THE CHARIOT OF THE FLESH

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THE CHARIOT OF THE FLESH

BY

HEDLEY PEEK

"Look on the Spirit as the rider! take
The Body for the chariot, and the Will
As charioteer! regard the mind as reins.
The senses as the steeds; and things of sense
The ways they trample on....
For whoso rides this chariot of the flesh,
The reins of mind well grasped, the charioteer
Faithful and firm–comes to his journey's end."

The Secret of Death.

LONDON
LAWRENCE & BULLEN, LTD.
1897
NEW YORK
LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.
1897

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON & BUNGAY.

Dedicated
TO
REV. S. A. TIPPLE
FOR THIRTY YEARS MY FRIEND AND TEACHER

In our definitions we grope after the *spiritual* by describing it as invisible. The true meaning of *spiritual*

is *real.*–EMERSON.

THE CHARIOT OF THE FLESH

PART I

CHAPTER I

It is nearly eleven years since Alan Sydney left England, but I have only recently been released from my promise of secrecy. So sacred to me is the memory of our friendship, that, even now, I shrink from the task of narrating his strange and curious history. A strong impulse, however, urges me to break silence.

The village of Anstead, near which we both lived, is in Surrey, possibly the best county in England to find mixed society. Here the old-fashioned farmers, the labourers who have never travelled as far as London, and a few country squires are mingled with, and influenced by, retired London shopkeepers, merchant princes–with or without H's–and a sprinkling of literary and scientific dabblers; these last are regarded with suspicion by all, but especially by the retired Army and Navy magnates.

Nobody seemed to know to which class Alan Sydney belonged, and strange to say he was admitted, chiefly, I fancy, because he was an eccentric bachelor, into all societies. As I am wealthy and have been a confirmed idler from my youth, the same privilege has been granted to me; a privilege of which, however, I am seldom inclined to take advantage.

I had known Alan Sydney for some years before we became at all intimate. He fascinated, repelled and puzzled me. "Why," I would say to myself, "is this man so confoundedly unlike other men?"

It is not easy to describe him, because, instead of having to portray an identity, I seem rather obliged to describe a number of individualities peeping out through one person. Often you would fancy when speaking to him that you were in the presence of a fool, to be sharply awakened to the unpleasant discovery that it was far more probable you were being fooled yourself. You had hardly

decided that he was a liar before you were conscious that, if once able to get behind the outside spray of speech with which he was purposely blinding you, it might be possible to trust him more fully than other men. I usually left him with the unpleasant impression that instead of treating me as a man, he had been dissecting me as a mental or spiritual corpse. He seemed to have about as much regard for the opinion any one formed of his character as a surgeon would have of the views once entertained by his unconscious subject. Yet it was difficult to tell why one felt these sensations, for his manner was outwardly pleasant even at times jovial; and if there was satire in what he said it was certainly quite impossible for a third party to be conscious of it. I have heard him at a dinner-party make some trivial remark in his quiet voice to one of the guests which would cause the person addressed to flush up with annoyance and surprise as though he had been detected in a crime or stung by the lash of a whip.

I have never been able to find out why he chose me as his only confidant, but so it came about.

It was a warm summer evening, and after dinner it occurred to me that I would stroll over and consult him about an old manuscript which I had recently purchased. From something that he had once said it seemed probable that he might be able to help me with the Old English, which was more than usually difficult on account of the writer having been a North-countryman. Alan Sydney was in the garden inhaling a cigarette, a bad habit which he frequently denounced and perpetually practised. Sitting down beside him I remarked on his inconsistency.

"Consistency," he replied, smiling, "if we may believe Bacon, Emerson, and at least ten other original thinkers, is the quixotism of little minds. Inhaling cigarettes is the last infirmity of habitual smokers. The boy-child begins with a cigarette; in youth or manhood he drifts into cigars and pipes; later on, if he should be unfortunate enough once to try the experiment of inhaling, he reverts to his first love."

I turned the subject by handing to him the manuscript, which he looked over for some time with evident interest. When asked if he could make out the meaning of some of the Old English words he answered that he could not, and that there was probably no one living who could.

"You think I am conceited in making such a remark, but in that you are mistaken. It is simply that I am better acquainted with ignorance than you are. Most of these early English provincialisms, if I may use the term for want of a better, can only be guessed at. There are not sufficient local manuscripts of similar date for comparison to be of much service. If a word cannot be traced either to Anglo-Saxon, Moeso-Gothic, or Scandinavian, you may safely translate it as you please and defy criticism. But let us come in, it is getting chilly."

We entered the house together, passing on to his study. The home was typical of the man. From outside it might easily have been mistaken for a small farm-house. It had the appearance of age, though built by its present owner. It was constructed after the model of the oldest existing style of a Surrey cottage. The walls were supported by and interlaced with massive oak beams, and the roof was entirely composed of thin slabs of rough ironstone which had served a similar purpose for many centuries, having been collected from various dilapidated and condemned buildings. The greatest care had been taken in removing these slabs not to destroy the moss and lichen attached to them, and a few years after the house was finished, an antiquarian might easily have been deceived, so perfectly had every detail, external and internal, been studied.

This humble-looking abode cost probably as much as many of the surrounding mansions, and was unquestionably far more comfortable.

I thought that I was well acquainted with the interior. How far this idea was correct will shortly be seen.

We looked over the manuscript together for some time, and I was surprised to find that many words I had considered provincial were known to my friend; and it was not often that he had to own himself beaten. The matter, however, was most uninteresting, being a homily on the Roman faith.

Presently my companion leaned back in his chair, and seemed to be looking fixedly on some spot on the wall opposite him. I followed the direction of his eyes, but could see nothing likely to attract his attention. I spoke, but he did not answer. The light was rather dim, and it was not possible to see his face distinctly, as the shade from the lamp screened it, but I felt certain that something was wrong. I placed my hand upon his arm, but he took no notice, and this now thoroughly alarmed me.

My first inclination was to ring the bell; my second to move the shade from the lamp so as to be quite sure that I was not mistaken. Lifting the screen, I let the light fall brightly on Sydney's face, and turned to look more closely. For a moment his eyes still maintained their fixed and vacant expression, then turned slowly toward the light. He heaved a deep sigh, and then looked at me with a slightly dazed expression.

"I am afraid you are not well," I said.

"It is nothing," he replied. "For the moment I felt faint, but the sensation has passed."

Knowing something of fainting fits, and having noticed that he had never changed colour nor shown any of the usual signs of faintness, I presumed that he wished to deceive me, and began wondering what the attack could have been.

"You are not satisfied," he continued. "However, let it pass now. Some time I will explain."

Seeing that he wished to be alone, I said good-night.

"Can you come and dine with me to-morrow?" he asked. "I shall be alone, and should be glad to have a quiet talk with you."

Accepting the invitation gladly, I went out into the warm summer night, little thinking how much I was to learn before that door again closed behind me.

CHAPTER II

On the following evening I dined with Alan Sydney for the first time. It was one of his peculiarities not to ask acquaintances to his house; his bachelorhood excused him from the necessity. I was therefore not a little surprised to notice the dainty epicureanism of his meal. The wines were such as it is an unexpected delight to find; the service a thing to remember, but scarcely to hope to attain. Why have some men this curious power of getting their slightest wish gratified, apparently without effort? Money cannot purchase it, and ordinary mortals, whilst they approach the semblance, miss the ease and quietude.

My host talked freely on many subjects, leaving me to suggest a topic, and seeming equally at home whatever I might choose. Sport, philosophy, science, history–I tried each subject, and seemed always the pupil of an expert. At last I started on my pet hobby, Ancient Engravings. "*Now*," I thought, "*it will be my turn*."

"I know little or nothing of the subject," he said.

I went off gaily, but even while preparing to air my wisdom, he would apparently intercept my thought and take the very words out of my mouth.

"*This man must be deceiving me*," I mused. "*He has purposely led me on to my favourite topic, to show that even in that he is my superior!*."

My reverie was broken by his next remark–

"Why do you think me a liar?"

I turned round confused, protesting that of course I did nothing of the kind.

"I often am guilty of what people call lying," he said, "but never intentionally of deceiving a guest. That is why I so seldom indulge in the pleasure of entertaining."

As he said this he rose, and we went together into his study.

"Come," he continued, "I have a surprise for you."

He went up to one of the book-cases, touched a concealed spring, and

the whole oak framework moved slowly round on a pivot, forming a doorway through which we passed.

Having gone down a few steps into what I judged must be an underground passage, we once more ascended into a large room, lined on every side with crowded book-cases.

"You are surprised," he said, "to see so large a room in so small a house. We are now in part of what are usually supposed to be my farm-buildings. There are three rooms here which I use for different purposes. I will show you the other two later on."

The library was lighted by a skylight arranged in such a way, that from outside it would not be visible. My companion sat down on a comfortable couch, and beckoning me to another, said–

"I must ask you to promise me that you will reveal nothing of what I am now going to say, or anything which I may show you until you have my permission. I have a strong opinion that for some reason or other the time has not yet come when it would be advisable to make generally known many facts which I have discovered belonging to a power which is lying dormant in all men. The world, however, is progressing quickly, and the responsibility must rest with you at some future time, when I am gone, as to the wisdom of making known part or all of the knowledge which you will gather from me."

Saying this, he got up, and going to one of the shelves in his book-case, took down a volume.

"You may judge," he continued, "by the collection here, that at one time I was an ardent lover of books. Now they have little interest for me: but this volume will always have a special value, for it was from it that I first gained the knowledge which has influenced my whole life.

"While travelling in France, and making, as was then my custom, a round of any old book-stalls that came in my way, I noticed a small shop which outwardly had little appearance of containing anything of interest to the bibliomaniac. In the window there were various ancient curiosities, but knowing that these antique dealers sometimes bought books which they did not display, it seemed worth while to make an inquiry. I was well rewarded, for the old man, after saying that he did not as a rule buy books, told me that he had at various times picked up at sales a few which he usually sent to be sold by auction in Paris. He had some by him at the time, and amongst these a curious Latin manuscript. Though evidently a seventeenth-century work, it was not dated. I thought at first that it would probably prove of little value, until turning over the leaves, I noticed that it was by no less celebrated a writer than Descartes. This author's works were at the time little known to me, and it never occurred to my mind that this volume could be anything more valuable than a manuscript of one of

his published works. However, published or unpublished, it was certainly worth a thousand times more than the dealer asked for it, so I took it back to my hotel well pleased with my morning's work, and spent the whole afternoon reading. An entirely new idea of existence seemed opening before me, and it appeared incredible that a work of this description could have been known for two hundred and fifty years without my having even heard a repetition of the views found there. Then remembering that many of Descartes' works had, owing to the opposition of the Romish Church, never been printed, I decided to find out at once whether by any chance this might be one of them. I sent immediately to Paris for a complete edition of Descartes, which had recently been published, and soon found that this volume was not among them. A little further inquiry satisfied me of the authenticity of the MS., and that it was entirely unknown.

"You may remember that Descartes, in his 'Discourse on Method,' published in 1637, says, 'It appears to me that I have discovered many truths more useful and more important than all I had before learned, or even expected to learn. I have essayed to expound the chief of these discoveries in a treatise which certain considerations prevent me from publishing.' Now we know that the chief consideration was his fear of offending the Church, and every one who has read Descartes' published works must observe through them a perpetual veiling of what he thought to be true so as to avoid being brought in conflict with the religious opinions of his day. Notice this passage from the work just mentioned. 'It may be believed without discredit to the miracle of creation, that things purely material might in course of time have become such as we observe them at present, and their end is much more easily conceived when they are beheld coming in this manner gradually into existence, than when they are only considered as produced at once in a finished and perfect state.'

"He then applies this theory to man. He says that as yet he has not sufficient knowledge to treat of this development, and is obliged to remain satisfied with the supposition that God formed the body of man wholly like to one of ours, but at first placed in it no rational soul. Having gone thus far and apparently fearing to go further, he breaks off suddenly and never satisfactorily returns to the subject in his published works. But how different is his method when we turn to the manuscript before me, which I fancy must have been his last work, as it is unfinished! How much more lucid and complete we find his conclusions here! There is no attempt to suppress his real view. I will give you briefly a summary of the chief conclusions which interested me, and which will be enough for the present purpose.

"'All things have slowly developed.'

"'Man is the most perfectly developed being of whose existence we are conscious.'

"'The lower orders of life have a varying number of powers of perception which we term senses.'

"'The higher orders of life have five.'

"'These senses diminish in power as they increase in number, being relieved one by the other.'

"'No deterioration in sense-power is known to have taken place without causing deterioration to the possessor unless at the same time accompanied by the development of a new perceptive faculty.'

"'Man alone is credited with being an exception to this rule. He is inferior in keenness of sense to the animals below him, yet superior in power. It is also noticeable that the savage is in like manner superior to the civilized man. It is therefore probable that man is really the possessor of a sixth sense as yet imperfectly developed and unequally distributed.'

"Briefly this is the key to the remarkable conclusions at which he eventually arrives, and which are worked out with his usual mathematical exactitude and care. He has fully satisfied me that this theory explains most of the mysteries of life; but there is not time now to go more fully into the matter."

"But," I said, "he appears to have forgotten entirely the importance of intellect."

"There you are mistaken. He goes very fully into the matter and anticipates Darwin. 'Intellect,' he writes, 'is not a means of perception, but an organ for the arrangement and use of the senses, and is to be found in all animal life though in a less developed form than is noticeable in man.'"

"But," I interrupted, "is not that therefore the explanation; the higher intellect of man needs a lower standard of sensitive faculty, and he is thus enabled to produce from lesser gifts a greater gain?"

"I will," he answered, "as nearly as possible give you Descartes' answer to this objection. 'To say that the more highly developed a being, the less it will require its perceptive powers, and that therefore through want of use they have gradually deteriorated, would lead us to this *reductio ad absurdum:*–that in time man will become so perfectly developed that his senses must continue deteriorating until at last he will arrive at the perfection of an insensitive existence, with intellect to place in order all things which he perceives while he is unable to perceive anything.' Of course in endeavouring to give you his argument in a few words–an argument which requires close and careful reasoning, I do Descartes considerable injustice, but I hope on some future occasion to be able to go more fully into the discussion. I have said enough for my present purpose, and am not fond of argument unless satisfied that my opponent agrees with me upon the primary ground of discussion; much valuable time is otherwise wasted. For instance, if you are speaking on the subject of the colour red to a man born blind

and his idea of red is some sound which resembles the blast of a trumpet, you cannot possibly hope to arrive at any very satisfactory conclusion. In the same way if man is unconscious of the power granted him through the sixth; or, as for lack of a better term we may call it, the spiritual sense, no argument on the subject would be of the least value. It will suffice at present to say that the theory which Descartes fully works out was to me personally a revelation; a revelation, because it seemed but the perfected expression of my own dormant thought. Having therefore carefully considered the advice which the writer gives to those who are anxious to prove the value of this partially developed power, namely, to use it, I started on a course of experiments which, should you care to follow me, I will endeavour to explain. You may thus be able to judge of the truth of the theory by its results, which after all is by far the safer plan. Moreover, some of my experiences may be of interest."

I expressed my anxiety to hear him further, and he continued–

"You must endeavour to realize clearly the work to which I had decided to devote my energies and time. It was to cultivate and analyze every perception or sensation which appeared to reach me through none of the known organs of sense. The first conclusion arrived at was that I imperfectly possessed the power to read other people's thoughts; that at certain times and under certain conditions ideas were conveyed to me through no recognized organ of perception. I therefore decided for the time being to devote all my energy to following up this clue. It was not long before the truth of my idea was confirmed beyond any possibility of doubt; but the difficulty was, firstly, in being confident from whom the impression came; and secondly, in discerning truth from imagination. Many others have gone as far as this point on the road to discovery, but few have persevered much further. The story of how my path was cleared of these uncertainties is worth describing in detail.

"About this time I became engaged to be married to a girl of seventeen. It may be owing to prejudice, but I still think she possessed remarkable beauty. It is not easy to give a reason, but a girl seldom at that time seemed lovely to me after she was out of her teens. She might be more interesting intellectually; but owing to some peculiarity in my character, her chief charm was too often brushed away somewhere about the age of twenty.

"I first met Vera Soudin at her father's house in Scotland. I had gone down to stay with a friend for grouse-shooting, and the members of her family were practically our only neighbours, so that we saw a good deal of each other. She was an only child, and must have found life rather dull. Her father's thoughts were chiefly concentrated on sport; her mother was an invalid, and a decidedly uninteresting woman. It is hardly surprising that Vera found the change from previous solitude a relief. She had a remarkably weak will, though probably few

outside her intimate friends were aware of the fact, for, as is often the case with such characters, she possessed a strong vein of obstinacy, which people mistook for firmness. As a matter of fact she was little more than a mirror which reflected surrounding influences. On the other hand, I may possibly possess a will of rather unusual power, more powerful, unfortunately, over others than myself. I was unconscious how great my influence over her really was, nor did I know that in cultivating her acquaintance I was allowing myself to be swayed by my affections.

