. “I can always tell a Christian when I see him. Wherefore speaks he not?”

“He is ancient, for all his vigorous mien. His martyrdom began ere our present speech was, nor could he learn this in his captivity.”

“Martyrdom! Captivity!” exclaimed the prelate gleefully, “I thought we were coming thither. An early martyr, doubtless?”

“A very early martyr.”

“Fettered and manacled?”

“Behold his wrists and ankles.”

“Tortured, of course?”

“Incredibly.”

“Miraculously kept alive to this day?”

“In an entirely supernatural manner.”

“Now,” said the Bishop, “I would wager my mitre and ring that his life was prolonged by the daily ministrations of yonder fowl that he caresses with such singular affection?”

“Never,” replied Elenko, “for one day did that most punctual bird omit to visit him.”

“Hurrah!” shouted the Bishop. “And now, its mission accomplished, the blessed creature, as I am informed, is found dead at the foot of the mountain. Saints and angels! this is glorious! On your knees, ye infidels!”

And down they all went, the Bishop setting the example. As their heads were bowed to the earth, Elenko made a sign to Prometheus, and when the multitude looked up, it beheld him in the act of imparting the episcopal blessing.

“Tell him that we are all his brethren,” said the Bishop, which announcement became in Elenko’s mouth, “Do as I do, and cleave to thy eagle.”

A procession was formed. The new saint, his convert, and the eagle, rode in a car at the head of it. The Bishop, surrounded by his bodyguard, followed with the sacred vessels of Apollo, to which he had never ceased to direct a vigilant eye throughout the whole proceedings. The multitude swarmed along singing hymns, or contending for the stray feathers of the eagle. The representatives of seven monasteries put in their claims for the links of Prometheus’s fetters, but the Bishop scouted them all. Lie found time to whisper to Elenko:

“You seem a sensible young person. Just hint to our friend that we don’t want to hear anything about his theology, and the less he talks about the primitive Church the better. No doubt he is a most intelligent man, but he cannot possibly be up to all the recent improvements.”

Elenko promised most fervently that Prometheus’ theological sentiments should remain a mystery to the public. She then began to reflect very seriously on the subject of her own morals. “This day,” she said to herself, “I have renounced all the Gods, and told lies enough to last me my life, and for no other reason than that I am in love. If this is a sufficient reason, lovers must

have a different code of morality from the rest of the world, and indeed it would appear that they have. Will you die for me? Yes. Admirable. Will you lie for me? No. Then you don't love me. $\hat{a}\hat{a}\hat{e}\hat{e}^3 \hat{a}\hat{b}\hat{o} \hat{e}\hat{i}\hat{n}\hat{a}\hat{e}\hat{a}\hat{o}, \hat{a}\hat{b}\hat{o} \hat{i}\hat{a}\hat{a} \hat{E}\hat{i}\hat{a}\hat{a}.$ "

III

Elenko soon found that there was no pausing upon the path to which she had committed herself. As the sole medium of communication between Prometheus and the religious public, her time was half spent in instructing Prometheus in the creed in which he was supposed to have instructed her, and half in framing the edifying sentences which passed for the interpretation of discourses for the most part far more interesting to herself than if they had been what they professed to be. The rapt and impassioned attention which she was observed to bestow on his utterances on such occasions all but gained her the reputation of a saint, and was accepted as a sufficient set-off against the unhallowed affection which she could not help manifesting for the memory of her father. The judicious reluctance of the Caucasian ecclesiastics to inquire over-anxiously into the creeds and customs of the primitive Church was a great help to her; and another difficulty was removed by the Bishop, who, having no idea of encouraging a rival thaumaturgist, took an early opportunity of signifying that it was rather in the line of Desmotes (for by this name the new saint passed) to be the subject than the instrument of miracles, and that, at all events, no more were to be looked for from him at his time of life. The warmth with which Elenko espoused this view raised her greatly in his good opinion, and he was always ready to come to her aid when she became entangled in chronological or historical difficulties, or seasoned her versions of Desmotes' speeches with reminiscences of Plato or Marcus Aurelius, or when her invention failed altogether. On such occasions, if objectors grew troublesome, the Bishop would thunder, "Brethren, I smell a heresy!" and no more was said. One minor trouble both to Prometheus and Elenko was the affection they were naturally expected to manifest towards the carcass of the wretched eagle, which many identified with the eagle of the Evangelist John. Prometheus was of a forgiving disposition, but Elenko wished nothing more ardently than that the whole aquiline race might have but one neck, and that she might wring it. It somewhat comforted her to observe that the eagle's plumage was growing thin, while the eagle's custodian was growing fat.

