

# His Primeval Conscience

BY JENNIE BULLARD WATERBURY

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!  
And the little less, and what worlds away!  
—ROBERT BROWNING.

“ARE you quite sure, Helen?”  
“Quite sure, John.”  
“Think again. Seven years is a long period for even a woman’s heart to ache.”

Mrs. Wentworth’s face flushed. Then she remarked, evasively,

“Perhaps I am unconsciously imitating St. Paul’s example. Perhaps I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Frost’s kindly glance had swept over her as he demanded enlightenment. As she replied, with an undisguised expression of mystification, he looked away.

Outside, a driving sleet blurred and blunted the elaborate outlines of the dwellings opposite. Inside, the long low room with its bowls of flowers, some few choice etchings and engravings, a grand piano thrown open, on its rack a Chopin prelude, Daghestan rugs disposed discreetly at rare intervals along the inlaid parquet floor, and the low bookcases, running the entire length of the walls, holding the daintiest editions of standard works, framed in one whom her friends named “the loveliest woman in the world!”

“How old are you, Helen?” Frost inquired abruptly.

Surprised, resentful, and then intensely amused, Mrs. Wentworth threw back her handsome head and contemplated her visitor merrily through half-shut eyelids.

“Guess!”

“Let me see,” began Frost. “Four years abroad with masters—you crossed when you were sixteen; that makes you twenty. Then you married.”

“Such fun, John! And how I danced!”

“How you flirted, you mean!”

“I exonerate you from all blame concerning that adjunct of my education!”

“Would that I might as truthfully exonerate you!”

“You took me too seriously. Some one is bound to be wounded in a skirmish of hearts. Were you really hurt, John?”

“Irrevocably hurt.”

“I am so sorry!”

She leaned forward and looked tenderly into the reserved face with its crown of gray hair. John Frost had always been a part of her life from girlhood to womanhood, from wifehood to widowhood. Of rare parts, he had unobtrusively attained the highest eminence. Helen Wentworth had grown so accustomed to his quiet devotion that often she forgot it altogether; or if she thought about it at all, she sighed. To-day, however, the pathos of his disappointed life came home to her, and made her exclaim, both hands outstretched,

“There are so many other women, John!”

“Hush! There is but one!”

“But you must conquer it!”

“I don’t wish to conquer it.”

She sank back in her luxurious chair, her full figure in its steel-gray gown set like a cameo against the dull red background.

“Shall I tell you why I love you, Helen?”

She made an almost imperceptible gesture of remonstrance, to vouchsafe apologetically,

“If it affords you any comfort—yes.”

“I loved you at first because you were you: it’s the law of the universe for one man to love one woman, and none other.”

“And for one woman to love one man—usually the wrong one!” she flung out, irritably.

“I loved you, secondly, for the turn of your wrist, for the modulation of your voice; because you were the only person in the world who could stir my heart. I could not misunderstand you if I tried. To me you were transparent even in your



"ARE YOU QUITE SURE, HELEN?"

most aggravating moods. When you married Wentworth, even, I knew you did it because—”

“Because he was so good.”

“You became his wife. That was sufficient. Was his goodness satisfying, Helen?”

“Entirely.”

She scated herself, yielding to an impulse of overpowering fatigue.

“In all those childless years, John,” she averred, *thoughtfully*, “he never once lost his temper or upbraided me!”

“Extraordinary.”

There was a long pause. Then Frost continued:

“I love you, Helen, for your fine character. Your conduct in every visible emergency gives evidence of extraordinary good sense and latent force. I love you most of all because you have been faithful. It is so like you; it shows a noble resolution. Although austere and precluding friendly intercourse—the intercourse that is only attained through a mutual exchange of confidences—I never hesitate to pay it entire homage from the depths of my soul! Is it to be wondered at that as a woman you stand alone in my estimation? But, Helen, why can't you be as frank with me as I am toward you? Will your heart never wake again? Am I not to be considered at all? Is my long patience to go for naught. True love is sweet. Are you so complete that you dare thrust it from you? Are you so sure that solitude is best that you coldly reject every companionship?”