"I had decided to take this opportunity of practising and perfecting, if possible, my power of thought-reading. It is curious how often we are influenced by an unconscious motive, and how long we take to find out in ourselves an emotion which is perfectly obvious to those around us.

"Whatever the effect of our intercourse may have been in other ways, it certainly enabled me to make considerable advance in my particular study. To begin with, being often alone with her, the difficulty of deciding from whom the impression came was at these times necessarily removed. I had, therefore, only to satisfy myself as to whether these impressions were real or imaginary; and it was easy with a girl who had not yet learned the trick of hiding, or feigning emotions, to discover by her face whether I had rightly or wrongly interpreted something which was passing through her mind. A question on the subject was usually sufficient. It mattered little to me how trivial or unimportant the thought might be; I felt satisfied that there was a difference between the effect caused on my mind by a true or by an imaginary impression. The difficulty lay in defining this subtle difference.

"Before I had known the girl a week I was able, as far as she was concerned, to overcome this obstacle, and to tell with certainty whenever any thought of hers passed involuntarily through my mind. In the same way when meeting her at dinner, among other people, I was equally certain that the impression was a correct one if it came from her; and this knowledge was a great assistance, enabling me, as it were, to take the first step towards localizing the direction from which thought was transmitted.

"One evening after dinner I was sitting alone with Vera Soudin; her mother had not been well enough to come down to dinner, and the other men had retired to the billiard-room. The light from the candles was overpowered by the brightness of the fire, and as she leant back, this ruddy glow gave an additional attraction to the delicate beauty of her face. I forgot for the moment all about my new power, and sat looking at her without speaking, the whole force of my will unconsciously exercised in a desire to gain her love. She sat silent, gazing at the burning logs as though unconscious of my presence. Then I recognized an inaudible voice speaking. I use the words 'voice' and 'speaking' because as yet our language is too imperfect to express any sensations connected with the sixth

sense. The sentence was, however, unmistakable.

"'*I love him.*'

"I answered her aloud. 'Why do you?'

"Her face flushed and then lost all colour save what the firelight cast there. 'Why do I what?' she stammered.

"I cared for her too much to press my advantage. 'I love you!' I said, and getting up I went over and knelt by her side; then looking into her eyes I saw an expression that I had never seen before.

"What man who has once been brought under this influence could ever forget it–man's passion reflected upon woman's nature, the idealized counterpart of his sensations revealed on the idol of worship? In a moment such as this, reason is trampled under the feet of a hundred new emotions, hurrying forward to find expression, and the man's action will be determined by natural instincts, and not, as is more often the case, by the training and habits which have moulded them. During such times of intoxication we become for once natural; and as all men tend by nature, if on a lower plane, to idiocy, if on a higher to madness, such moments are best kept private. An observer missing the more delicate atmosphere of pathos which ever surrounds a truly comic situation, is apt to rest his own instability more on the stick of ridicule than the crutch of pity.

"As, however, owing to the power which I have of reading other people's thoughts of myself, my nature has become impervious to scorn; and as it is better that you should have the opportunity of judging my actions impartially, I will throw off reserve as far as possible.

"We remained much in the same attitude for an indefinite period of sensations, which may probably have extended to thirty minutes, her hands clasped in mine as we talked together. As far as I can remember, the conversation rested principally with me, and her answers came back chiefly in unspoken thoughts. I will endeavour to give you an idea of what passed between us, audibly and inaudibly.

"'Beloved,' I said, 'is it possible that you can care for me? That what I have longed for, dreamed of, and despaired of ever attaining, is at last mine? I cannot realize it! I feel rather that I am in a trance, surrounded by a confusing, yet delightful mist.'

"'*I love you.*'

"'Say it again out loud that I can hear.'

"'I love you.'

"'But why–tell me why?'

"'I don't know. Why do you love me? I cannot see that there can be anything to love in me. I suppose it is only because I am pretty!'

"'Beauty is only a veil which the soul looks through; how perfect then must

be your soul, dearest!'

"Then came these unspoken words which puzzled me–

"'*What queer things men are!–but I like to hear him, and perhaps it is true; but if so, how horrid most women must be!*' Then out loud–'*I fancy you will soon get tired of me.*'

"'Tired! It makes me mad when I think of ever having an opportunity of getting tired–to have you with me always–to know that we can never be parted–to feel that death itself will only bring us closer: I almost wish that we could die now, for such great happiness makes me afraid something may come. Oh, Vera! you will always love me?'

"'Of course, dear!'

"Then this thought followed–

"'*I wish he would not talk about death; I hate death, I don't want to die. It is quite nice enough to be here having some one loving and petting me, without thinking about the future. I wonder if he is going to kiss me? I thought men always kissed girls when they proposed to them!*'

"This was enough for me. I had been afraid to venture on what seemed so great a liberty, but now I moved forward and was about to kiss her, when to my surprise she drew away saying–

"'Oh, don't! You frighten me!'

"'Why, dearest, you cannot be afraid of me? Will you not let me have just one when you know how I should prize it!'

"'No, I cannot really, not yet anyway; perhaps some day!'

"I was so afraid of offending her that I moved back, puzzled and discomfited, when once again I was conscious she was thinking.

"'*How foolish he is!–it would have been much nicer to have been forced to give him one; he is so strong he could easily have held me back in the chair and made me do it.*'

"This came as a whip for my inclinations, and I did as suggested under a storm of protests which soon died down, for I now found her thoughts were wandering between the condition of her hair and the probability of some one coming in from the billiard-room.

"I think I have now described sufficiently our first moments of happiness, but I will own that before we were eventually disturbed I had begun to get not a little annoyed with my new power of perception, and began to wonder if after all we had arrived at a sufficient state of perfection to be always happily employed when using it.

"The next half-hour which I spent with Vera's father convinced me that often it might be useful in the cause of humility.

"I asked to speak with him alone, a request that he readily granted, though,

if I interpreted his thoughts aright, he used strong language internally. I felt horribly nervous, and at first he did nothing to help me, but what was far worse, he kept on transmitting thoughts that made me every moment more wretched and uncomfortable; they must have been his, as I feel sure they would never otherwise have occurred to me as being likely to proceed from the smiling old gentleman sitting opposite. This is something of what I made out of them, but they were disjointed and confused, for you must remember I had not as yet had an opportunity of studying him as perfectly as his daughter.

"'*Confound it! I wish he had not been in such a hurry. I must delay things in some way. I meant to make inquiries, but have been so busy. Besides there is ... coming, and I quite fancy that when he sees her, he ... But after all, Sydney is an only son; I did find that out, and I must not choke him off. I wonder how much longer he will stand there like a fool and say nothing!*'

"You may well imagine that this kind of thing was hardly helpful to me. I began at once to wonder who my rival might be. And here I may as well mention that even now, when my thought-reading power has been developed very nearly to perfection, I can seldom read the name of a person passing through another's mind, unless that person is also known to me. This is probably owing to the fact that in thinking of an acquaintance we disregard usually the name and are conscious only of the individuality, for in the few cases when I have had a name conveyed distinctly, it has been where the person referred to was comparatively a stranger to the one whose thoughts I was studying.

"The silence was eventually broken by Mr. Soudin.

"'You wish to speak to me. I hope that you know me well enough to be certain that if there is any service I can do for you I shall be delighted!'

"'It is more than an ordinary service,' I answered. 'I wish to take from you your greatest treasure, and consequently you must excuse my embarrassment in asking. I love your daughter, and would beg her from you.'

"'*Young ass! Now he has once started he talks like a book bound in morocco with gilt edges*,' was his thought. His words–'You have taken me greatly by surprise, Mr. Sydney. I have always looked upon my daughter as a child, and it would be quite impossible for me to think of allowing her at present to be disturbed by any question of marriage. Hers is a sweet and delicate nature, influenced as yet but by the dreams of childhood. I trust that nothing you have said to her can possibly have ruffled the calm of innocence.'

"At this point I should have been placed in a position of difficulty had not his thoughts continued–

"'*I would stake twenty to one the young cub has been sitting spooning for the last half-hour. I wonder how he will try to get out of it.*'

"I did not, therefore, try at all, but quietly told him the fact, ignoring, how-

ever, the details. His anger was so well assumed, that whilst it lasted his thoughts almost followed his words, or else the latter so upset me that I missed the accompanying reflections.

"'It was, he said, a most unpardonable action thus to take advantage of an innocent child who, he felt quite certain, had not even realized the very meaning of the situation, etc., etc.'

"At last he cooled down a little, and when this happened, his thoughts and words became mixed up in my mind somewhat in the following manner. 'You must realize, Mr. Sydney, that in speaking to you in this manner, I am actuated by no unfriendly feeling–*it would be unwise to go too far*–Personally from what I have seen of you, there are few young men whom I could welcome more cordially into my family–*If only I were certain that he possessed a safe five thousand a year*– But she is too young, and I am quite sure that you will agree with me when you think it over in a calmer mood, that it would be unfair to bind my daughter to an engagement before she is fairly out of the nursery–*That ought to smooth him down and keep up the romance at the same time. I must have a good talk with Vera and see what is best to be done. I feel certain that I shall have indigestion to-night. It always upsets me having to think and bother about things after dinner.*'

"I eventually agreed not to see Vera for a week, and at the end of that time I was to be granted another interview with her father for the purpose of arriving at some plan for the future.

"My feelings were of a mixed character as I walked away from the house over the crisp, frozen ground. I felt excited, but neither satisfied nor happy. I had tasted the sweets of love, and a little of the acidity of disenchantment. I began to meditate somewhat after this fashion. How lovely she looked with that expression on her face as I knelt down by her side and took her hands in mine. 'Is it possible that the physiognomists are correct when they tell us that the eye never changes, and that the eyelids alone work those miracles of varying expression; that a few slight wrinkles can convey such a world of meaning, and have often the power to change the destiny of thousands? Is it not more probable that some subtle influence passes from eye to eye that no scientist can detect, owing to the fact that as yet science confines its observations only to those influences which are discernible by animal sense organs? But, whatever the cause, the fact is most remarkable, and one must needs have loved to realize the full significance of its power.' However, I did not, after all, feel satisfied that I had awakened quite the same feeling in Vera as that which I myself experienced, and I began to think of another partially developed power which Descartes attributes to this sixth sense, and to which I have not hitherto referred.

"He maintains that the will-force is always unconsciously transmitted, and that if this power were cultivated it would lead to surprising results. We can

now have no doubt that his theory is partially correct, as it has been satisfactorily demonstrated through recent experiments in hypnotism; but his views also convince me that the modern methods which have been adopted for the transmission of this will-power are likely to prove both dangerous and inadequate, as they are based on totally false premises. As, however, I shall have occasion to go into all this matter more fully later on, as well as to show you the light which Descartes throws on theosophy, spiritualism, and many other modern mysteries, I shall only refer now to the subject so far as I find it necessary in order to make my story intelligible.

"The probability that this theory of transmitted will-power might have been experimentally proved in my late interview with Vera sent a shock of anxiety to my heart. What if after all she had been little better than a semi-conscious mirror reflecting my newly-awakened sensations? I argued, however, against my fear, that it could not be so, for I had read in her thoughts sensations not only differing from my own, but even foreign to a man's inclinations. Yet even as I recalled these instances with relief, a passage from Descartes flashed through my mind which brought a painful reaction.

"'It must not be supposed,' he writes, 'that the will-power, however strong, can absolutely take possession of an alien mind. A person of tender susceptibility cannot be induced to commit a murder, or a man of brutal instinct be made, even for the time being, pure or lovable. That part of the brain on which the will either of ourselves or others is brought to bear, may be compared to a musical instrument on which this force plays. A tune may be the same whether practised on a pipe or upon a full organ, but there will be a considerable difference in the effect produced, owing to the numerous variations, etc. of which the more complex instrument is capable; so also on different natures a similar impulse will produce totally different results. This difference of effect is most noticeable in the actions of men and women who, if willed by one influence, often act dissimilarly, singing, as it were, the same melody to an accompanying music which flows forth from their complex dispositions and sensibilities.'

"Having by this and similar reflections thoroughly unsettled my belief, not only in the girl I loved, but in myself and in nearly everything else, I went to bed wretched, and after tossing about for some hours, at last fell into a troubled sleep, during which I had the following rather curious dream.

"It seemed that I was walking hurriedly along a winding path, though for what purpose, or whither, I thus hastened was hidden. On my left, through its setting of ferns and pleasant flowers, there flowed a stream, the waters of which cast back many fair reflections; yet so great was my wish to gain some unknown object, that I was scarcely conscious of the beauty around. As I turned a corner, however, I saw across my path an object lying, and coming nearer found it to be

a woman; the face turned upwards bore all the traces of degradation which dissipation and misery had engraved upon the image of one who in youth might have been beautiful. My feelings, supersensitive to the slightest coarseness, revolted at the spectacle before me, and crushing through the undergrowth which grew beside my path, I strove to avoid getting in closer contact with it, but I had not gone many paces forward before I became hopelessly entangled. Then looking round I noticed an old man standing near, who it seemed must have followed me unobserved. His hair was of silvery whiteness, and though his face was lined with age, each furrow seemed but the imprint of an habitual expression of kindliness. He might have stood as a sculptor's model for love that has outlived passion.

"'Why have you wandered from the path?' he said. 'It is not possible for man to reach the place whither you are bound save by the way appointed.'

"'But,' I answered, 'He who called me is pure, and in the footpath lies that which is abhorrent both to my Master and to me.'

"'Who then is thy master?' he asked.

"Then I looked at him in surprise and said–

"'We have but one Master; He who ruleth all things, and is Father of all.'

"'And it is one of His beloved children,' he said, 'from whom you turn aside, and her weakness and your strength are of His ordering; and you whom He has made on a different, though no higher plan, turn in pride from your sister who has been placed in the path so that your strength may support her weakness.'

"'Now,' I replied, 'you speak blasphemy, for God is not the Father of sin, and what is sinful is unpleasing in His sight.'

"Then my companion, looking fixedly at me, said–

"'There is no sin. Viewed from the eye of wisdom and holiness there is one law–Love; one path–Order; and one state–Happiness. Man is permitted to dream of freedom, which he calls life; is allowed to dip into the darkness, and, for the moment, to imagine discord exists, that when he shall awaken his joy may be exceeding joyful. It has been left to man to give names to nothing and to fight the phantoms of negation; when his sleep shall be broken the former things will have passed away. Follow me.'

"So we returned together to the path, and as we stood before the woman I said, 'If this is but a dream, wherefore should I care what happens either to the woman or myself?' Then it seemed that the man did not answer, but I heard a voice singing. And the song was of love, and told how the slumber of life could never be broken till the light of unselfish love fell upon the sleeper.

"When the voice ceased, I turned and said to my companion–'What can I do for the woman? Behold her, as she lies there. It seems impossible for me to feel more than helpless compassion for such a one.'

"'Compassion and pity,' he answered, 'are words coined by man, and are

associated at best but with a gleam of love, and more often with nothing but a selfish desire to hide pain from sight because it reminds man of that which is hateful. Love will ever find a way to helpfulness.'

"'But,' I said to him, 'I cannot feel this love to one so degraded.'

"Then he bent over the woman, and touched her with his hand; and as I looked down wondering, the degraded face seemed changed into the face of the girl I loved. And in the horror of the revelation I awoke, thankful to believe that it was but a dream! How many lessons, prophecies, and warnings come to men, if they did but realize it, in certain forms called dreams!

"When I got up on the following morning my mind was in that anxious and restless condition in which it usually finds itself after being too busily occupied during the hours of slumber. I felt depressed and irritable, consequently my view of everything was one-sided. My thoughts continually expressed themselves in doggerel verse instead of moving along smoothly and quietly in prose. This, I have always noticed, is a sign that my body requires some stimulating exercise. Moreover, every picture that reached my mind had a dark and unpleasant background. For instance, when my thoughts for relief turned to Vera's face, I had scarcely begun to dwell with pleasure on the beauty of some remembered expression before I became conscious that the woman of my dream was grinning at me over the girl's shoulder.

"This way, I knew, led to madness; so conscious that the body, if ill-used, becomes too often the master of the mind, I decided to give it a day's pleasure, tempting it back thereby into a condition of happy servitude.

"The result was in every way satisfactory. After two hours' walking over the moors, I was able to laugh at my fears, and by lunch-time it was even a trouble to recall them. At dinner nothing seemed more important in life than perfect accuracy of aim, and my friends might easily have mistaken me for a sportomaniac by my conversation. The only thought I read that evening came, I believe, from my host, and took the form of regret that he had not selected a better shot than myself for the sake of the game returns which he intended to forward to *The Field*, and considering the number of birds which my nerves had succeeded in missing for me during the morning, I could not feel surprised. My dreams during the night did not trouble me. I felt but a momentary discomfiture even when the youth who was expected to fall in love with Vera rose up with a whirr just under my feet, and in the flurry of the moment I only succeeded in knocking a few feathers out of his coat-tail.

