

THE CONVENTIONALISTS

to speak, and with that speaking would come the crash. Her voice at least must betray her, and then she would betray herself ; for she had seen during the talk her last rays of hope die.

The atmosphere grew tense and electric, tenfold more than before. Even Mrs. Banister moved her head uneasily. I saw the girl, her face gone suddenly white as paper, lift her cheek from her hand. I heard Dick draw a slow whistling breath.

"Well, Miss Mary?" came the sturdy old voice again.

Then Chris recovered himself. It was like a Divine Interposition. It was rude, of course, but we had done with such considerations now ; and his tone made it as little rude as possible. He interrupted—

"We're to see Algy to-night," he said to the old man, "and we want, if you will allow us, to take some definite message. . . ."

I heard no more. I saw the girl's face flush to scarlet and her half-opened lips close, and her hand pass over her eyes.

"Well, well," said the old man. "I don't want to be hard on the boy. . . ."

He stopped, and looked at his watch irresolutely.

"We will have a word again before you go," he said, "but we must have a cup of tea now."

As we passed out to the hall, where Harold and Sybil were waiting, I could not forbear from one glance backwards. The girl was standing now, motionless