“Stop!” cried a voice.

Mrs. Wentworth's face was white as snow. Her features were stamped with unalterable resolve:

“Take that chair,” she commanded, unflinchingly, in that strange voice, “and listen to me. What I am going to do is small enough return for twenty years' worship of a false image. Sit down!”

Frost sank into a chair, the white inflexibility in Mrs. Wentworth's face reflecting itself in his own.

She stood with her back to the fire again, her arms behind her, one small foot advanced.

“New York may translate me as it will,” she said, firmly. “It is not my business nor my intention to enlighten it. But you must know the truth, John; I

tell it to save you from yourself! I married because I thought my heart was broken, and required diversion! There never has been but one man in the world for me. There never can be but that one.”

She dragged one hand from behind her as though a weight were attached to its fingers, and dashed it hurriedly across her wet eyes. Biting her lips as though to control their trembling, she continued:

“‘Faithful!’ I was faithful to nothing once. I am trying to be faithful ‘in the least of things’ now—to myself, and others!”

“How could you marry where you did not love?”

She started violently.

“Listen! The other was a poor student who used to come to my father's house to study law. It took him years and years to earn enough to support his aged mother. He never told me he loved me. Because he could not leave her and marry me, he was too honorable to speak; but I saw it in his startling pallor and heard it in the tones of his voice. How the consciousness of it made my heart leap! But ‘hearts,’ you know, ‘after leaps, *ache*.’ I was hungry for love, and motherhood. I married. When my widowhood came upon me, still he could not marry. He could not leave her; he would not. She is old. Her ways are not my ways. He is too loyal to hurt her, or to blame her, or to explain himself; and she is entitled to the first consideration. I love him better for his renunciation than I possibly could if he married me at her expense!”

“That's right!”

The involuntary ejaculation from the man before her made her eyes fill and run over.

“There must be a way,” he said, thoughtfully, after a few seconds.

“There is no way. His portion is provided for him. He is no longer young; he is worn out. She absorbs every moment when he is not occupied. He has plodded on and on. I have these!” pointing contemptuously at the rare paintings on the walls, at the conservatory beyond, at the hall with its rich furnishings. “I have ‘everything,’ my friends say, ‘that human creature can desire’; but, oh, John, John, the days are empty, empty!”

She buried her face in her hands, and stood sobbing convulsively.

"What a tangle life is!" said Frost.

"I could not let you go on saying and thinking all those nice things about me any longer, when I was such a hypocrite!" she sobbed.

"Nonsense! You are nothing of the kind!"

"I want to be happy and to make others happy, but it is taken out of my hands. I try to do for everybody, and forget myself—what the novelists call 'cloaking my grief in merciful deeds.' But life is so bare, and bald!"

He crossed the room and laid a big hand against her bowed head.

"Brave little woman; there, there!" he whispered, soberly.

"What shall I do?" she asked, convulsively.

"Endure!"

The words were as firm as adamant. Frost's face was like gray marble.

She lifted her head and looked at him with grateful eyes.

"That you, of all others, should counsel this when it makes you suffer so! Oh, there are days when I am beside myself; and my youth is ebbing out, ebbing out! I think until I'm almost out of my mind. I rarely see him now. He only comes once in a while, and each parting is nothing short of agony for us both. Sometimes I believe I am idealizing him, and that love cannot exist on such short rations—but when I see him"—her eyes behind the tear-laden lashes grew glad—"ah, well. Then I *know!*" she concluded.

"Cling to that. It's the only thing that makes life worth living!" He had lifted his hat from a small table. Now he stood by the door. As the light from the hall lantern fell across his pale, set face, Helen drew a sudden sharp breath.

"How noble you are!" she exclaimed, wondering. "You advise me, then, to cling to this hollow thing which leaves me, and every one, desolate?"

"Don't outrage nature," advised Frost, quietly. "Good-night."