"On the second day, therefore, after my proposal, I felt in a safe mental condition to think rationally over the prospect before me, and as I can always reason more quietly when walking and in the open air, I went for a stroll by myself over the moors.

”The day was bright, and the wind blew softly from the south-west. I felt that life was very good as I passed over the heather. Presently, however, a wounded bird which was lying by the side of the footpath upset my train of thought, and set me on a discussion of cruelty which I began to argue out from both sides. The impression which I arrived at, after wasting fully an hour, may be summed up as follows: that about an equal amount can be urged for and against sport, and that there is something wrong somewhere. Nearly every subject we approach seems beset with like difficulty, owing to the fact that our life is not as yet sufficiently under the rule of order to embrace, without causing additional misery, the doctrine of perfection. For instance, war can easily be shown to be unjustifiable, and socialism to be the only form of perfect justice; but it is equally clear that the abolition of armaments and the adoption of socialistic principles would lead to the greatest misery that has ever been experienced on earth, if they should be tried before men have learnt to control their evil passions without the whip of legal and military chastisement. Birds of prey and moral disease would quickly take the place of the fowling-pieces of modern civilization, whilst the dream of Paradise would be found more to resemble a nightmare, and the comparative peace of the past would be transformed into a pandemonium of unbridled passions.

”At last, after a few more fruitless attempts, I managed to fix my mind on the condition of my own prospects. Firstly, was I in love? And this involved settling in my mind what love really meant. If not, what had caused in me certain sensations never before experienced? Secondly, if this love existed, was it returned? It is not necessary for you to follow me through my subsequent confused circle of reasoning, as it led to no satisfactory conclusion beyond a determination to watch for further light, and in the meantime to follow the dictates of inclination. It is always easy to do the latter, and unless a man’s nature inclines strongly to selfishness, it is often the wisest course to adopt. Progress is often hindered by self-repression, and even more by self-analysis.

”At the moment, inclination led me towards a figure which I saw in the distance. On drawing nearer I felt certain that the form in question was a familiar one, and soon recognized one of my London acquaintances, Lord Vancome. Now if there was one man whom I thoroughly disliked without apparent reason, it was Vancome. I had at that time a peculiar eccentricity; there were a few people who possessed the power of unconsciously torturing me in a way that defies description. He was one of these. If we met in a room I felt my whole flesh creep, and on shaking hands with him an absolute chill of horror passed through my body. It was with great difficulty that I refrained from showing to such persons marked expressions of dislike. When, therefore, I met him thus unexpectedly, it seemed as though a blight had suddenly swept over the hills, blurring the sunshine: the

glow of life had vanished; the beauty of love was forgotten.

"'Why, Sydney!' he called out, 'whoever expected to see you here?'

"I told him briefly how it came about, and that I was stopping with Major Couson.

"'Oh!' he said, 'that's lucky! I am glad to find there is some sort of society in the place. Mr. Soudin asked me down, and feeling a trifle played out, I accepted; but I was already beginning to dread the idea of being confined to the society of Heather Lodge for a fortnight. The daughter's not a bad sort of girl, and devilish pretty, too!–but one wants even more than that combined with the shooting, which is not first-rate, to avoid being bored to death during a period of two weeks.'

"'Why are you not shooting?' I asked.

"'The old man's got a touch of the gout, so I was taking a look round.' (Then before I could think of anything further to say his thought flashed through me.) '*Damn the fellow! I wish he would go. The girl's bound to turn up soon, and I don't want him fooling round.*'

"'I must be going,' I said, looking at my watch. 'No doubt we shall meet again before long.'

"He seemed relieved, and saying that he should look me up, held out his hand. I took it, thanking God I had not a gun, and being now certain that I was in love, went hurriedly on my way.

"I had been walking for perhaps ten minutes, when I saw Vera Soudin coming towards me. She had evidently been to the village. What was to be done? I had promised not to see her for a week, but it would be ridiculous to pass without speaking. Besides, ought she not to be put on her guard against Lord Vancome? And yet what right had I to do this? As far as I knew there was nothing against his character. It is true that I felt a mortal antipathy to him, but such feelings are hardly regarded as evidence. Then I remembered that women are credited with possessing far more accurate discrimination of character than men. This thought comforted me, and having decided to discover her feelings with regard to Vancome I went on towards her.

"When we met I noticed that she also felt embarrassed, but for some reason possessed better control over herself. When I made some remark about being so pleased to see her again, she put her hand to her lips, and then, taking out a pocket-book, scribbled these words down–

"'I promised not to speak to you for a week.' 'But good gracious!' she cried out, 'I also said I would not write, and now I have done both. Well, as it is done, it can't be helped. But mind you don't tell, or father would be angry, and you know it was all your fault.'

"'I did not know, dear, that you had promised,' I replied, 'and though I also

said I would not see you during the same time, it seemed absurd to pass without speaking.'

"'Of course it's absurd, and father's no right to make us promise such foolish things. But I don't mind, for we need not say anything about it. Besides, as we have broken our promises it does not now matter what we do.'

"'But,' I said, 'will it be right to go on breaking them further?'

"'Oh! what is done can't be mended.' And as she said this she looked into my face with such a pathetic appeal that all ideas of right, wrong, honour and dishonour got hopelessly mixed. 'You don't really love me,' she continued, 'or you would not talk like that. You don't care how wretched I feel!'

"What could I do? Tears were coming into her eyes. Not a mile away, waiting in her path, stood one I hated. Could I let her go on distrusting my love, to meet possible treachery?

"I gave up the contest without a struggle.

"We turned from the footpath, and crossing a strip of heather, descended into a woody glen. Through this glen ran a merry bubbling stream, and the soft moisture which it left along its edges had encouraged the growth of deep soft moss to cover the otherwise barren stones. Choosing a pleasant nook thus carpeted on which the sun shone brightly, we sat and rested.

"A few birds were singing their farewell songs to Scotland before retreating to a warmer country. My companion's face was slightly flushed by the wind, and the colour seemed to give an additional depth to the blue eyes which looked shyly forth from between her dark lashes. Her fair hair, which was unusually soft and fine, had been blown by the wind into a waving network of shining confusion round her ears, and over her forehead. As she sat just above me, and I looked into her face, it seemed impossible for God to make, or man to picture, aught more fair or pure in earthly texture. Yet, so does my nature act and react, ever tumbling from the sublime to the ridiculous, that I had hardly realized the perfect human beauty before me when my mind began to drop down into one of its most annoying analytical moods, tearing, as it were, all soft and delicate covering from the face, and pointing mockingly to the hollow skull beneath, the framework alike of beauty and ugliness. Not that there is really anything ridiculous, or for the matter of that, frightful about a skull; the comic part of the situation lay in the fact that it was impossible for me vividly to realize this framework of the beauty I had a moment before worshipped, without a shudder. I refer to it now, because such sensations throw a valuable sidelight on love itself.

"It is to be presumed that when we love a person, we fancy that we love, not the body, not in fact the clothing of the individual, but the personality; that there is something therein which attracts and draws forth these sensations wholly apart from anything to do with simply animal passion. There are, of course,

some who deny this, but to reason with such is, as said before, absolutely useless: to the purely animal nature all must necessarily appear animal. Such men and women are exceptions, yet though many are conscious of the strength of higher love, how few seem to try to solve the mystery surrounding it, or to draw a line between true and false sensations.

"For instance, here was I sitting at the feet of one who, as far as it was possible to judge, possessed nothing really attractive except most unusual physical beauty; one I judged to be lacking in will-power, to be untruthful and vain, to be possessed of little information and still less discernment. Yet, knowing all this, I loved her. You may think that I deceived myself, and that what I really experienced was simply animal fascination; but before my story is finished you will see that you have judged wrongly. The truth of the matter is this; pure love is no more drawn out by nobleness of character than it is by beauty of form, but by a far more subtle attraction for which as yet we have no name, and which reaches us through the medium of our imperfectly developed sixth sense. Whatever comes to us through the ordinary channels is merely passion or comradeship, though owing to our complex nature, the former usually accompanies true spiritual love and is hopelessly confused with it. This confusion has led to much misery and to many senseless social and so-called moral laws which are quite unsuited to the present condition of man's development, as they are nearly all founded on the theory of animal instincts alone.

"I am sorry to be obliged so frequently to break the thread of my narrative, but as I am about to deal with subjects which are outside the range of ordinary experience, it is absolutely necessary that from the commencement you should follow not only the course of events, but also the working of my mind. If I simply confine myself to the story, it might possibly interest you as the wild imagination of either a liar or a madman; on the other hand, should you have patience to hear me to the end, I hope to convince you that many things which seem incredible are only so as long as we stand outside the door of discovery. There is nothing more remarkable than the ease with which the public will swallow yesterday's miracle, if only scientists will give it a name.

"For instance, look at a recent case–the Telephone. What do the public understand about it? The electricians themselves have only discovered a method by which they can produce certain effects, and know nearly as little as the public of the servants they employ. Yet this miraculous transmission of sound, once baptized, is admitted forthwith without further questioning, into the circle of commonplace.

"You must not suppose that, though I have thus wandered from my subject, any of these ideas occurred to me after my encounter with the imaginary skull, for at that moment one of my companion's thoughts fortunately deranged my

own, and gave me fresh subject for reflection.

"'*I like him in some ways better, but he is certainly not nearly so amusing.*'

"'I am sorry you find me so dull,' I said, 'but looking at you has made me speechless through admiration. However, I want you to tell me what your father said about our engagement.'

"'Oh! only that I was too young to know my own mind, and that he wanted me to promise that I would not speak or write to you for a week. What nonsense! Too young to know my own mind, and I shall be eighteen next June!'

"After which remarks these thoughts followed; and as I was busy listening to them I remained silent.

"'*I wonder why father wished me not to say anything. Can it be to do with...? But I like Alan much better, and ... is not likely to make love to me, and of course I should not let him if he tried. Yet perhaps he may. I have a good mind to see if I can make him just for the fun of it, and when he does of course I will tell him I am engaged. It's rather nice to have people make love to one. That's the worst of being married, you can't have proposals afterwards, so it is only fair to get as many as you can before. Besides, then I could say that I might have been Lady ... if I had chosen.*'

"Thought is quicker than speech, and probably the pause was hardly more than thirty seconds before she continued aloud–

"'Why are you not shooting to-day?'

"'I wanted to think about you,' I answered, 'and so went for a walk instead, and was lucky. But I met some one else on the moor, an acquaintance of mine, who, I find, is staying with you.'

"'Oh! Lord Vancome! So you know him. Where did you meet him?' Then silently, '*I wonder if he came out so as to walk back with me?*'

"'I met him wandering about, taking a prospective view of your father's shooting,' I answered vaguely. 'But tell me what you think of him?'

"'Oh! he seems very nice and interesting, but I feel somehow frightened of him.' Then, dropping her voice slightly–'Is he rather wicked?'

"'What makes you think so?' I asked, relieved to find that her woman's instinct was not at fault.

"'I do not know; I suppose it's the way he looks at one, or something.' Then her thought continued–'*Men are so foolish; they seem to fancy girls are perfect fools and don't know anything!*'

"I felt it was not fair to follow these reflections further. One gets hardened in time to seeing people's minds, as it were, naked, but at first some revelations tend to lower our views of human nature. It is not until we realize that our own unclothed sentiments would have a similar disenchanting effect upon others that we grow more charitable. If you wish fully to understand my meaning, try next

time you are in mixed society to fancy that not only your words, but also your thoughts are audible to those around, and see if under such circumstances you would care to meet any of those people again.

"I, therefore, not wishing to be disenchanted, here disturbed her reflections with a kiss, and this action of mine started the usual train of sentimental talk which is about as varied and interesting as the soft, gentle, and monotonous sounds which the wood-pigeons make in spring-time. Happy birds, to whom comes no questioning voice to break their peace; who are conscious of no notes of absurdity mingling with their monotonous strains, and who wake from each short spring-time of love without remorse or disenchantment! Surely some men and women seem more naturally fitted for such brief experiences than for the prolonged and deeper sentiments of life-long devotion.

"'Life is too short,' cry such in the moment of awakened joy, for at that moment eternity touches them. Yet how few natures have risen sufficiently far above their transitory and animal instincts to remain long in this spirit of self-negation. The first breath of egoism disturbs it; passion degrades it; and before a year of the wished-for eternity is expired, how many may be found secretly regarding the one sane emotion of their lives as an experience of temporary, and yet conventional madness.

"Yet we have no right to blame them so long as they live up to the best instinct they possess, for growth is slow, and if we carry as yet more beast in our body than angel in our spirit, the beast will have its way. Growth or deterioration (for which alone we are responsible) depends upon the rule we welcome, and to which side our will, consciously or unconsciously, inclines us.

"During one of the pauses, as Vera and I sat together, I became conscious of a new and remarkable clearness of mental vision such as I had never before experienced (though I have spoken to a man temporarily insane who graphically described similar sensations of increased mental sight). It was as though from the normal condition of observing all subjects through the medium of frosted glass, some power had for the time removed the obstruction, enabling me to see every object in the clear light of day. In this condition I fully realized the weakness of Vera's character, and the misery that must necessarily follow. I also felt that whether we married or did not marry, I, having once loved, could only break this bond by selfishness. Then came this question, Was I prepared to suffer all things for her sake?–for if not, it was far better to cut my bonds at once. I looked at her, and a feeling of intense pity filled my heart.

"'Poor little child!' I thought. 'God alone can see all the nightmare of misery your nature must pass through before it comes forth in the light of His pure love!' Then a voice seemed to whisper in my ear, 'Think of your own life. If you take up this burden you will be dragged into the darkness; your nature will be

lowered, your power for good destroyed.' Then again I looked at the girl, and as I did so my spirit cried and said, 'Even though I should be damned to walk for ever in darkness, though God's light be hidden from me, yet will I never cut this bond till we stand together before the face of our Father.' And it seemed to me that there were many voices chanting softly, 'Amen.'

"Whilst listening to the sound an overpowering gloom settled upon me. I remembered nothing more distinctly, though through the darkness many indistinct pictures flashed before me and vanished ere they were printed on my mind. At last I heard voices speaking, and opening my eyes, saw Vera and Vancome bending over me. As far as I know, this was the first time that I had fallen into a trance, or as doctors would call it, a state of catalepsy.

"It appears that Vera, finding me insensible, had rushed out of the glen, and seeing Vancome in the distance, had called to him for assistance. They both appeared to think that I had fainted, and I did not wish to undeceive them.

"But it is getting late, and as I have now reached the point in my story which makes it necessary to explain an important discovery to which I was led by this trance condition, it will be better to stop for this evening."

"But," I interrupted, "before I go you will show me the other rooms you spoke of."

"Not to-night," he replied, "for there are many things in them which still require explanations for which at present you are hardly prepared. But the next time we meet I hope to take you into one of them. When I began this evening, I had no intention of going so fully into the details of my story, but noticing that the method unconsciously adopted did not weary you, it seemed better to give my experiences in the order in which they occurred. This plan has led, and will probably still lead, me to describe many so-called trivial reminiscences; but as a matter of fact, nothing is trivial, and by striving to confine ourselves to more important subjects, we often miss the tiny thread which might, if followed, have led to some great discovery. When, however, I continue my story, I hope to make it more interesting by illustrations."

As he said this he took both my hands. In a moment I was plunged in darkness; the room, my companion, everything had vanished; but as I still strained my eyes a faint revolving spark of light became visible. This light increased until I found that I was in the presence of a young girl, whom I had little difficulty in recognizing as the Vera of my friend's story. She was standing in a listening attitude, as though some one had called her, and was evidently unconscious of my presence. As I lay watching she turned her face toward me. I shall never forget the revelation of beauty and weakness depicted there; but more quickly than the vision came it vanished, and I heard my host say–

"Good-night. Come again at the same time as soon as ever you feel in-

clined."

Then I heard the door close, and found myself standing in the cool evening air outside Alan Sydney's house.

When I got back to my room I was too excited to sleep. Was there, after all, some incomprehensible meaning in life, a possibility of solving the mystery of existence? I sat for some time thinking; then taking my pen, began to write, and as I wrote it seemed that already my mind was under the influence of a new power, for each sentence Sydney had used came back to me without effort of memory, as if I were writing from some inaudible dictation.

CHAPTER III

I felt annoyed the next morning to remember that I had accepted an invitation to dine out that evening, and it would be therefore necessary to postpone seeing Sydney until the following day. I was so interested in what I had heard and seen that it hardly occurred to me to delay my next visit longer than necessary, for he who evidently could read my thoughts would not expect me to restrain my impatience with any feeling of consideration for conventionalities.