But she had worse troubles to endure than any that eagles could occasion. The youth of those who resorted to her and Prometheus attracted remark from the graver members of the community. Young ladies found the precepts of the handsome and dignified saint indispensable to their spiritual health; young men were charmed with their purity as they came filtered through the lips of Elenko. Is man more conceited than woman, or more confiding? Elenko should certainly have been at ease; no temptress, however enterprising, could well be spreading her nets for an Antony three hundred years old. Prometheus, on the contrary, might have found cause for jealousy in many a noble youth's unconcealed admiration of Elenko. Yet he seemed magnificently unconscious of any cause for apprehension, while Elenko's heart swelled till it was like to burst. She had the further satisfaction of knowing herself the best hated woman in Caucasia, between the enmity of those of whose admirers she had made an involuntary conquest, and of those who found her standing between them and Prometheus. Her monopoly of Greek, she felt sure, was her only security. Two constant attendants at Prometheus's receptions particularly alarmed her, the Princess Miriam, niece of the Bishop, a handsome widow accustomed to

have things as she wished them; and a tall veiled woman who seemed unknown to all, but whose unseen eyes, she instinctively knew, were never averted from the unconscious Prometheus.

It was therefore with some trepidation that she received a summons to the private apartment of the Princess Miriam.

“Dear friend,” the Princess began, “thou knowest the singular affection which I have invariably entertained for thee.”

“Right well do I know it,” responded Elenko. (“The thirty-first lie to-day,” she added wearily to herself.)

“It is this affection, dear friend,” continued the Princess, “which induces me on the present occasion to transgress the limits of conventional propriety, and make a communication distressing to thee, but infinitely more so to myself.”

Elenko implored the Princess to make no such sacrifice in the cause of friendship, but the great lady was resolute.

“People say,” she continued—

“What say they?”

“That thy relation to Desmotes is indiscreet. That it is equivocal. That it is offensive. That it is sacrilegious. That, in a word, it is improper.”

Elenko defended herself with as much energy as her candour would allow.

“Dear friend,” said the Princess, “thou dost not imagine that I have part or lot in these odious imputations? Even could I deem them true, should I not think charitably of thee, but yesterday a heathen, and educated in impiety by a foul sorcerer? My poor lamb! But tongues must be stopped, and I have now to advise thee how this may be accomplished.”

“Say on.”

“People will always talk so long as thou art the sole medium of communication with the holy man. Some deem him less ignorant of our speech than he seems, but concerning this I inquire not: for, in society, what seems, is. Enough that thy colloquies expose thee to scandal. There is but one remedy. Thou must yield thy place to another. It is meet that thou forthwith instruct in that barbarous dialect some matron of unblemished repute and devout aspirations; no mere ignorant devotee, however, but a woman of the world, whose prudence and experience may preserve the holy man from the pitfalls set for him by the unprincipled. Manifestly she must be a married person, else nought were gained, yet must she not be chargeable with forsaking her duties towards her husband and children. It follows that she must be a widow. It were also well that she should be of kin to some influential personage, to whose counsel she might have recourse in times of difficulty, and whose authority might protect her against the slanderous and evil disposed. I have not been able to meet any one endowed with all these qualifications, excepting myself. I therefore propose to thee that thou shouldst instruct me in the speech of Desmotes, and when I am qualified to take thy place my uncle shall elevate thee to the dignity of Abbess, or bestow thee upon some young clergyman of extraordinary desert.”

Elenko intimated, perhaps with more warmth than necessary, her aversion to both propositions, and the extreme improbability of the Princess ever acquiring any knowledge of Greek by her instrumentality.

“If this is the case,” said the Princess, with perfect calmness, “I must have recourse to my other method, which is infallible.”

Elenko inquired what it might be.