"But, John!"

The door slammed. He was gone.

They were in the same room, only the hour was later, and they were two years

older. Her manner was less frank and his more reserved. They had consumed a Welsh rarebit at a little table drawn close to the fire, with fervent outspoken supplications to be spared bad dreams, and now, like a modern Darby and Joan, they were ensconced comfortably at opposite corners of the hearth.

Mrs. Wentworth laid her fingers calculatingly point against point; her arched eyebrows curved mischievously; her slipped foot tapped the fender restlessly.

"Any news?"

"Let me dream," he begged.

"I refuse. You're no longer in Europe, remember. Life here is essentially practical. Come! Brush off Old World mould, John. By-the-way, did you know that the Warrens were divorced?"

"Too bad," feebly. "They seemed as happy, when I left, as the proverbial turtle-doves."

"Yes; too happy. Love is out of fashion!"

"You're looking handsomer than ever," interrupted Frost, with a frown.

"Isn't that what might be termed a 'back-handed' compliment? What do you mean by the 'ever,' pray? Give me much and more of praise, though, please. I'm growing old, and I'm as thirsty for compliments as a spinster is for cats."

"Helen, why haven't you married?"

"Don't ask stupid questions."

"I know that his mother is dead—since. Be yourself, Helen. Life is so short. Try rest."

He had risen. She too rose, and they stood face to face. With a sigh she whirled her arm-chair towards her so that she might lean the entire weight of her body against it. Her mocking eyes looked inward for an instant; then she said, impulsively,

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Command me."

"Go over to the window, turn your back, and don't speak until I have concluded."

He glanced at her sharply, but her expression was impenetrable. With three strides he was at the window. Folding his arms across his broad chest, he stood still.

"When you went away," began Mrs. Wentworth, "you unconsciously left me

possessed of a delightful acquisition. Every woman should value as her most precious possession the feminine capacity to read between the lines. I have always considered it my sixth sense. Your unquestioning resignation betrayed a state of things that electrified me; you had preserved your primeval conscience! Your reverent and uncomplaining submission to my will divulged my selfishness. You turned me to the rightabout, and took it for granted that I would live up to things. I began at once to go about more, to try and forget my foremost grievance, to interest myself in other people; but once again their littleness appalled me, and their superficiality in contrast with your genuine merit made me unhappy.

"One day I read a notice of his mother's death in the newspaper. It came like a clap of thunder. When he reached my side his words, so long pent up, reminded me of a lava stream that overflows its crater surcharged with the concentrated fire of centuries. He told me what for long years I thought to have yearned to hear—that he loved me. He told me that my silence had helped him to be silent, that his mother had been a peculiarly constituted person with whom I never could have been happy; that until now, in loyalty to her, he had been dumb.

"I answered that intuition had taught me patience, and that the certitude of his strength of character had inspired my allegiance! 'Although your decision was against me,' I said, 'I admired you more for making it than if you had weakly rejected your portion and made all three of us wretched in consequence.' 'If you had known my mother,' he answered, 'you would have seen for yourself that the plan adopted was the one honest way to prevent a painful complication. She would share me with no one. It would have killed her if I had spoken of you. But,' he added, 'when Wentworth died I had to exercise my utmost forbearance. I knew you had married once; you would marry again.' 'That would have been impossible,' I interrupted. 'Remember, I am a woman now. Before, I was only a vain weak girl. Married life taught me how entirely I had outraged my better nature.' He looked

bewildered, and then he slowly shook his head. 'I am quite sure,' he affirmed, 'that if you had had the opportunity you would have married again. Shadow for substance! Human nature is too weak for any such folly! I probably arrived just in time!'

"I looked at him in speechless dismay; he is an ugly, powerfully built man, with a heavy jaw and a corrugated forehead. As I looked, a bubble seemed to dissolve before my eyes, and with it vanished all the prismatic colors of my youth. Don't turn your head. Just listen.