My entertainment this evening was likely to be a stimulating contrast to that of the previous night. Transon Hall, where I was to dine, may be considered the centre of our circle of social exclusiveness. Into this ring those who moved in inferior orbits at times penetrated, and at times were excluded.

Sir James Folker, Baronet, M.P., J.P., M.F.H., etc., comes of one of the oldest families in this semi-suburban part of Surrey; in fact, his father lived here before him. Of course, in saying this I refer only to the wealthy part of the community. We have plenty of small squires and farmers whose ancestors have lived here for centuries, but as their present representatives are nearly all too poor to entertain, such impecunious hereditary grandeur is appreciated chiefly by their respective families. Sir James is, however, a thoroughly good fellow, well informed, of kindly disposition, and a true sportsman. If he is a trifle overbearing, it is owing chiefly to education. His father was a self-made man, and necessarily had a very exalted appreciation of the dignity attaching to wealth and title. Even a snob, if snobbishness is linked with every association of childhood, may be at heart a gentleman. Life is not long enough to polish off the ugly advertisements which were engraved upon him in youth.

I arrived at the house rather late, and you may fancy my surprise on looking round the room to see Alan Sydney busily engaged in talking to one of the guests.

"Well," I said, as soon as an opportunity occurred of speaking to him, "suppose I had turned up at your house to-night?"

"If I had not known you were coming here," he replied, "I should have warned you; but I quite expect to see you to-morrow. As you know, I am not often away from home, but there is a reason for my being here to-night."

At this moment we were disturbed by the general shuffle which takes place at the announcement of dinner, and I found myself escorting a stranger into the dining-room, who had just been introduced to me as Miss Augusta Smith. My companion was neither young nor pretty, but I noticed with relief that she had a bright and interesting face. We sat exactly opposite Sydney, who had on his right Miss Folker, a good-looking girl of about twenty-one, devoted to sport, and on his left Lady Todman, a most energetic widow, whose object in life was to reform the world by means of teetotalism.

Everything tended to my friend having a somewhat dull time of it, though I noticed a look in his eyes which showed me he was in one of his more lively moods. Lady Todman is not a woman of tact. If all around you are drinking wine, it seems to me hardly good taste to begin a sermon on the eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not drink." But there are some women whose consciences constrain them, and she was one of these.

"Don't you think," she said in a rather loud, penetrating voice, turning to Sydney, as the butler was pouring some sherry into his glass, "that drinking is the cause of much evil?"

Her companion tasted the sherry thoughtfully before he answered. "Certainly, if the wine is not good. But let me assure you this wine is very dry; you need have no fear of any ill effects from drinking it."

"Oh! I don't mean that," she replied; "I mean that nearly every crime that is committed can be directly or indirectly traced to the use of alcohol."

"You surprise me," he said. "Are you fond of travelling?"

"I don't now travel," she answered, evidently offended at what seemed an obvious attempt to turn the conversation. "I find sufficient work near at hand which my conscience will not allow me to neglect, and therefore leave these pleasures for others."

"Let me urge you to go to Constantinople," said Sydney; "it is the best place in which thoroughly to study the temperance question. Degradation and misery have there reached such a perfection without the aid of drink that after a month of such experience I can almost fancy any one weeping tears of joy at the sight of an honest drunkard."

Seeing Lady Todman turning away in evident disgust, and wishing to know

what my friend really thought on the matter, I asked whether the Turks might not possibly be even worse if they added to their other sins the vice of intemperance.

"Drink," he replied, "does not alter a man's character; it simply exposes it. That crime is generally associated with drunkenness is true, but that it causes it is unusual, and it is frequently a deterrent. The weakness in a man is sure to find vent through some channel, and I would rather not picture some of the crimes that our drunkards would probably have committed had not the absorption of this attraction turned their thoughts in another direction. Among weak natures and deformed characters we should expect to find both drunkards and criminals of all kinds."

"I quite agree with you," said Miss Folker. "I don't believe that it is any use trying to make people sober; our best whips always drink, don't they, father? And nothing you could do would ever stop them."

Our host seemed to think this was an unfortunate remark, for I noticed him glance at the butler as he replied, "If they do they soon have to go, I know that."

"You misunderstand me," Sydney said, turning to Miss Folker. "I believe there is great use in trying to make people sober, for weakness of any kind encouraged leads to disease; but one does little service to the cause of truth by telling lies."

"What would you do, then?" broke in Miss Smith, who had been listening intently.

"With the habitual drunkard," replied Sydney, "there is only at present one course open. He should be placed under restraint as a temporary lunatic, which he is. But drunkenness is a mere stage in the growth of mankind, and can only work itself out through the lessons of experience. To try to prohibit drink is to hinder progress; to say that there is more drunkenness now than formerly, is simply to say that the greater part of our race is considered strong enough to face the temptation. Give a savage as much spirit as he cares for, and he will kill himself in a few months. Our forefathers, in much the same way, though with more caution, used to lie nightly under the dinner-table; but now, among those classes which can afford to drink as much as they like, only persons with hereditary tendencies, or those who are unusually weak go to this extreme either in private or public. They have partially learned their lesson. Among the more ignorant there would be ten times the drunkenness if their wages allowed it. If you consider a man, though he starves his wife and children, cannot afford to get hopelessly drunk more than about twice a week; and this is one of the reasons why the poor have taken longer to learn by experience this lesson. But they, too, are slowly improving under increased temptations."

"Well, Sydney," said our host, "you are the most extraordinary man. You always seem to take a view of things from a reversed position."

"It is an excellent plan," Sydney replied, laughing, "now and then to stand on your head; in that position you see the world from quite a new aspect, for instead of your eyes being turned naturally to the earth with only an occasional glimpse of the heavens above, your view for the time is altered. It does not, however, do to keep in that attitude too long, or the blood will flow to your brain."

"But," asked Miss Smith, "do you not think that such doctrines might be very dangerous?"

"All truth is dangerous to those who wish for an excuse for weakness," he replied. "But there are many at the present time who want a little light thrown on the subject; for the man who does any action, however right in itself, feeling that thereby he may be throwing his influence on the side of selfishness, must therein be damned. Alcohol is probably one of our greatest gifts if rightly used, and being so, must of necessity be a frightful curse if abused."

"Gift indeed!" sniffed Lady Todman, "when every doctor will tell you it has no feeding property."

"That is quite true," Sydney continued. "It is not a food, and therein lies its great charm for an age when people eat far too much for the sedentary lives they live; but it prevents the waste of tissue, and enables man to keep in health without half his time and two-thirds of his energy being exhausted in the process of digestion. It is, however, a so-called poison, and must be treated as such; but the poisons of to-day will probably become the nutriment of the future. On the other hand, sugar, a splendid food for savages and labourers, is little better than a slow poison to those who neglect exercise. Some day we shall have a new commandment–'Thou shalt not take sweet things.' Considering the misery brought about in families through dyspepsia, I have a good mind to try and start a new order of lemontotallers at once.

"If, however, you want a temperance sermon, you must go to the drunkard, and as an antidote to what I have said, if you care to hear it, I will tell you a story of a friend of mine who is now dead. He was a young man of great ability, who had passed through the University, carrying off some of its most coveted prizes. For some years having heard nothing of him, I decided to look him up. I knew that he had been ordained, and, retaining his fellowship, had accepted a quiet living in the country, intending to spend his spare time in literary work. It had surprised me that since then I had heard nothing from him, nor had any book of his been published. I found him a hopeless wreck, and this, in a few words, is what he told me.

"He had come down to the country for the purpose of having leisure to study and write. For some time all went well. He had been brought up not to take wine, and was one of the few teetotallers of his College. His father had died from drink when Hamlin was a boy, and his mother had done all in her power

to keep her child from following in the same course. 'I never,' he said, 'touched drink till I was ordained. My curacy was in the West End of London, and as the time drew near for me to preach my first sermon, I became hopelessly nervous, feeling that I should break down, or losing all self-control, behave like a lunatic. The thought horrified me. As I went over my sermon in private, my hand shook so that I could not read the words. In despair I tried a remedy many University men resort to when they have to read the lessons in chapel. I took a small dose of brandy and tried the effect. It was only about a tablespoonful, yet the result was miraculous. In a few minutes I felt capable of preaching in St. Paul's. On the following Sunday, having provided myself with a flask, I took a double dose in the vestry before the sermon, and the result was equally successful. From that day to this I have never preached without the aid of a stimulant.'

"For some time he confined his abuse of alcohol to this purpose, but before he came into the country the habit had grown, and he took spirits every evening, though not in large quantities. On being appointed rector to a small parish, the loneliness of his life added to his temptation.

"'I knew I was damned,' he said, 'but was helpless. Week by week, as I got less effect from the usual amount, I increased it. At last I began to feel the result. My interest in my work died down; the services in the church became a hollow and hateful mockery. I felt languid, and disinclined to take exercise, whilst my thoughts now always ran in one direction, to the moment when again I could drink–drink and be happy–feel the blood course freely through my veins, and my brain wake from its now normal condition of torpor; for you must understand that I never drank to what is called excess, that is to say, was never obviously the worse for drink. One night, after having been sleeping soundly for some hours, I woke oppressed with a feeling of nameless horror. The perspiration poured down me, and yet I shivered; then it seemed as if the very fiends of hell were tearing at my soul, mocking me, shouting my ordination vows into my ears, bidding me look at the damned souls in torture whom I had promised to watch over here, and had neglected. Thus I lay for an hour in anguish unspeakable, and at last got up, dressed, and went out into the cool night air. As I began to feel better I vowed to God never again to touch a drop of alcohol.

"'On the following morning it seemed that, after all, the whole state of my mind had been exaggerated, and was only probably due to indigestion. I, however, kept my vow for a few days and became a wreck. Sunday was drawing near. What should I do? I began my sermon after taking an unusually large dose, and preached contentedly from a passage chosen to strengthen my resolution during the night of misery–"Thy vows, O God, are upon me." Only once since,' he concluded in a whisper, 'have I made a vow, and that was after the first week spent with the real visible fiends in hell, when the doctor came and found that

the minister whom all respected was suffering from *delirium tremens*!'"

There was a pause, and Lady Todman, who had been listening intently to the story, which she evidently intended to retail with a little extra colour at her next temperance meeting, asked what was the poor fellow's end.

"I am glad to say," Sydney replied, "that the day after I left he gathered up what little power was left him, and seeing that his life was hopeless, faced death bravely."

"I hope he was truly penitent before the end," said Lady Todman.

"I think he showed that conclusively," replied Sydney, "when he shot himself."

There was a moment's silence; and then, before anyone could continue the subject, which had become depressing, he turned the drift of talk quite naturally into a new channel, and was very soon keeping most of the party laughing over some comical experiences in the hunting-field. Though he made himself the hero for his own satire, we all knew him well enough to be sure that he was speaking from observation, and not personal experience.

"Well," I said, when the ladies had left us, and I had taken the opportunity to move over next to him, "was it the temperance question which brought you here to-night?"

"No," he replied, "it was not that; but a little private matter, which I hope to be able to accomplish later on."

The conversation then became general, as is usually the case under the friendly influence of tobacco.

We found only two ladies waiting for our arrival in the larger drawing-room, the others had gone into a dimly-lighted and smaller apartment adjoining. Lady Todman informed us, with a look of disgust, that the others were tempting the devil to rap on a circular table, from which we gathered that our hostess was indulging in her favourite occupation of playing at spiritualism.

"You don't seem to approve of spiritualism, Lady Todman," I remarked, rather hoping to draw Sydney into discussion with her on the subject.

"I certainly don't," she replied. "I consider it not only a great waste of time, but also wicked."

"I am glad to find," said Sydney, "that in this case we can agree if I may use the word dangerous instead of wicked, which is much the same thing."

"But why dangerous?" asked Miss Smith, who was the other lady present. "It is nothing but rubbish, and I don't see that people can do much harm by unconsciously pushing a table about, and we cannot fancy that any one would rap on purpose."

"Have you ever been present at one of these gatherings?" he replied. And being answered in the negative, continued, "Is it wise to judge without expe-

rience? There may be more than you fancy even in so apparently childish a performance as table-turning."

Whilst he spoke we were roused by low, yet excited voices in the next room, and he went toward the drawn curtains and quietly passed through, followed by Miss Smith and myself.

The light was dim, and at first I had some difficulty in seeing anything; but as my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, I noticed six ladies sitting round a table with their hands joined. One of these, a girl of about twenty, was lying back in her chair apparently unconscious, although her eyes were open. The others were watching her with expressions either of alarm or interest.

"What shall we do?" said Lady Folker in a whisper; "she has gone off, and I know that in my book it says if any one goes into a trance one ought to be most careful unless an experienced spiritualist is with you."

"If," said Sydney, "you would care to follow my instructions, we might see something interesting without doing the young lady any further harm. I once had a good deal of experience in these matters."

"Oh! how delightful!" said Miss Folker. "Tell us what we ought to do, and let us see a real live ghost; that would be lovely!"

The instructions were quickly carried out; the insensible girl being laid on a couch. All the rest were asked to go into the drawing-room, and the curtains were then again drawn between the two rooms. After some protest from the remainder of our party, including Lady Todman and the men who had so far taken no part in the performance, the lights were put out, and Alan Sydney brought a small shaded pink lamp from the inner room, where the girl still lay unconscious, and placed it in our midst. Hardly had he done this before the curtains were drawn quickly apart by some invisible means, and we could see into the inner room.

Miss Halcome still lay on the couch, apparently sleeping, but with her face turned from us. A soft light was falling upon her from above; as we watched, the light appeared to take, as it were, form, till we recognized that a woman clothed in white stood leaning over the girl. Then the woman, taking one of the girl's white hands, raised her up and led her into the centre of the inner room.

Miss Halcome moved at first as though walking in her sleep, with eyes open, yet apparently unseeing. When they thus reached the centre, the figure of the woman again began to fade till the girl stood alone before us, still with that strange light falling upon her. She made a beautiful picture, being one of those who possess a physical and purely sensuous loveliness, which appeals especially to men of lower type. Her hair and eyes were brown; her complexion clear, though rather dark; her lips were full, prettily shaped, and of deep colour; as a rule her cheeks carried, for my liking, too deep a rose tint, but they were now more pale than usual.

As she stood there she lifted her arms towards us, and began to sing. Her voice I had always considered to be her chief attraction, for not only was it rich and tuneful, but unusually well trained. I had not heard either song or tune before.

”Come to me, dearest, with a love
Eternal, strong as death;
Love that but lasts a transient life,
And fades with fading breath,

Can bring to this sad heart no joy,
No ecstasy divine;
Eternity is far too brief
To fill this heart of mine.

Though I should change, as all must change.
My soul shall ever be,
In youth or age, the soul you love
Through all eternity.

The beauty now that charms your eye,
This youthful form so fair,
Shall alter with each passing year.
Is it for these you care?

Go! face the truth! If all the grace
That earth alone can give,
Were turned from one you think you love,
What of that love would live?

A little space–say fifty years,
Or only five, may be,
And all that now you prize so much
Shall change to what you see.’”

The last few lines of the song almost died away, for at the commencement of the last stanza a most extraordinary change began to take place in the singer. The only way in which I can describe it is to compare her to a waxen image that was being melted rapidly by the strong light falling from above. Everything seemed

to slip away downward and disappear, except the skeleton, which stood with hollow eye-sockets and moving jaw chattering out the last few words. There was a frightful shriek, and at the same moment the curtains fell together.

We were all, Sydney excepted, far too horrified to move. He, however, got up immediately and drew back the curtains. The room was just as we had left it; Miss Halcome still lay on the sofa in exactly the attitude he had placed her. Lady Todman was the first to speak.

"Just as I said, tempting the devil! And a nice fright he has given us all. Not that I was frightened. I just shut my eyes and said my prayers."

The poor old woman was simply shivering as she spoke, and we must therefore excuse her, for it is possible she did not know what she was saying.

"If any one wishes to talk about what we have seen," remarked Sydney, "he should do so at once, before we bring Miss Halcome out of her trance, as I am sure every one will agree with me that nothing of what has occurred should be mentioned in her presence."

"Oh! for goodness' sake!" cried Lady Todman, whose chattering teeth reminded me of the skeleton, "let's wake her up at once, or we shall be having I don't know what next! It is quite sinful, it really is!"

As no one seemed inclined to do more than utter a few disjointed words such as "Awful!" "Most remarkable!" etc., Sydney struck a match, and lighting a powerful lamp held it in front of the girl's eyes.

At this she sneezed twice, and then sitting up said–

"What's the matter? Why did you all leave the table?"

Her companion, holding the lamp still near her eyes, then told her that as she had gone into a trance the others had left the room, but he mentioned nothing of any further experiences; and she, seeming none the worse in any way, followed him into the outer room.