“I shall represent to my uncle, what indeed he very well knows, that a saint is, properly speaking, of no value till he is dead. Not until his decease are his relics available, or pilgrimages

to his shrine feasible. It is solely in anticipation of this event that my uncle is keeping Desmotes at all; and the sooner it comes to pass, the sooner will my revered relative come by his own. Only think of the capital locked up in the new church, now so nearly completed, on the spot where they picked up the eagle! How shall it be dedicated to Desmotes in Desmotes' lifetime? Were it not a most blissful and appropriate coincidence if the day of the consecration were that of the saint's migration to a better world? I shall submit this view of the case to my uncle: he is accustomed to hear reason from me, of whom, between ourselves, he is not a little afraid. Thou mayest rely upon it that about the time of the consecration Desmotes will ascend to heaven; while thou, it is gravely to be feared, wilt proceed in the opposite direction. Would'st thou avert this unpleasantness, think well of my first proposal. I give thee credit for loving Desmotes, and suppose, therefore, that thou wilt make some sacrifice for his sake. I am a Kettle, thou art a Pot. Take heed how thou knockest against me!"

Elenko sped back to bear tidings of the threatened collision to Prometheus. As she approached his chamber she heard with astonishment two voices in eager conversation, and discovered with still greater amazement that their dialogue was carried on in Greek. The second speaker, moreover, was evidently a female. A jealous pang shot through Elenko's breast; she looked cautiously in, and discerned the same mysterious veiled woman whose demeanour had already been an enigma to her. But the veil was thrown back, and the countenance went far to allay Elenko's disquiet. It bore indeed traces of past beauty, but was altogether that of one who had known better days; worn and faded, weary and repining. Elenko's jealousy vanished, though her surprise redoubled, when she heard Prometheus address the stranger as "Sister."

"A pretty brother I have got," rejoined the lady, in high sharp tones: "to leave me in want! Never once to inquire after me!"

"Nay, sister, or sister-in-law," responded Prometheus, "if it comes to that, where were you while I was on Caucasus? The Oceanides ministered to me, Hermes came now and then, even Hercules left a card; but I never saw Pandora."

"How could I compromise Epimetheus, Prometheus?" demanded Pandora. "Besides, my attendant Hope was always telling me that all would come right, without any meddling of mine."

"Let her tell you so now," retorted Prometheus.

"Tell me now! Do you pretend not to know that the hussey forsook Olympus ten years ago, and has turned Christian?"

"I am sure I am very sorry to hear it. Somehow, she never forsook *me*. I can't imagine how you Gods get on without her."

"Get on! We are getting off. Except Eros and Plutus, who seem as usual, and the 'old Fates, who go on spinning as if nothing had happened, none of us expects to last for another ten years. The sacrifices have dwindled down to nothing. Zeus has put down his eagle. Hera has eaten her peacocks. Apollo's lyre is never heard—pawned, no doubt. Bacchus drinks water, and Venus—well, you can imagine how she gets on without him and Ceres. And here you are, sleek and comfortable, and never troubling yourself about your family. But you had better, or I swear I will tell Zeus; and we shall see whether these Christians will keep you with your ante-chamber full of starving gods. Take a day to think of what I have been saying!"

And away she flounced, not noticing Elenko. Long and earnestly did the pair discuss the perils that menaced them, and at the end of their deliberations Elenko sought the Bishop, and briefly imparted the Princess Miriam's ultimatum.

"It is painful to a spiritual man," replied the prelate, "to be accessory to a murder. It is also repugnant to his feelings to deny a beloved niece anything on which she has set her heart. To

avoid such grievous dilemma, I judge it well that ye both ascend to heaven without further ceremony.”

That night the ascent of Prometheus and Elenko was witnessed by divers credible persons. The new church was consecrated shortly afterwards. It was amply stored with relics from the wardrobe of Prometheus and what remained of the eagle. The damsels of the capital regained their admirers, and those who had become enamoured of Prometheus mostly transferred their affections to the Bishop. Everybody was satisfied except the Princess Miriam, who never ceased to deplore her indulgence in giving Elenko the chance of first speech with her uncle.

“If I had been five minutes beforehand with the minx!” she said.