"The day of his visit I was tired and ill. I suddenly realized that my sluggish destiny had at last quickened. Inevitable doom stood knocking at my door. It said, 'Be this man's wife!'

"All at once a thought came to me like a rope thrown towards a drowning man; I decided to test him. I would put before him a similar case to that I had submitted to you, and his decision would reveal his true self. I said, 'Before we go any further I must ask you a question, and request that you answer it candidly. Imagine,' I began, after he had complied, 'that in the interim of my husband's death and your mother's loss I had come to love another man! What would your advice be to me—to marry him, or you?' And, John, I listened for his answer as a mother awaits the cry of her first-born—"

"I will come to you. I want to see your face. Now; tell me it all fully."

Frost had whirled, strode towards her, and clasped her reluctant fingers.

Mrs. Wentworth recoiled. Then she spoke again after a supreme effort, the words emerging indistinctly from between her dry lips:

"He said instantaneously, without a moment's hesitation, 'Your first duty is to me.' He said it obstinately, like a man who will not be forced to admit what is already evident. 'But if I no longer loved you?' I insisted. 'No longer loved me,' he repeated, mockingly. 'You are mine, I tell you!' My heart froze. I asked him to leave me for a few hours, as I felt faint and ill; but he would not go. He seemed to be trying to ward off a crisis. Finally he rose, and accused me of loving another man!"

"Well?" The question was equivocal,





MRS. WENTWORTH TURNED FROM HIM

but Frost's expression betrayed unmitigated disapproval.

Mrs. Wentworth turned from him and buried her face in her nervous, trembling hands.

"I told him to go away. He would not. He said that he had come for his answer, and that he meant to have it."

"Continue; I am listening." The curt exclamation shot out like a projectile that had expended its force upon some intervening obstacle in its headlong course.

"I could not marry him," she cried, agitatedly. "My doll was stuffed with sawdust. Don't you see? I could not. And yet my decision seemed so cruel. All those duty-strangled years of his; all those mistaken heartaches of mine!"

"You mean you refused him?" Frost's voice was emphatically severe.

"He would not understand that matrimony exacts its just equivalent; he only recognized my abject and piteously mistaken fidelity. When I tried to explain this to him he said: 'I've always heard that women had no principle; now I know it. Do you mean to say, Helen, that you are going to throw me over?' 'You released me,' I told him, 'when in answering my question you betrayed that your happiness, not mine, was the foremost consideration. If this morning you had come to me and said that you loved another woman, I should have, without an instant's hesitation, told you to leave me and marry her!'

"'I must say you are honorable,' he taunted. 'You confound honor with honesty,' I replied. 'Honor is the core of the soul; honesty is a principle of education.'"

"You no longer love him, then?"

"How could I trust my happiness to a being so deficient in acuteness of perception?"

"But that other love! You only supposed it to test his strength. How heartless! He suffered, and you did not appease. He came for his reward, and you refused to give it. Where is your sense of justice, Helen?"

His flashing eyes blazed with righteous indignation.

"How like a man!" she exclaimed, in a thrilling voice. "You taught me that there can be but one love, and that the true love. You alone should hold your-

self responsible for the whole miserable affair!"

Frost interpolated a harsh denial:

"One word. You sent him from you?"

"Yes!"

"You have consigned him to an existence of utter desolation for the sake of a passing whim?"

"You appear to take delight in ignoring the fact that his dimness of perception will of itself institute a cure!"

Her lips were very scornful; her eyes glittered.

Frost's face hardened. With a resounding thud he brought his hand down upon a table near him.

"From this night on I swear I'm done with women!" he cried.

An irrepressible tremor darted across Mrs. Wentworth's face. With a movement of exceeding exasperation she pushed away the chair which had been supporting her during her argument, and stood erect, her eyes fixed indignantly upon her old friend.