While looking round on the faces present I noticed that of a young man who was a stranger to me. As the girl came forward a look of terror passed over his features such as I had never seen before, and hope never to see again. There was still more mystery, apparently, behind even the late mysterious performance, and I began to wonder whether my friend's motive for coming might not have something to do with the terrified face before me.

Shortly after this, to every one's relief, the carriages began to be announced. I asked Sydney if he were driving, and finding that he was not, offered to take him with me.

"No," he replied, "let us both walk. I get too little exercise as it is, and cannot afford to miss an opportunity."

I agreed, and sending the coachman home, we started together.

There is no time like night for walking, and as the south-west wind blew

softly against us, I felt as though it would have been pleasant to spend hours in the open air. There was much that I wanted to say, but for a few moments the delight of quiet night kept us both from speaking. At last I broke the silence.

"Well, that was the most extraordinary experience," I remarked; "can you throw any light upon it? Talk about the days of miracles being over!"

"The days of so-called miracles will never be over," replied my friend, "till all have equal knowledge. A miracle is but a natural law, of which most persons have hitherto been ignorant, brought into play at length by one who is better informed than the majority."

"But you had nothing to do with the manifestation of to-night, had you?" I asked.

"It was all my doing, with the exception of the first act, and even that was ruled by my influence; but I will explain it to you, as by doing so I shall save trouble later on. I told you that I had come to-night for a reason, and that my object was an important one you may judge by my using a power in public which I have seldom cared to exercise. No one, however, suspects that I had anything to do with what happened beyond being able to give them a little information; all the credit or discredit will be with the performers at the table. Let me first explain what I did, and then give you an idea of my motive.

"Before the ladies left us I exercised my will on Lady Folker and two others to try table-turning that evening. It is a slightly dangerous amusement that has recently revived; and is nothing else but a convenient form of semi-mesmerism caused by the joining of hands. If, which is unusual, no one tries to cheat or to fool the others present, the persons will soon feel a tingling sensation in their arms and hands, and lastly through their whole bodies; when the balance of will is fairly even, nothing may happen for some time, but at last one will-force must predominate the others, and quite unconsciously that power influences all the rest, so that every hand moves by the order of a semi-dormant will. Hence the moving and tilting of the table, the message received, etc. Sometimes the motive-will, being partially entranced, becomes a medium for the transmission of thoughts passing through the mind of some absent friend, for under certain conditions thought can be transferred, even as the sound of the voice through a telephone; but this is too lengthy a matter to go into now.

"As a rule, however, one of the party being more susceptible than the others, will before long become unconscious, or completely mesmerized. This is, as you know, what happened to-night, and in this condition the predominant will, whether the owner thereof be absent or present, gains complete control, speaking through his or her voice, and in fact acting the part of hypnotizer on a patient. Sometimes one of the party present, and then another, will so act on the medium, and each one be unconscious of doing so."

"I begin to see now," I said, "what happened. Your will acted on the girl, and you made her do just what you wished. But how about the skeleton?"

"You are mistaken," my friend answered, "and you forget about the curtains going back of their own accord. I adopted a simpler method, and one less harmful to the girl. Those at the table mesmerized her, but I mesmerized all the others present; from the time the curtains had been drawn till I myself threw them back not a single thing took place, and the room was in silence with the exception of the shriek of horror when I relaxed my power, and you saw, as you thought, the curtains fall together."

"Do you mean to say that the girl had nothing to do with it, and that she never moved?"

"She never stirred so much as a finger, but her condition assisted me in a way that you will understand better when I explain the laws which govern the transmission of will-force, for in her state what power she possessed was added to my own."

"And you mean to say that during all this time we were staring like a pack of fools at a blank curtain?" I demanded.

"I should hardly put it in that way myself," he replied. "It is true that that is what your bodily eyes were doing to all appearances, but your minds had a most impressive scene in front of them, which though it reached them from a different channel than the eye, was none the less vivid."

"But how did you convey the impression?" I asked.

"That," he replied, "requires what I fortunately possess, a vivid imagination, and it was only necessary for me to call up the visions for them to pass also before you; but it is exhausting work, as you will find some day if you try it, for the mind must never wander for a moment, and few people have learnt the art of perfect self-concentration. It is also necessary that for the time being the operator should be in a half-entranced state, or the pictures would be meagre and unreal. This condition, which for the sake of convenience may be called day-dreaming, requires much practice, but it is nevertheless fairly easy to learn. I will before long show you the method of acquiring the habit, so that you can judge for yourself of its use."

"And now," I asked, "what was your motive for giving us such a terrible experience? You succeeded in giving one young man, whose name I don't know, such a scare that he will be some weeks before he gets over the effects."

"I pray that he may never get over them," said Sydney. "If he should, my work has failed. His name is William Jackson, and he is the only son of the late Sir John Jackson. You may have heard of the father, as he was fifteen years ago one of the most notorious and wealthy rakes in London; in other words, having made a god of self, he had become a fiend to others. Thus, as we carry our circumference

with us, he raged at the hell he created, whilst increasing its torments. It is only when we fully realize the damnation of such lives that our hatred turns to pity. Some whom I have known had good cause to hate his memory, as you will hear in the story of my life. Too often have I in his case forgotten that vengeance is not man's business, and that the law of retribution never faileth. It is easy to forgive one who wrongs you, but how hard when the injury is to one we love; when we see some weak loved spirit driven further into the darkness, deeper into the thicket of pain, for though we know that in the end, as Tennyson so finely expresses it, 'There shall be greater good because of evil, larger mercy through the fall,' yet is the suffering present and it is hard to see those we love in pain. William, however, takes far more after his mother than his father. She is a good and noble woman, purified by suffering of which she had in the latter days of her husband's life considerable experience. It would be cruel not to try and save her from like misery through her son, to whom she is devoted. He is a youth of good ability, possessing even half-fledged genius; his nature is at present very susceptible to kindness, and in many ways lovable, but he is cursed with his father's passions, and should this get the upper hand, the finer qualities of his disposition will drag him the more quickly down. If he once came under the influence of a heartless animal nature, there would practically be little hope of saving him."

"And one with that nature was there to-night?"

"Yes," he replied, "Miss Halcome is of all girls the least suited to be his wife, yet he loved or fancied he loved her, and she has set her mind on marrying him, though I believe she cares only for his wealth. But I do not know that I should have interfered were it not that I possess knowledge which makes the whole case most terrible. It is not fit that any child should be born into the world cursed by a double descent from such a man as Sir John Jackson."

"And are you certain that Miss Halcome is really his child?" I asked.

"Unfortunately I have too good reason to know," he replied; "but this is where we part, and I have told you enough to throw some light upon this evening; the rest of the explanation can be left till I reach that part of my story where it would naturally come in."

CHAPTER IV

On the following evening, as soon as we had finished dinner, Sydney led me, as on the previous occasion, through his study and into the library; but we did not wait here, for going up to a curtain at one corner, he pushed it aside, and opening a door led me into a room beyond. This room did not seem to be lighted in any way from the outside, but an electric light, the first I ever saw in a private house, cast a strong glare over the apartment.

As soon as we entered, my companion touched a handle and a shade passed over the light; the effect was pleasant and restful. Except in one recess which was curtained off from the rest of the room, there were few signs of comfort. I could not help fancying that I had suddenly entered a scientific laboratory; the walls of the room were covered with mechanical apparatus of various kinds, and with shelves that contained rows of bottles, tubes, and other chemical appliances.

"This," said Sydney, "is my workshop, where for years I have been busy trying experiments on nature by the assistance of knowledge gained through the development of our sixth sense. There is no doubt whatever that when men once begin to understand the uses of this latent power, existence will be revolutionized entirely. The world as it is now will cease to exist, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. But," he continued after a pause, "I fear the time is not yet come; for so awfully will man's power be increased, that unless our natures are at the same time purified and perfected, existence here under such a reversal of conditions would be in truth hell itself.

"Fortunately, however, the power of using this sense is greatly dependent on the lives of the persons employing it. If a man has not learned to curb his passions and keep his body under control, he will make little progress, for the subjugation of the body is essential to success. The weakness of my own nature has, alas! too often caused me to break down at the very moment of seeming victory. If only a man were perfectly unselfish, pure, and free from pride, he could without the aid of science and without seeming effort control the forces of nature. Such a One has been on earth, and we know the result. Such power may be given when man has learnt to follow His example. But as man becomes conscious of his new powers we may expect a terrible time of transition, for with the possession of free will each added gift means added force to evil as well as to good, even as I was saying last night with regard to the gift of alcohol.

"People will soon find this out, if they have not already done so, with regard to hypnotism. In the time that is coming no creed shall save a man, for the wonders that shall be done on the earth shall deceive all those who have not experienced the realization of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; all those in fact who are not able to distinguish truth from falsehood by the instinct of their own hearts. It is doubtless for this reason that scientists have so long had their eyes blinded. When the time shall come, and the people are ready,

these men shall lead, as they have ever led, the march of progress; yet they must abandon pride if they hope to succeed.

"I perceive, however, that like many others, you are more anxious to hear of the marvellous, or to see it, than to listen to the future possible condition of things which probably will not take place in your lifetime. If, therefore, you will lie down on the couch in that recess, I will continue my story, though on a somewhat different plan from that to which you are accustomed."

I lay down, and he drew the curtain that divided us from the rest of the room, and sitting beside me, said,

"If I remember rightly, I left off last time when, having just recovered from my first trance, I found Vera and Vancome standing over me. I felt very little the worse for my experience, and seeing that I did not appear likely to faint again, my companions went on their way to Heather Lodge, leaving me to walk back home. During the evening I began to feel nervous and distressed; a weight of anxiety seemed to be hanging over me, none the less real because it was undefined. I went to bed early, but instead of feeling better, the nervousness increased. On whatever subject my thoughts turned, the unpleasant impression followed them, haunting me and driving sleep far away. At last in despair I determined on an experiment. I would try to think of nothing, and keep my eyes steadily fixed on some imaginary spot just over my head. The room was dark, but (as any one who has tried the experiment will know) if you concentrate the eyes on one dark place for any length of time, that spot will appear light. As I watched the light it revolved at first slowly, and then with increasing rapidity. Though unknown to me at the time, the method I had adopted is the simplest and easiest way of hypnotizing oneself, and with a little patience most people could do it, for if the light does not soon revolve it is easy to start it by moving the eye, as it always follows; the great difficulty is to keep the mind from wandering.

"When these revolutions had continued for some few moments, I became about every alternate second, as it were, blind, seeing nothing, and my mind also during the same period became a blank; then pictures alternately flashed across the darkness, so rapidly that I could not perfectly grasp them. But after a time I was able to see quite clearly, and this is the picture which I saw."

Sydney stopped speaking, touched something, and the light was extinguished; then as he placed his hand on mine, I found that I was looking into a room which was lighted by a number of shaded candles. A man of about thirty was standing with his back to a log fire, and a girl was lying on a sofa near him. The girl was the same I had previously recognized as Vera; the man I had little doubt was Lord Vancome. He was speaking in a low tone, but every word was distinct.

"How cruel you are to me, Miss Soudin! The very softness of your voice but

adds to the bitterness of your words!" Then coming a little nearer and speaking still lower; "Vera!–I must call you Vera, just to hear the word–if you could but know for one moment what it is to be a man and to see such loveliness, and yet not to be able to approach it; to have to stand off and to be told that it belongs to another. If you could only know, you would have pity before you send me from you for ever! How can you be so cruel?"

"Oh, Lord Vancome!" said Vera, "I wish you would not talk like that; you know I do not wish to be unkind, but you must remember I am engaged, and it would be very wrong to let any one kiss me."

"Wrong! You dear innocent thing!" he answered; "how small is your knowledge of the world! Do you think girls never let any but one man kiss them? And what harm would it do? Do you fancy a kiss leaves any mark behind that would betray us? No, the only mark will be upon my life, a mark of brightness in the gloom!"

"Oh! but I really could not!" she replied; but even as she said the words, her up-turned face, her eyes, her lips, denied them, and she knew it; and the spirits of evil and of good knew it; and the man who stood trembling with passion over her, knew and took advantage of it. As he did so the scene vanished.

Sydney turned on the light, and then said–"That is what I saw; but what I felt it is impossible to describe. The girl lying there listening to the stage-learned sentimental drivel of a half-drunken blackguard–that she could not see through it–that she was unable to distinguish the laugh behind the scenes, or know that at some future date the details exaggerated would be retailed to a club audience–that she should let him even kiss her!

"I came-to from that trance little better than a madman, with one only hope, that it might not be true; one determination to find out for certain, and if so to be revenged–revenged on the man. My love for the girl was unchanged, and I realized with something akin to horror that nothing could alter it; that from the moment when I made my vow, her fate and mine were woven together; and in this first vision of her damnation I felt driven from the face of God, a thing accursed. I had taken her sin upon me, as we must ever take the sins of those we truly love; and I had then perhaps for the first time some faint idea of the meaning of the word substitution, and could understand how one perfect in love, and therefore perfect in holiness, must in a world like this bear the sin and carry the sorrows of humanity.

"As every man born into the world becomes a unit, influenced by all that preceded him and influencing all future life, so must each be a saviour or destroyer through self-renunciation or through egotism. To One alone can we give the title, the noblest and the grandest for us to conceive, of the Saviour. He, who possessing fully the spirit of God's order and of God's love, was ordained to re-

flect them once perfectly upon earth so that He might show to the wanderers of all time the possibility of man's nature, and the only path by which we may return to peace. Men waste time in disputing if this Saviour was God. What know we of God but by his attributes? Which of these attributes can we conceive bound down in human form which was not manifest in the Christ? Could love exceed His love, or meekness His humility, whose unselfishness asked no reward of gratitude, and the exercise of whose power was ever restrained by the hand of a far-seeing compassion? Is all we read true? Perhaps not; the hand of imperfect devotion often, through want of insight, may have touched and marred the picture, but the portrait remains, if somewhat soiled through the fingers of adoration. On the other hand, if the painter of our picture had no living model, a thing well nigh impossible, then must he have been the Christ, for no soul can rise to a sustained ideal beyond the possibility of his own nature.

"How wretched and partial a thing my love was, may be seen at once by the bitter feeling of revenge that took possession of me. I fully believe that at that moment I could have murdered my enemy in cold blood. It is a humiliating reflection that there is virtually no crime of which the best of us could not be guilty if the temptation were only strong enough and the circumstances propitious.

"The next morning I walked to Heather Lodge, and asking to see Mr. Soudin, was shown into his library. The old gentleman was sitting there dressed for shooting, and did not seem very pleased to see me.

"'I must apologize,' I began, 'for coming up before the week is expired, but I have good reason to believe that Lord Vancome is making love to your daughter, and feel that it is impossible to let things go on as they are. I must therefore ask you to release me from my promise and allow me to have an interview with her at once.'

"I knew that to all appearance I was making a fool of myself, but being desperate and unable to think of any better plan, I adopted the simplest one of speaking the truth.

"'You must be mad, Mr. Sydney,' he replied. 'You insult, without any possible grounds, both my daughter and my guest, and show yourself unworthy of the position in my family which you wish to occupy.' Then without speaking his thoughts continued–'*I hope he may be correct; if so, that settles the business once for all, and I can get rid of him.*'

"I felt so angry with the man before me that I lost all self-control. 'If you think that you can play fast and loose with me,' I answered, 'you are mistaken. I know your views perfectly well, and that you are anxious that your daughter should, if possible, become Lady Vancome. If you were told such a marriage would end miserably; that Lord Vancome is thoroughly bad, it would not influence you. I will, therefore, keep strictly to business, and for your daughter's sake

give you information which may possibly have some weight. Lord Vancome, never wealthy, is a gambler, and, if report speaks truly, has nearly reached the end of his resources. On the other hand, though it is not generally known, I have an income of over twelve thousand pounds a year, derived from safe investments. You can verify my statements without difficulty!'

"I saw my companion, when I came to the last part of my sentence, metaphorically speaking, prick up his ears. He, however, sat a few minutes silent, and I had to content myself with his thoughts, which after all were far more important. And this is what I made of them–

"'*Twelve thousand pounds a year–safe securities–four per cent. at most–three hundred thousand pounds capital–other fellow broke–wonder if it's true–soon find out–getting tight myself—cannot live on a broken Lord for son-in-law–good job, if it is true, I found it out–must write at once to ... and make inquiries–wish this fellow was broke and the other had his money–getting to hate Sydney–damned prig! talking to me like that–what in the name of the devil am I to do?–the beggar seems regularly to see into one!*'

"At this point I thought it well to keep up my advantage, so I said, 'That facts are as I stated, you can find out as soon as you please, but one thing I wish you to understand; if I leave this house without an opportunity of speaking to your daughter, when you have dismissed Lord Vancome as unsuitable, you may find you have lost me also!'