IV

The heaven to which Prometheus and Elenko had ascended was situated in a sequestered valley of Laconia. A single winding path led into the glen, which was inhabited only by a few hunters and shepherds, who still observed the rites of the ancient faith; and sometimes, deeming but to show kindness to a mortal, refreshed or sheltered a forlorn and hungry Deity. Saving at the entrance the vale was walled round by steep cliffs, for the most part waving with trees, but here and there revealing the naked crag. It was traversed by a silvery stream, in its windings enclosing Prometheus's and Elenko's cottage, almost as in an island. The cot, buried in laurel and myrtle, had a garden where fig and mulberry, grape and almond, ripened in their season. A few goats browsed on the long grass, and yielded their milk to the household. Bread and wine, and flesh when needed, were easily procured from the neighbours. Beyond necessary furniture, the cottage contained little but precious scrolls, obtained by Elenko from Athens and the newly founded city of Constantine. In these, under her guidance, Prometheus read of matters that never, while he dwelt on Olympus, entered the imagination of any God.

It is a chief happiness of lovers that each possesses treasures wholly their own, which they may yet make fully the possession of the other. These treasures are of divers kinds, beauty, affection, memory, hope. But never were such treasures of knowledge shared between lovers as between Prometheus and Elenko. Each possessed immeasurable stores, hitherto inaccessible to the other. How trifling seemed the mythical lore which Elenko had gleaned as the minister of Phœbus to that now imparted by Prometheus! The Titan had seen all, and been a part of all that he had seen. He had bowed beneath the sceptre of Uranus, he had witnessed his fall, and marked the ocean crimson with his blood. He remembered hoary Saturn a brisk active Deity, pushing his way to the throne of Heaven, and devouring in a trice the stone that now resists his fangs for millenniums. He had heard the shields of the Corybantes clash around the infant Zeus; he described to Elenko how one day the sea had frothed and boiled, and undraped Aphrodite had ascended from it in the presence of the gazing and applauding amphitheatre of cloud-cushioned gods. He could depict the personal appearance of Cybele, and sketch the character of Enceladus. He had instructed Zeus, as Chiron had instructed Achilles; he remembered Poseidon afraid of the water, and Pluto of the dark. He called to mind and expounded ancient oracles heretofore unintelligible: he had himself been told, and had disbelieved, that the happiest day of his own life would be that on which he should feel himself divested of immortality. Of the younger gods and their doings he knew but little; he inquired with interest whether Bacchus had returned in safety from his Indian expedition, and whether Proserpine had a family of divine imps.

Much more, nevertheless, had Elenko to teach Prometheus than she could learn from him. How trivial seemed the history of the gods to what he now heard of the history of men! Were these

indeed the beings he had known “like ants in the sunless recesses of caves, dwelling deep-burrowing in the earth, ignorant of the signs of the seasons,” to whom he had given fire and whom he had taught memory and number, for whom he had “brought the horse under the chariot, and invented the sea-beaten, flaxen-winged chariot of the sailor”? And now, how poorly showed the gods beside this once wretched brood! What Deity could die for Olympus, as Leonidas had for Greece?

Which of them could, like Iphigenia, dwell for years beside the melancholy sea, keeping a true heart for an absent brother? Which of them could raise his fellows nearer to the source of all Deity, as Socrates and Plato had raised men? Who could portray himself as Phidias had portrayed Athene? Could the Muses speak with their own voices as they had spoken by Sappho’s? He was especially pleased to see his own moral superiority to Zeus so eloquently enforced by Æschylus, and delighted in criticising the sentiments which the other poets had put into the mouth of the gods. Homer, he thought, must have been in Olympus often, and Aristophanes not seldom. When he read in the Cyclops of Euripides, “Stranger, I laugh to scorn Zeus’s thunderbolts,” he grew for a moment thoughtful. “Am I,” he questioned, “ending where Polyphemus began?” But when he read a little further on:

The wise man’s only Jupiter is this,
To eat and drink during his little day,
And give himself no care—

“No,” he said, “the Zeus that miled me to the rock is better than this Zeus. But well for man to be rid of both, if he does not put another in their place; or, in dropping his idolatry, has not flung away his religion. Heaven has not departed with Zeus.” And, taking his lyre, he sang:

What floods of lavish splendour
The lofty sun doth pour!
What else can Heaven render?
What room hath she for more?
Yet shall his course be shortly done,
And after his declining
The skies that held a single Sun
With thousands shall be shining.