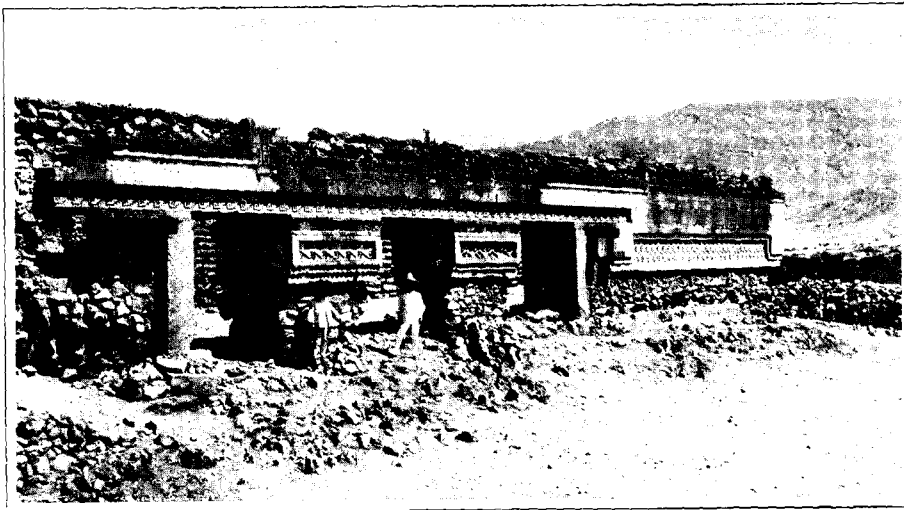
"Look at me, Helen, with the face I knew as a girl's, and loved as a woman's, and yearned for as a wife's. Rather than hear what you have just told me I would gladly cut off my right hand. It mattered not that my hopes were dead; your happiness was assured. It mattered not that another man was to benefit from an accumulation of sweetness garnered in secret for him alone, evidence of a tenderness I would have given my life to inspire. Love is a divine and indestructible law. I had been less than a man not to recognize that. But this! I flatly decline to stand by and see my idol chipped to pieces bit by bit."

As he stepped towards the threshold Mrs. Wentworth sprang between him and it, her lips drawn and very white. Into her face during the interval of Frost's seathing denunciation had come a look of mingled rapture and anguish. One mesh of her hair loosened and fell against her bare shoulders; a gloss like that in the under side of a bird's wing revealed itself captive in those distracting ripples.

A dry lump welled in Frost's throat and obstructed his breath.

She made a sudden unpremeditated movement, barring Frost's progress.

"I did not 'suppose' the case," she whispered.



After a photograph by C. B. Waite

ENTRANCE AND FACADE, RUINS OF MITLA

# The Buddhist Discovery of America

*A THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE COLUMBUS*

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**I**N a comfortable building on one of the more quiet and retired streets of the city of San Francisco there have lately been established the headquarters of a Japanese Buddhist Mission to America. The object of this mission is not only to keep up the teaching and practice of Buddhism among the fast-increasing numbers of Japanese who have come to live in California, but it also embraces the more ambitious hope of spreading the knowledge of that cult among the people of America. A director and four priests, all having received a good English education in Japan, have been sent out by the wealthy members of the "Shin-shiu," or True Sect of Buddhists, and are already actively at work. About five hundred Japanese attend the regular services of this Oriental church, which are of course conducted in the Japanese language. The Young Men's Buddhist Association connected with it numbers over two hundred members.

Three branches are established at other cities of California. There is a separate service on Sundays in English, at which twenty or more Americans are generally present, of whom eleven have already been converted to Buddhism, and have openly professed that they take their refuge in Buddha, in his gospel and in his order. The church is called the Dharma-Sangha of Buddha.

There are various features connected with this mission that are of deep interest and importance. Perhaps the most extraordinary feature is its well-authenticated claim to be the successor and counterpart of an early Buddhist mission to America which existed in the fifth century, and which, like the present one, consisted of five Buddhist priests. It seems almost incredible that just at that notable period when the Dark Ages commenced in Europe, through the western influx of barbarian tribes, Buddhism, "The Light of Asia," was carried eastward across the