"'Really, Mr. Sydney,' he replied, trying to force a smile, 'I am afraid being in love does not agree with you; your nerves seem thoroughly upset this morning. But I suppose we old people must put up with this kind of thing, we were all young and foolish once. Many years ago I believe that even I was jealous. There is, after all, no particular reason why you should not see my daughter if you wish; but it is the tone you have adopted which I object to. Money, my dear sir, money is a thing that, where my child's happiness is at stake, would never cross my mind; it must rest with her to decide, when she is a little older and knows her own mind, what husband she will take. So long as he is a good man and of gentle birth, I shall not interfere!'

"'Have I your permission, then,' I asked, 'to go and see her?'

"I saw he was about to consent when the thought crossed his mind that very likely she was at the moment with Vancome, and he replied, getting up, 'I will send her to you.'

"Soon after his departure Vera came into the room looking very pale and nervous, and I saw that she was wondering what could have brought me up. As I looked at her, my love, pity, and anger grew uncontrollable, and entirely upset my mental balance.

"My animal nature got the upper hand, and I became, for the time being,

cruel. My very passion, as is often the case under such conditions, was an incentive rather than a check, to that which, in the language of hypocrisy, is termed 'religious anger,' but which is often little better than the counter thrust of a wounded heart. I will, I thought, use my power against this girl, and make her see herself even as she is.

"'Vera,' I began, 'I have got your father's permission to see you again before the week is over. I find it impossible to keep away from you, dearest, any longer. I want to hear from your lips once more that you love me, and that you will be my wife.'

"'Why, of course I love you, dear,' she said, a look of relief coming into her face as she came forward, evidently expecting that I should take her in my arms and kiss her.

"I took both her hands in mine, and looked into the sweet face before me. Was it possible that I might have been mistaken? That I was a victim of delusion? As I stooped and kissed her forehead, I said–

"'Have you missed me much, dear? And did you find the hours hang heavily?'

"'Oh, yes,' she replied, 'it has seemed such a long, long time. But after all, you see, we have met once already. Have you quite got over your fainting fit? Do you know that you don't look at all well. When I came in I was quite afraid something had happened, you seemed so queer.'

"'What did you fancy could have happened?' I asked. 'Did you suppose that in this short time I had fallen in love with some one else, and had come to break the news to you? Now, tell me, are you jealous? Let us hope not, because you know it would be unpleasant to have a jealous wife. Should you be very angry if you knew that I had sometimes kissed other girls?'

"'How can you be so horrid!' she answered, looking troubled and perplexed. 'But you are only joking. Why, if you ever did such a thing, I would never! never! never! speak to you again.'

"'Why?' I questioned. 'Do you think there is much harm in a simple kiss? Do you fancy that men only kiss one woman in their lives?' I stopped abruptly.

"She stood staring at me with a frightened look in her eyes, but whilst I was watching she turned away; then her thoughts came quickly. '*Just what he said about women–after all I did not kiss him. And how could I help his kissing me? I wonder whether Alan knows any thing–Can he have guessed? No, it is absurd! But somehow he frightens me, especially when he looks in that queer way.*'

"'Vera,' I said, 'sit down. I want to talk to you, to explain something so that in future we may understand each other. You see you are going to be my wife, and those who love should have as few secrets as possible. Now I feel sure that you have something on your mind, and I want you to tell it to me. Don't be afraid

that I shall be angry.'

"'I don't know what you mean,' she answered. Her manner was half defiant, half frightened.

"'Should you have wished me to be present, though unseen, in the drawing-room last night, between ten and eleven?' I asked.

"She lost her presence of mind in a moment. A bright flush passed over her face and left it deadly white.

"'How mean!' she cried. 'You were outside looking through the window. I don't know what you think you saw. It is disgusting of you to have done such a thing.'

"'I was in bed,' I replied.

"'Then what on earth do you mean?'

"'I mean this, that last night a gross insult was offered to one I love, and that she accepted it, and what is more, accepted it willingly.'

"'Oh! I know you were looking. But I don't care if you did see, it was not my fault. I tried to prevent him, but he would do it, and I hate you now! Yes, I do! You are mean, and you tell lies!' Then she burst into a flood of tears.

"'Vera,' I said, placing my arm round her, 'I have told you no lie. If I tried to explain how I know all, yes, all that happened, far more than could have been seen through any window, you would simply not understand me. You say I spied upon you. How was it then that the shutters were not closed, and the blinds and curtains drawn as usual?'

"'They were,' she replied. And then in the pause her thought continued. '*I looked to see afterwards, and that is just what I can't understand. Besides, he could not have been in the room either, for I examined carefully after Vancome left, as I had an uncomfortable feeling at the time that some one had been watching us.*'

"'Cannot you understand,' I asked, 'that if we love a person very much we may be conscious of what is happening to such a one, even though we are not present?'

"'No,' she replied, 'I don't believe anything of the kind. You may imagine things, or you may see them, or be told about them; but I won't listen to another word. I hate you! and would not marry you now if you were the only man on earth. I would rather marry Lord Vancome, so there! And I will kiss him too, just to spite you, if for no other reason. Whatever else he is, he is a man, and you are not! You are a devil!'

"She got up, and before I could stop her, rushed out of the room. I went to the window and looked out. In the distance I could see Soudin, and Lord Vancome, with keepers and dogs starting for their day's shooting. There was no fear of my being disturbed for some time, so I sat down and reviewed the situation. Vera had defied me, and there seemed little doubt that if left to herself,

she would throw me over and accept Vancome. That is to say, if he had any intention of going beyond flirtation, which seemed doubtful. On the other hand, I felt satisfied that when her father had verified my statements, I might fully rely on having the paternal influence. The retreating figures of the two men seemed to show conclusively that he already believed me; otherwise there is little doubt that he would have seen me safely out of the house before starting off for the day with my rival. I had therefore to decide an important question. How far was I justified in influencing this girl's will? Could I, in fact, excite a love which was not spontaneously given? Should I not, in doing so, destroy the one thing that gives to life an interest and meaning, namely, freedom of action, without which man would be little better than an automaton?

"Whilst I sat thus musing over what may well seem to you a comparatively trivial matter, a new light was cast upon the mystery of life, for as I realized how unsatisfying such self-created love would be, I began to see an interpretation which had not previously occurred to me in the parable of man's fall. Was it not possible that the Creator of all things, not fully satisfied with the loving obedience of those who through their very nature were only able to do His bidding, decided to create man, a being, who like Himself, should know by experience the good of order, the evil of disorder, and therefore be capable of discovering which path leads to pain, and which to happiness; one who in the end should love him with the deep love that is a free offering of the lesser nature to a greater which is akin to it?

"While thinking about these things it seemed clear, that if any man had the power of partially influencing another's will, he must be careful how it was employed. I began to wonder why it had been given to me, till I remembered that after all it was but a developed form of that influence which we see around us every day, and that the reception of good, and the rejection of evil influence, is the necessary part of free growth. As man therefore develops, we might naturally expect that he would have to contend against stronger and more subtle forces. For these reasons it seemed to me that we are as fully justified in using any such powers, as we are in applying the more ordinary methods of influence, provided that we do so unselfishly, and in no way permanently overpower the general freedom of another. This latter restriction, as you will see, is open to a very wide construction.

"I had, however, up to this time, seldom tried to exercise my will on others, for though Descartes has given up a great part of his manuscript to this subject, my time had been chiefly occupied in studying the transmission of thought, which is, as it were, a first step to the other. Until you can read the thoughts of those around you, it is practically impossible to convey distinct impressions to another, unless for the time being the person is in a trance condition, when it

is comparatively easy. The mind in this latter state being deprived of its usual guiding forces, is peculiarly susceptible to any external influence. It is probable that I should have been unsuccessful in the attempt now made, had I not been working on one with whom I was already familiar, and who was partially under my sway.

"I willed that she should come back to the room, having a strong desire to tell me all that had happened on the previous evening, and the feelings that had influenced her throughout. In a few minutes the door opened and she entered; there was nothing in her appearance that would have led any one to suppose she was acting under restraint, or had in any way been mesmerized; her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes showed traces of recent tears, but she was outwardly calm. Having closed the door behind her, she came and stood before me.

"'Alan,' she said, 'I have been thinking that perhaps it will be better to explain exactly what happened last night; you will then understand.'

"I said nothing, but continued to concentrate my will, urging her to tell me all, not in the conventional manner of speech, but from her soul.

"'I have, you see, a sort of liking,' she continued, 'for Lord Vancome, a liking which is checked yet increased because I am afraid of him. I don't understand the feeling, but it is nice to play with fire; as a child I always loved to run my finger through the flame of a candle, each time more slowly till at last it just burnt me a little; and then I like, oh! you cannot know how I like to influence others!–to feel that for the moment I can turn them this way or that; to realize that there is some charm about me which holds them with a spell, and which they cannot escape. If you could have seen his eyes last night as he followed my every movement! I, only a country girl, and he a man used to all the beautiful women of London. I do not love him, I do not love you; in fact, I don't know what people mean by love, but I like people to be attracted by me, and to make much of me; and–well, to lead them on. Why should I not? Then he wanted to kiss me; he came nearer, I refused to let him; I felt more frightened, but I liked the feeling; would he or would he not? Then I looked up into his face in a way that I felt sure would make him, intending all the while to refuse if he tried to take advantage of that look. But he was too quick, and–and it was nice to feel powerless, but it was not my fault, for I told him not to do it.'

"'Vera,' I said, and my heart was very sad, 'can you not see, do you not understand, that it is your will and not your words that matter? Men and women are differently made, and the temptations of the latter come chiefly from weakness and vanity; but tell me why it was you promised to be my wife if you do not love me?'

"'Well,' she replied, 'I don't quite know; you see I don't love any one, but I

suppose I shall when we marry, and it would be nice to marry. It would be lovely to have a wedding and presents, and to be made a lot of, and to have people talking about me, and it's dreadfully dull at home; besides, you are strong, and it is nice to feel that there is some one to lean upon, some one to trust. But I hate you now, and I will tell you why. You see into me, and I don't like it. I know you do, you see my thoughts, and if when we are married I did anything which you would not like, I should be afraid you might find it out. It would be better to marry Lord Vancome, he is not a bit like that; though I would rather trust you of the two in a difficulty.'

"I had become so interested in what she was saying that I had relaxed my power over her, and was only reminded of the fact by her next remark.

"'I do not really know, Mr. Sydney, what induced me to come down and say all this nonsense, for I have quite made up my mind, and it is no use your asking me to reconsider the matter. After your insult I shall never think of speaking to you again.'

"'I don't know that you have been asked to change your mind,' I replied, altering my tone, and no longer striving in any way to affect her judgment. 'You have wronged yourself, and would put the blame on me for bringing the fact home to you. I can for the present think of nothing to say, nothing to do; but remember, though you do not love me, I love you, and love never changes; whatever may happen in the future, Vera, as long as I live you will find me unchanged in two things—my desire for your love, and my wish to help you.'

"'Thank you, Mr. Sydney,' she answered, making at the same time a little mock curtsey; 'I do not think it at all likely that your valuable assistance will be required, or that you will succeed in gaining my love. Good-bye!'

"'Well,' I reflected, while walking back slowly over the moor, 'for one possessed of exceptional powers it seems that I have made a pretty fair mess of the whole thing.' And I began to understand how limited all influence must be under such conditions. For, in the first place, I wished for the love of a girl who was as yet incapable of understanding the meaning of the word; and secondly, was trying to save a soul from its own nature without destroying its freedom of action.

"I left Scotland on the following day and returned to my chambers in London. Before doing so I wrote a note to Mr. Soudin saying that though my feelings were still quite unchanged towards Vera, I felt it would be better for both of us if we did not meet again just at present. I also asked him in the event of his coming up to town, if he would call and see me.

"In reply a most cordial letter arrived, saying that he expected to be in London in the course of the following week, and that he would be sure to call and look me up.

”When I had settled down once more in my own rooms, my thoughts turned to Vancome. I hated him with a hatred that was almost madness. In later life it is impossible to feel either the passions of love or hatred as we feel them in our youth.

”I look back upon this period of my life with horror and contempt; but it is none the less important that you should follow me through it, as you will see what new temptations to evil every added power brings with it. I determined, if Vancome had not already ruined himself completely, to beggar him, flattering myself that in so doing I was but assisting lagging Providence, getting out of the way a corrupt influence, making myself an instrument of retribution to avenge the many whom he had wronged. I set about my plan carefully and systematically, being aided not a little by my increasing powers, and still more by an entire disregard of expense. I very soon had a far more correct knowledge of his affairs than he probably possessed himself, for few people in money difficulties can bring themselves to face the unpleasant facts connected with their position.

”When his father died he came into the title and property; the estate, which was not entailed, had been heavily mortgaged, and since then every year the burden had been increasing until it was very doubtful if at the present time a forced sale of the property would cover his liabilities. The mortgagees were pressing for a large sum of interest overdue, and Vancome’s solicitors had done all in their power to raise this money, but as yet without success. I therefore called on a firm of rather second-rate bill discounters, and had an interview with Mr. Marsden, the senior partner, who had some interest in the mortgage.

”I have always adopted one method in dealing with business men, which has proved on the whole successful. I will endeavour to describe it to you briefly, as it may be of service. Each man’s honesty lies on a certain plane, and the types can for convenience be classified under four heads.

”No. 1, which is rarely met with, may be called the natural inclination level.

”No. 2, the advantageous moral level, which, except under severe temptations, it is equally safe to trust.

”No. 3, the reflecting level.

”No. 4, the fear of detection level.

”More men set their honesty down on No. 3 platform than on all the rest put together, and as Mr. Marsden was among the majority, it will be as well, therefore, to explain more fully what is meant by the definition.

”This type is honest or dishonest simply through the way it is approached. If you go to it in a meek and quiet spirit, carrying all the guilelessness of your nature on your head, and all your cunning wrapped in a napkin, it will meet you frankly, treat you moderately fairly, and protect you with almost tender solicitude from the jaws of any of the No. 4 type. This way of approach is, moreover,

safest in dealing with all business men, for if you come on one by mistake whose honesty is altogether absent, such method will incite to greed, and your wolf will be less careful to keep on his sheep-skin.

"I learned this lesson when quite a youth from the relation who has since left me a great part of his fortune. He was one of the most successful men in London, and when I asked if he would tell me the secret of his power, he replied in his queer and enigmatical way–'I have sucked in knowledge through every pore, and studied men always from behind the mask of stupidity; those who wish to be thought wise must be content to remain fools; for in the light of seeming wisdom, the bats hang head downwards in their safe retreat indistinguishable from the dirt around; but they flutter in the dull face of stupidity, and may easily be knocked down and trampled upon. Nevertheless,' he continued, winking at me, 'it is good sport sometimes to cast off the veil, and to give these people a taste of your power; then the poor wretches will go away blubbering that you have hurt them, and the world, knowing how stupid you are, will say that you must have been mad.'

"Thus I went, carrying a helpless expression, to Mr. Marsden, and letting him know that I was very wealthy, and at the same time anxious to acquire the whole of Lord Vancome's property, I threw myself upon his world-wide knowledge, and asked his advice.

"'I am delighted, Mr. Sydney, that you should have come to me,' he said, rubbing his hands. 'There is fate in it; had you gone elsewhere, a large price might have been asked. With my information, and if you leave yourself in my hands, we can secure a bargain for you, a real bargain.' Here he dropped his voice as if imparting a great secret. 'Lord Vancome is pressed for money, and the mortgagees are threatening to foreclose.' (All this of course I knew, but I thought it better to appear ignorant.) 'We must advance money–we must get his bills–press for payment–threaten bankruptcy–pay off mortgagees–take estates.'

"I besought him not to trouble me with details, but whilst keeping my name from appearing in the matter, act as he thought best. My solicitors, I told him, would supply whatever funds were required. Then once more calling his attention to the fact that I was entirely at his mercy, and having read in his thoughts various ways by which he intended to profit by the transaction, without fleecing me beyond the limit of his conscience, I went away satisfied.

"On entering my rooms after this interview, I found Mr. Soudin waiting to see me. He appeared in good spirits; told me he had been in London the last three days; and I perceived from his thoughts, that he had found out all he wished to know, and had quite decided to accept me as his future son-in-law. It was just as well that he could not see into my mind as clearly, for I had also discovered that he was in even worse difficulties than Lord Vancome. Not contented with

a comfortable income, he had put some of his capital into an unlimited bank, which, if my information proved correct, was about to fail.

"He seemed anxious for me to return with him to Scotland, and his wishes evidently inclined towards an early marriage. Moreover, he suggested the advisability of having the engagement publicly announced in the papers. At this point it seemed necessary to inform him that at my last interview with his daughter, we had quarrelled, though I did not mention the cause; at the same time I told him that if Vera was willing, I had not the slightest objection to his making our engagement public. He pooh-poohed the idea of any objection coming from this quarter, declaring that his daughter was devoted to me, and took his departure, saying he would write to her and settle everything.