V

It was not long ere the gods began to find their way to Prometheus’s earthly paradise, and who came once came again. The first was Epimetheus, who had probably suffered least of all from the general upset, having in truth little to lose since his ill-starred union with Pandora. He had indeed reason for thankfulness in his practical divorce from his spouse, who had settled in Caucasia, and gave Greek lessons to the Princess Miriam. Would Prometheus lend him half a talent? a quarter? a tenth? a hundredth? Thanks, thanks. Prometheus might rely upon it that his residence should not be divulged on any account. Notwithstanding which assurance, the cottage was visited next day by eleven gods and demigods, mostly Titans. Elenko found it trying, and was really alarmed when by and by the Furies, having made over their functions to the Devil, strolled up to take the air, and dropped in for a chat, bringing Cerberus. But they behaved exceedingly well, and took back a message from Elenko to Eurydice. Ere long she was on most intimate terms with all the dethroned divinities, celestial, infernal, and marine.

Beautiful and blessed beyond most things is youthful enthusiasm, looking up to something it feels or deems above itself. Beautiful, too, as autumn sunshine is maturity looking down with gentleness on the ideal it has surpassed, and reverencing it still for old ideas and associations. The thought of beholding a Deity would once have thrilled Elenko with rapture, if this had not been checked by awe at her own presumption. The idea that a Deity, other than some disgraced offender like Prometheus, could be the object of her compassion, would never have entered her mind. And now she pitied the whole Olympian cohort most sincerely, not so much for having fallen as for having deserved to fall. She could not conceal from herself how grievously they were one and all behind the age. It was impossible to make Zeus comprehend how an idea could be a match for a thunderbolt. Apollo spoke handsomely of Homer, yet evidently esteemed the Iliad and Odyssey but lightly in comparison with the blind bard's hymn to himself. Ceres candidly admitted that her mind was a complete blank on the subject of the Eleusinian mysteries. Aphrodite's dress was admirable for summer, but in winter seemed obstinate conservatism; and why should Pallas make herself a fright with her Gorgon helmet, now that it no longer frightened anybody? Where Elenko would fain have adored she found herself tolerating, excusing, condescending. How many Elenkos are even now tenderly nursing ancient creeds, whose main virtue is the virtue of their professors!

One autumn night all the principal gods were assembled under Prometheus's roof, doing justice to the figs and mulberries, and wine cooled with Taygetan snow. The guests were more than usually despondent. Prometheus was moody and abstracted, his breast seemed labouring with thought. "So looked my Pythoness," whispered Apollo to his neighbour, "when about to deliver an oracle."

And the oracle came—in lyric verse, not to infringe any patent of Apollo's—

When o'er the towers of Constantine
An Orient Moon begins to shine,
Waning nor waxing aught, and bright
In daytide as in deep of night:

Then, though the fane be brought
To wreck, the God shall find,
Enthroned in human thought,
A Temple in the mind.

"And what becomes of us while this prodigious moonshine is concocting?" demanded Zeus, who had become the most sceptical of any of the gods.

"Go to Elysium," suggested Prometheus.

"There's an idea!" cried Zeus and Pallas together.

"To Elysium! to Elysium!" exclaimed the other gods, and all rose tumultuously, saving two.

"I go not," said Eros, "for where Love is, there is Elysium. And yonder rising moon tells me that my hour is come." And he flitted forth.

"Neither go I," said an old blind god, "for where Plutus is, Elysium is not. Moreover, mankind would follow after me. But I too must away. Strange that I should have abode so long under the roof of a pair of perfect virtue." And he tottered out.

But the other gods swept forth into the moonlight, and were seen no more. And Prometheus picked up the forsaken sandals of Hermes, and bound them on his own feet, and grasped Elenko, and they rose up by a dizzy flight to empty heaven. All was silent in those immense courts, vacant of everything save here and there some rusty thunderbolt or mouldering crumb of

ambrosia. Above, around, below, beyond sight, beyond thought, stretched the still deeps of æther, blazing with innumerable worlds. Eye could rove nowhither without beholding a star, nor could star be beheld from which the God's hall, with all its vastness, would not have been utterly invisible. Elenko leaned over the battlements, and watched the racing meteors. Prometheus stood by her, and pointed out in the immeasurable distance the little speck of shining dust from which they had flown.

“There? or here?” he asked.

“There!” said Elenko.