"The door had scarcely closed behind him, when a deadly faintness began to steal over me. With some difficulty I managed to get into my bed-room, and had hardly thrown myself on the bed before I lost consciousness."

My companion paused for a moment.

"I have at last brought you to the point of my narrative," he continued, rising, "where the chief interest may be said to begin. It has seemed best to touch on many points which may have appeared of little or no importance, and to leave out a few which you might have considered more interesting. It is a far more difficult matter than you can well understand, to deal in an intelligible manner with the forces brought into play through an unrecognized sense; especially as we have at present no names either for its effect upon the mind, or for the subjects of which, through the medium of its power, we are for the first time conscious. I propose, therefore, before continuing my story, to show you a few experiments, and to throw as much light as possible on the remarkable changes in our whole life, which a perfect knowledge of this sixth sense would bring about."

"First," he continued, throwing back the curtain, "you, in your condition, are permanently tied to what we call the body, and bound down to its limitation. You can see only by the aid of light, and your vision cannot pass through what we call opaque substances. The reason why the animal eye is thus constructed must be obvious. Had it been formed in such a way as to enable it to focus only on the object it wished to observe, and were able to disregard any material obstruction which lay in the way, an animal would dash into the intervening material, even as a bird strikes itself against a clear sheet of glass.

"It was doubtless for this reason that nature mercifully deals but seldom in transparent solids, allowing the eye only to penetrate matter in its liquid or gaseous forms. But you must not for a moment suppose that there is anything more miraculous in a vision which is constructed in such a way that it can reverse the process, one form being as easily developed as the other. Moreover, what we call solid, is only the term for describing matter which in its present condition

resists the pressure of other material bodies to a certain extent. For as we know, heat, electricity, sound, etc., can pass even through steel.

"Now, if you will come this way, I will show you an instrument which was perfected by me some years ago, but which I no longer require to use; it may possibly explain my meaning more fully.

"Here," said Sydney, pointing to a small instrument which looked like a very delicate binocular telescope, "is an invention of lenses which neutralizes the effect of the greater part of the services of the eye on the brain. It is very imperfect, but it will do as an example. I will focus it at twenty yards from here, and turn it in this direction. Now what can you see?"

I looked through, and saw a servant in the dining-room removing some of the things off the table.

"That is a wonderful invention," I said. "Why have you never made it known?"

"Can you ask?" he replied. "Just fancy what misery such power would cause in our present condition; what temptation it would be to evil; what an aid it might give to cruelty. But I do not fancy it will ever be required, for as soon as a man is fit to use the power, he will not require the aid of any instrument. The powers of vision are slowly changing from generation to generation, in the direction here indicated. It is the same with regard to hearing. Ask any man who is acquainted with the roar of London, if it strikes with the sense of confusing sound. No, he is capable quite unconsciously of listening to a whisper, or some soft strain of music, and being quite oblivious to the uproar going on around. If we for one moment were able to hear, as people fancy they do, all sounds in proportion to their magnitude, we should that instant be struck deaf by the thunder of universal movement, the tumult of unceasing vibration. But we hear only just as much as our natures are fitted to make use of. With the aid of the sixth sense, we hear just as much or just as little as we will."

He led me to another instrument. "Put your ear to that," he said. "It is not a telephone, but it answers the purpose far better. Now concentrate your thought on some distant sound you would like to hear."

I thought of my own hall clock, which has a peculiar, solemn, old-fashioned tick. I could hear it distinctly, and even now there came the familiar rattling sound, then slowly it chimed a quarter past eleven.

"Try again," my companion said.

I thought of my cottage by the sea, and wished to hear the waves on the beach as I hear them from my bedroom window. I listened, but could distinguish nothing.

"There is no sound this time," I said.

"It is low tide," he replied, "and the sea is calm. You must will to be upon

the sand."

I did so, and in a moment the little wavelets seemed tumbling over my feet, splashing and trickling back over the sand. It seemed impossible that I could be thirty miles from the sea, and nearly a hundred from that sandy beach; for the sea on nearly all our southern coasts, breaking as it does on shingle, can give forth no such sweet sounds as these.

CHAPTER V

In this way Alan Sydney gave me an idea of the limitations of our present sense-organs, and how, by superior knowledge, they may be altered and varied. I was able to feel things at a distance that I did not touch, and touch things near me without being able to feel them.

"It is curious," he said to me at last, when he had been showing some rather singular experiments with regard to perfumes, "that the sense of smell has been allowed to die out so much through lack of cultivation. I once taught a person to read quite easily by various scents. I made an alphabet first of all, which he soon learned, and then by arranging the perfumes in order he soon was able to read by this means quite easily. But there is a still more curious fact that, notwithstanding our present scientific knowledge, people talk of having five senses, even as I have done to you for fear of confusing matters, for there is no such thing as the sense of taste."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Taste," he replied, "is simply the combined effect of two senses, touch and smell. If a person loses his sense of smelling he can only taste by feeling; he can detect oil from water, or alcohol from vinegar, sugar from lemon, through the effect that any of these substances have on the more delicate nerves of feeling which are connected with the palate. But we will not waste time in discussing the matter. A few experiments will prove it to any one who is doubtful. I only mention it to show why I had not referred to taste as a means of perception."

He then took me to that part of the room fitted up as a chemical laboratory.

"Now," he said, "I am going to show you some experiments that will surprise you far more than anything which you have seen hitherto. But as I do not wish you to look upon them from the marvellous side, it will be well to explain some of the reasons why quite natural causes may lead apparently to miraculous results.

For instance, you look upon your body as an inseparable condition of life upon earth. It is even a question whether you do not really regard it as an essential part of yourself instead of seeing it is nothing more important than a suit of clothes well fitting and adapted to the present conditions and circumstances of your spirit. This latter view, though professed by most people, is but seldom really believed in. From the lowest to the highest every body is formed in one way; the life, or spirit, by its force of attraction drawing certain material elements to its aid for the purpose of growth and development. As the spirit thus grows and develops, its needs, and consequently its outward shape, alter. These elements, so gathered, we call our bodies, and it is as easy to cast off these bodies and put them on again as it is to take off or replace our clothes. If, however, the experiment is tried with an imperfect knowledge it is attended with great danger, probably with what we call loss of life. I will, however, show you an experiment on an animal."

He whistled, and a small bird that I had not noticed, flew down from the top of one of the cupboards and settled on his shoulder. It was a tame robin. As my companion poured out a number of liquids from various bottles into a glass dish, he told me that he had tamed it about six months ago, and that it lived chiefly out of doors and found its own food, but that it now nearly always slept in one of the rooms.

Taking it in his hands, he said–"As soon as its development in this form is complete, it will die. If the body is injured in such a way as to make it useless, it will find another; but there is a way of temporarily causing a life to become dormant. If during that time I dissolve the body into its gaseous particles, the life, on awaking to consciousness, will draw these particles back into their previous shape."

Whilst he was speaking he softly stroked the bird, and its head fell back. When the little thing was mesmerized he laid it down, a heap of ruffled feathers, beside the bowl.

"That condition of trance will last one minute," he said, as he placed the body in the bowl.

A slight vapour rose from the liquid, and in a moment all sign of the bird had disappeared. I looked into the pure watery fluid, but could see nothing left there.

"It is over there," he said; pointing to the shelf above me, and there the robin, without any sign of injury, stood pluming its feathers.

"I have shown you this," he continued, "not to convince you of the truth of what I was saying, for of course any second-rate conjuror could apparently bring about a similar result; but because this illustrates an important law of nature, viz. that life, which is indestructible, is everything, and the body merely a temporary

convenience."

"But," I said, "do you mean to tell me that the life of a bird is eternal?"

"Everything is eternal," he replied, "and everything is slowly progressing towards perfection."

"Yet," I answered, "do you really think that heaven will be full of the spirits of dead birds?"

He sat down and laughed. "For a reasonable man," he said, "you have some of the most extraordinary, childlike views; but I ought not to laugh, for after all how little do any of us know; but I will tell you what I think.

"From the lowest life in the flower to the highest created spirit in the universe, there is one law of growth; life meets life, uniting and strengthening. As one atom joining apparently with others becomes what we call a molecule, and these molecules continue to unite and form new substances, even thus do lives join and mingle to form more perfect life."

"Why," I exclaimed, "do you mean to say that my life is but the amalgamation of countless other lives?"

"You do not," he replied, "express it quite in the way I should; but you seem to understand me. What we call attraction, fascination, and love are the forces that draw the kindred elements together, and Swedenborg was, I fancy, not far wrong when he said, 'That the man and woman spirits become one angel in death;' so will that angel also doubtless meet another kindred spirit and unite. Fancy if we could look behind us and see the millions of gathered lives that form our own. Truly no man can harm another without stabbing himself, for the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the redemption of the body. If," he continued, "you have never seen things in this light before, go and read your Bible; it is all there though veiled in parable from the eyes not ready yet to see: listen to the inspired words of men in all ages, and of all centuries; they point to the same end: study science, each new discovery is a continual verification of the eternity of all things, and of continued progress through unity to power. But come, let us return to the subject before us, so that I may get back as soon as possible to my story. You do not mind spending the night here, do you?"

I replied that I would rather spend it there than in bed, and he continued–

"These chemical and mechanical appliances have as little interest to me as the books in the adjoining room, for they were but stepping-stones across a difficulty. I soon discovered that as my spiritual sense grew and strengthened through use, what we term material aids became unnecessary, and even a hindrance. It is well, however, that they were not destroyed, for they may be useful as lesson books to you."

"Do you think," I asked, "that I shall ever attain to any of your power?"

"No," he replied, "not in this life; perhaps in the next. You have, to begin with, not sufficient of the feminine element in your character; and, moreover, you have neither the youth nor the bodily strength to make it safe for you to try. You would either die or become insane in the attempt. The strain upon both mind and body in such a work as this is terrible; and the cause of my success has been owing chiefly to the careful following out of Descartes' instructions. He says, 'I have been unable to verify my theory owing to bodily weakness. A man who wishes to succeed must be strong, and in the flower of youth, but let him beware of neglecting the body while he is developing his powers. A diseased body can never be trusted, it tricks the mind, makes it more difficult to distinguish falsehood from truth, and will even be the cause of illusions fatal to success.'

"The plan I adopted from the first, was this; the moment my study was engrossing me too completely, or there was any sign of mental strain, I threw up the occupation, and instead of being idle, set my body at work. I found riding the best of all pursuits, it exhausted me less than walking, and at the same time freed my thoughts more completely. Hunting, as you know, I have never neglected, and after days of work I have found in the hunting-field new life. I often start jaded and worn out, with the animal in me groaning and gnashing its teeth; a little more and it would turn and rend me. I let it loose, it feels the cool air, the soft and pleasant movement of the horse, which is its willing servant. At sight of the hounds a trembling joy passes through both my body and the beast; they rejoice and are glad, they feel the icy wind dash by as the welcome cry of a find wakens them to their true life. The danger of which my mind is dreamily conscious, stimulates them like new wine, the sweat pours down, and carries the venom from their blood. Hour after hour my body revels in delight; what folly it perpetrates so as not to be out-distanced; how it plays with me, rules me, laughs at my fears, and comes back after perhaps nine hours, like a tired dog, happy and obedient, ready for its food and its kennel! For days after such a treat it is my servant, faithful, refreshed, and purified. The mind takes it in hand, sucks out its renewed strength, and rejoices.

"The man who shall dare to do what I have done, must fight thus, with, not against, his body; must let it rule him at times, so that he may rule it more completely. The reason why Britain keeps her greatness, is owing more to her sportsmen than to her merchants, statesmen, philosophers, or divines. But let us go and rest; I will send you to sleep, and you shall see as in your dreams what I saw lying insensible after Mr. Soudin left me in my room. It will save me the trouble of talking, and at the same time be more interesting to you. But before doing so, I will ring for some coffee."

Saying this he touched a bell, and in two or three minutes went to one of the panels, slipped it aside, and brought out a tray of refreshments.

"I do not care," he said, "to let any one come in here, so I have a lift, and if I wish to stop in this part of the house all day I can do so undisturbed."

When we had finished our coffee, we both lay down on the couches in the recess, and the following scenes came to me while resting.

The first picture was very beautiful. I looked out into a bright moonlight night; some fleecy clouds were hanging across the sky, seen through trees that were now nearly bare of foliage. There was a pleasant sound of wind passing over the forest; the rustling of withered leaves. I stood close by a footpath, and could hear steps approaching; the crack of some withered branch trodden underfoot, the rustling of a dress, the whispering of voices. In another moment two figures became indistinctly visible; they were coming toward me. As they approached I caught part of their conversation. The girl was speaking.

"I don't like it at all," she said; "I am frightened. Why could not we be married in the ordinary way? It is horrid not having a proper wedding."

"But, dearest," the man answered, "you see it is impossible. Your father, you say, has told you that he will not hear of your marrying me because he has got into his mind that I am poor, and he insists on your marrying that fool Sydney, whom he thinks to be as rich as Croesus."

"But," questioned the girl, "could we not try to get his consent? Could you not convince him that after all you are well off? I am sure he would rather I married a lord, if only he did not think you were quite poor. Besides, as he is rich, it would not really matter very much."

"It will be much easier, darling, to bring him round after the wedding, when he sees there is no help for it. He will be as right as possible when once it is all over, and I introduce his daughter to him as Lady Vancome."

They were passing as he spoke, but it caused me no feeling of surprise that as they came near they took no notice of me. I was conscious that though present I was invisible, and though a witness, powerless to act. I recognized them before they came near, and thought Vera's face more ethereally lovely seen in this pale moonlight than it seemed possible for an earthly face to be. The lower and weaker feature were in shadow, the eyes that looked up to her companion were ennobled by a sadness which added to their depth.

Vancome, who had his arm round the girl, was evidently somewhat agitated. Cowardice and weakness were expressed in every feature. He was more what people used to call handsome, than what in the present day would be considered worthy of admiration.

The girl looked round into the wood, and visibly trembling, said–"I don't like it at all. Suppose some one were to see us at the station, what would they think? Oh, Frank, let us go back."

She stopped just opposite where I stood, and looking straight through me,

cried–"It is horrible here! There is something there!" And she stretched out her arm and pointed to where I stood, and her hand seemed to go into my heart and cut me as though her outstretched finger had been a poignard.

The man turned, and they both stood facing me. "Don't be foolish!" he said, looking, however, somewhat scared. "There is nothing but a light patch where the moonlight falls through the opening in the trees."

"I thought for a moment," the girl replied, "that Alan Sydney was standing quite close to us."

Vancome laughed. "I fancied you meant a ghost," he replied. "It would be a new experience to see the spirit of a living man, who probably at the same time is enjoying himself behind the scenes of some London theatre. Take my word for it, Sydney's spirit is not likely to forsake the limelight goddess to come wandering after the moonlight one. But we shall miss our train if you stand looking for ghosts, and it will not take us long now to get out of this wood if we walk quickly."

As they passed the girl said–"You are quite sure we shall have no difficulty about the licence when we get to Liverpool?" But the man's reply was lost in the distance, and the scene vanished.

Then there was, as it seemed, a long pause of darkness, till all of a sudden I found myself in a brightly lighted room alone. I went to the window and looked out upon a big city; the church clock struck the hour of eight, and the streets were full of clerks and workpeople, evidently on their way to business; a newsboy was shouting out, "Post!"–"Mercury!"

While standing thus wondering, the door behind me opened, and some persons entered the room. I tried to turn round and look at them, but could not. The man, whom I recognized by his voice as Vancome, said—"Yes, this will do very well, get some breakfast for two as soon as possible. We shall not stop the night, as we leave this evening by the nine o'clock boat for America."

While listening to these words I became conscious that I was asleep, and that for some reason it was most important for me to get up at once. I struggled to open my eyes, to turn, or do anything to rouse myself. At last with a desperate effort I struck out my arm, and hitting it smartly against some object, awoke.

"Well," said Sydney, "as we have had some rest, I will go on with my story. You have just seen what passed whilst I lay unconscious in my room; and it was a little after eight on the following morning that I awoke with an effort similar to that which you have just experienced, only of course the scenes affected me far more than they did you; and I roused myself with the distinct intention of hastening to Liverpool, and trying if possible to rescue the girl.

"While in the act of giving instructions for my things to be packed up, Mr. Soudin in a great state of excitement dashed into the room. He had just had a

telegram from his wife, saying that Vera had on the afternoon of the previous day walked over to see some friends. The carriage had been sent to fetch her, but the coachman brought back word that she had started to walk home about seven o'clock; and since that nothing had been seen or heard of her.

"'I am going to the north at once,' he said. 'Will you come and help?'

"I replied that though anxious to help, I expected to be of more service in taking steps independently.

"He tried to persuade me to alter my determination, but seeing that I was fixed upon it, left to catch his train.

"'It is possible,' I said, 'that you may see Vera back to-morrow about this time; and if she comes, deal kindly with her, and remember that nothing which has happened will make any difference to my intentions.'

"'I believe,' he replied, 'either that you are mad, or know something of this.'

"'I may be mad,' I answered, 'but don't forget.'

"I arrived at Liverpool later than I expected, and having no knowledge of the town, thought it would be safer to discover which boat started at nine, and watch that rather than risk hunting for the hotel. I, however, drove first to the house of a friend of mine, Mrs. Freshfield, who lived at Woolton, a suburb a few miles outside the city. I briefly explained my position, also that of the girl, and her kindly heart was soon roused to help me if possible.

"'Why don't you communicate with the police?' she said.

"'I shall,' I replied, 'as a last resource, but hope to be able to work without their assistance, so as to avoid making any scandal.'

"She was also very anxious to know how the plot had been discovered, but, not wishing to tell her, I excused myself on the ground of time, and receiving her promise to wait for me at a certain place near the docks from eight to nine, I left, and hurried back to the city to complete my arrangements.

"It was now past five, and already growing dusk, as I went to a private detective office, and requested to see the chief officer. When told briefly the facts of the case, he seemed very doubtful whether the law could help me if the girl was leaving of her own will.

"I replied that if so the law was iniquitous, which he seemed to think very probable; at the same time the fact did not help us. But when I pointed out that this was a case in which money was of no consequence, and that if it should cost £5000 it must be done, he immediately altered his tone.

"'You have come to the right place,' he said, his face visibly brightening, 'for we act for the public, not for the Government, and money can do pretty well anything. Are you prepared to swear, if necessary, to an indictable offence against this man?'

"I told him I would swear anything rather than that harm should happen

to the girl.

"'You will not mind leaving a guarantee in the way of money?' he asked.

"I satisfied him on this point also.

"Finally it was arranged that if I could not get Vera away secretly, he should be prepared to have Vancome arrested. He, however, warned me that we were running a considerable risk, and let me fully understand that he intended to deny all knowledge of my real motives.

"Having settled this matter, I went down to the docks, found out the vessel and waited.

"It was a beautiful night, calm and clear, with a slight mist lying over the Mersey. As I waited watching the vessels pass and repass, the moon rose and lit up the broad expanse of water. The sands in the direction of Waterloo were nearly covered, and looking westward the river spread out as if to welcome the opening sea. I cursed the ocean as I thought that it might so soon have been the means of bearing away one I loved from every helping hand. I pictured Vera when she realized the truth, looking out over the cruel waste of water, helpless, compromised, and too weak to struggle against her fate; a fate which probably she would only half comprehend or realize. Some passengers were already on the steamer. She might even now be there. I walked across the landing-stage to the vessel, but could see no sign of either of the fugitives.

"The time passed; I grew anxious. Could there be some mistake? At last, utterly unnerved, I sat down, and my heart cried out, 'Vera! Vera! come, oh, come! that I may save you.'

"A hand touched me on the shoulder. I looked up, the girl was standing over me; she had in her eyes a strange far-away look as though she were walking in her sleep.

"'You called me,' she said, 'but I must not wait, for my husband told me on no account to leave the berth until the ship had started.'

"I made no audible reply, but willing her to follow me, left the ship. Passing across the bridge I saw my detective waiting.

"'Keep the money,' I whispered.

"He saluted, and we passed on, the girl still following close behind me. I led the way to where Mrs. Freshfield had promised to wait, and found her in a state of great excitement. When, however, she saw Vera a look of relief passed over her face, and the kind-hearted woman went up, took the girl in her arms and kissed her as if she had been a long-lost child of her own.

"'Vera,' I said, bringing all my power to bear upon her, 'I want you to go home with this lady at once; do you understand?'

"'Yes, go home,' she answered in a weary, uninterested voice.

"I took her hands in mine, bent over and kissed her. 'Forget,' I whispered,

'all that has happened in the last thirty hours, and hate, hate, hate Vancome.'

"I said good-bye to my friend, made her promise to take Vera to her home at once, and left them.

"A frenzy of delight passed through me; for the moment I was mad. Though I had touched no food for thirty hours, I did not experience any feeling of hunger. I was hungry only for revenge. I would go back to the ship, would see the man's look of baffled rage and anger; would laugh at him, mock him, torture him. I began to run, and still in this mood regained the landing-place, and pressing my way past a crowd of people, who were leaving the vessel, went on board. Where was he? I thought of nothing else, cared for nothing, but to look at his face, to taunt him. I heard whistles blowing, shouts, the motion of the engine, but cared for nothing. I would find him. If the worst came to the worst it would be possible to get off at Queenstown. What did anything matter now that Vera was safe!

"But with regard to Queenstown I was mistaken. Vancome had planned his elopement some little time before, and with more forethought and care than I should have expected of him. The vessel he had chosen was making an experimental time journey, with special pilots on board, and did not stop anywhere this side of the Atlantic.

"While I was thus frantically searching for the enemy, he was quietly enjoying a cigar in the smoking-saloon, in the full confidence that Vera was in hiding, according to instructions, in the state cabin, which he had engaged. When his cigar was finished and the ship well on its way, he walked over to the cabin with the intention of releasing his captive; but finding she had already gone, and supposing that, the ship being in motion, she had considered herself free, he sauntered quietly up the ladder expecting to find her on deck. Thus it happened that we met at last face to face.

"The moment I saw him my excitement left me, and I became calm and collected. He evidently knew nothing as yet, and I enjoyed the pleasure of playing with him before dealing the final blow. Besides, it would be safer to keep him from knowing the worst till we were out of the Mersey and in the open sea, for I thought that probably the river pilot would leave before long, and my foe might get permission to accompany him on shore, in which case the safety of my plans might be slightly endangered. Assuming, therefore, a natural surprise, I said–

"'Well, who would have expected to meet you here?'

"He glared at me for a moment, then, feeling that it was necessary to say something, answered, 'You cannot be more surprised than I am to see you, for I thought you were in London. But you must excuse me a moment.' He hurried forward, and I saw him looking intently across the deck, scanning all the passengers with the evident expectation of seeing Vera.

"I watched, with a smile on my face. Having satisfied himself that she was

not on deck, he came back to me, and I suggested that we should go into the smoking-room.

"He thought for a moment, and then, evidently fancying that it would be the safest plan to keep me out of the way of discovering anything for the present, assented.

"The room was unoccupied, and we sat down opposite each other. He was evidently debating as to which was the best course to pursue. He could not keep Vera in hiding through the voyage, and therefore was certain to be found out. I could hardly restrain my laughter at his view of the position. What would he say when he discovered that her place had been taken by me? This suggested an idea.

"'I suppose,' I said, 'you cannot help me? I came on board at the last moment and have not yet engaged a berth. There is not a spare one in your cabin?'

"'*Damned if there is!*' he thought; but he only said after a little hesitation, 'No, it is occupied.'

"'Now look here,' I continued, 'you will never guess why I came here; it is such fun, you will enjoy the situation, but you must keep it quiet. I have run off with some one else's wife!' and I burst out in loud laughter.

"He looked relieved, patted me on the back, and began to whistle. 'What about the cabin?' he said, laughing.

"'Oh!' I replied (having in truth forgotten all about it), 'that was my little joke.'

"'*Then,*' he thought, '*I need not mind about him now, and may as well make a dean breast of it!*' 'I hope you have not run off with mine,' he said. 'You see I cannot now quite approve of these actions, I am a married man myself.'

"'A married man!' I exclaimed, trying to look more surprised than I felt, at what I supposed was a lie.

"'Look at that,' he continued, and drew from his pocket a copy of a marriage-licence dated that day at a registry office in Liverpool.

"It was–I could not be mistaken, the names and particulars were clear, though Vera's age had been inaccurately stated as twenty-one. I can see the paper distinctly at this moment, every cursed line. My brain reeled, and shouting out,–'My lie is true. I have run away with some one else's wife–your wife,' I fell forward on the floor insensible.

"On recovering I found that I had been placed in a cabin by myself, and was under the doctor's hands. It required but little power of thought-reading to discover that he regarded me as an escaped and rather dangerous lunatic, an opinion which I felt to be not far from correct. The position was ridiculous in the extreme. Following the dictates of my partially-developed powers, I had formed an erroneous view; rescued a girl against her will from her own husband, and

was now taking a needless voyage in her place to America. I wondered what Vancome thought of it all, and had not long to wait before discovering, as he, having obtained permission from the doctor, appeared later on in the day.

"I hated him more than ever, but at the same time was anxious to discuss matters.

"After closing the door, he sat down, saying, 'What in the devil's name is the meaning of all this?'

"'Perhaps,' I said, 'you will tell me first of all what you have done, then I will tell you what I have done, and possibly the meaning may come.'

"'Firstly,' he exclaimed, 'will you explain how you can have run off with my wife when you are here, and she is not? Where is she?'

"I felt aggravated, and therefore inclined to be aggravating. 'I left her,' I answered, 'as you know is generally the end of man's inconsistency in this case.'

"'This is ridiculous!' he replied, a dangerous light coming into his eyes. 'If you don't take care you will tempt me too far!'

"I felt nothing would please me more than to get him to murder me, then after he had been hanged Vera might go free.

"'I hope,' I said, 'you like your wedding trip, you coward. Who, half drunken with the father's wine, made a stage-play scene for the benefit of his child, when her very innocence should have protected her? Who lied about his private property, when he was in reality a beggar and will soon be a bankrupt? Who at last decided to marry in the hope of living on his wife's fortune?'

"He had come nearer and was now standing over me; his hand was on my throat; but for his natural cowardice he would have strangled me. His eyes glared down with fiendish anger!

"'You devil!' he cried, 'for devil I believe you are! Curse you! Curse you!'

"'I have still a trifle of news left, it may be a comfort for you to reflect upon it,' I said. 'Mr. Soudin is as badly off as you are. I heard the newsboy shouting that an unlimited bank has failed in which he is considerably interested. Probably if your mortgagees are merciful he may be bankrupt before you even now!'

"Vancome looked at me for a moment, then, seeming satisfied that as I knew so much it might be safe to rely upon me even in this, sank back in his chair. The last blow had tamed him. He was not only robbed of his wife, but what to him seemed far worse, utterly ruined, with or without her; cut off from his long-cherished hope of redeeming his fortune by marriage. I felt toward him almost a sensation of pity.

"After a pause he muttered, 'I cannot believe it! Some one told me that Soudin was very wealthy–a regular miser, rolling in gold! Look here,' he continued, turning to me, but the anger had left his face. 'Tell me plainly, how do you know all these things? How did you know we were here? What have you

done with Vera? And why in the name of fortune are you travelling with me to America?'

"I should have been a good deal puzzled to reply to the last question, and had no intention of answering the three others, so I remained silent. At this moment the doctor entered, and I expressed a wish to speak to him alone. Vancome left us evidently unwillingly.

"'I see from your manner,' I said to the doctor, 'that you believe me to be insane. I must therefore try to convince you that this is not the case, though you were quite justified in accepting the view you did. I came on board this ship hoping to find out something of great importance. During my search the vessel started. I then heard very bad news, and having in my excitement not tasted food for many hours, I fainted. Will you let the captain know, however, that I am well provided with money, and willing to pay for the best accommodation possible?'

"I took out my pocket-book and handed him a card, and at the same time drawing out a roll of notes which represented over £2000. I had brought this money with me for the purpose of bribery, for had I found it necessary to resort to that expedient, ready cash would have been required.

"The sight of the money had more effect in satisfying the doctor that he had not to deal with an escaped lunatic than any words could have done; but I noticed he was meditating on the probability of my being an escaped thief instead. However, having apparently decided that such matters were out of his line of business, and seeing a good chance of being paid for his services, his manner changed, and he became the friendly practitioner.

"I was soon supplied with a few requisites for the journey and also moved to very comfortable quarters; but I was most anxious to get an opportunity of returning at once to England. In the evening I consulted the captain, but though I offered a large reward if he could put me on a homebound vessel, he declined to stop the ship on her trial trip.

"Fortune nevertheless favoured me. We had been talking for some time, and it was well on into the night. The sea was smooth, though a gentle westerly breeze was blowing. The passengers had retired for the night.

"'How much did you say you were prepared to give?' he asked presently.

"I saw he was wavering, and doubled the sum.

"'Well,' he said looking out, 'if I am not mistaken, that is a Southampton schooner in the distance. Will you swear to keep the matter dark if I get you on board?'

"I assented.

"'Do you know any one on this vessel?' he then asked.

"'Only one man,' I replied, 'and he will be less surprised at my disappearance than he was at my appearance. He believes I am a magician.'

"'We will chance it,' he said. 'You are not a passenger, and the whole business can be done in ten minutes.'

"He gave some instructions and signalling went on. Then he crossed to one of the mates, with whom he had a private conversation, which led to a boat being got ready. The schooner had tacked and was coming quickly towards us.

"'It is all right,' the officer said. 'I know the Captain of this ship, and my mate will explain to him that you are willing to pay £100 for your trip to Southampton. He will keep the matter dark. Good-bye!'

"The steamer had slackened, and we glided noiselessly toward the sailing ship. As the boat was lowered I handed the speaker a handful of notes. In less than five minutes I was on board the schooner, and before the week was out, in London."

CHAPTER VI

"I found among the letters waiting attention, one from Mr. Soudin, thanking me most warmly for my action in saving his daughter from Lord Vancome, to whom he referred in language that hardly bears repetition. It was a diplomatic letter, striving to shield Vera as much as possible, and endeavouring to make out that she had not only left home against her will, but even hinting that she had been drugged, as he said that since her return with Mrs. Freshfield she had been unable to give any account of what had happened, and that she evidently looked upon Vancome with absolute detestation. This satisfied me that the influence which I had exercised had been successful, and the girl remembered nothing about the marriage. It was also plain that her father had no idea of the truth. You may well conceive that my position was both a painful and difficult one. I decided to go at once to Scotland, and hoped that during the journey I might be able to form some plans for future action.

"There was also a note from Mr. Marsden, saying that his scheme was progressing favourably, and that he considered it would be better to make Lord Vancome a bankrupt; he had got possession of all his bills, and now only awaited instructions before taking final action.

"Without replying to either of the letters, I started for the North by the night train, and slept nearly the whole time, instead of devoting it to unravelling the entangled skein, which was probably the better plan, for I was thoroughly

tired. Consequently I arrived at Heather Lodge refreshed, but without having the least idea of what course to pursue.

"Mr. Soudin had gone out, and I found Vera sitting alone, engaged in reading a novel. She seemed pleased to see me, and we sat for some time talking on trivial matters, which gave me an opportunity of reading her thoughts, and thus finding out whether the memory of her journey to Liverpool had returned. With some relief I soon discovered that, though she had a dim remembrance of having intended to run away from home with Vancome, and of a journey with some unknown lady, the intervening period was still a blank; and, moreover, that she had been persuaded even this remembrance was but a delusion owing to illness. After her return she had suffered from a slight fever, brought on no doubt by the excitement; and during recovery it was easy to make her believe that what remembrance she retained was simply the effect of delirium. Though she now disliked Vancome, it was not difficult to perceive that she had not forgotten our former quarrel. Her father had apparently been urging her strongly to accept my suit and had prevailed, but there was no sign that she loved me; and this fact, considering the strange position in which we were placed, ought to have caused me more relief than it did.

"I found it impossible to convince my heart that, considering the circumstances, such a husband had any right over this girl; though at the same time I fully realized how all hope of my marrying her was at an end, and that my love must in future be unselfish, desiring neither any return of affection nor other reward.

"You may think that from the time I became acquainted with the marriage, it was my duty to stamp out all feeling of affection and accept this as a sign that I had previously been mistaken in supposing our lives were for all time to influence each other, or that I was still responsible for the girl's future. In fact, considering her character, one so placed might well, from a selfish point of view, have rejoiced in regaining freedom from a burden that could only bring pain and trouble through life. Such views have become the accepted canons of society, and in most cases it would be foolish to fight against them. Marriage in itself is a wise law fitted to the present condition of our lower animal natures, and to tamper with it is not only a dangerous, but a retrograde step. For it shadows forth the nobler union of souls, and in some few cases may even bring a foretaste of future joy.

"On the other hand, it is equally false to assume that this legal or so-called religious tie has any necessary spiritual significance; and while at the present day the bond is often held too lightly, there are some, who, conscious of nobler feelings and aspirations, regard wedlock as a divine union of souls. This view, though correct as an ideal, finds too seldom its realization; hence arises no little

confusion of ideas and much unnecessary trouble of heart. The scoffers ask, with the Sadducees of old, which man's wife shall such a one be in the resurrection, forgetting that the body is nothing, and that the passions of the body are nothing but the trivialities of a transitory condition. Such things are intended to seem important to us whilst on earth; and bear an apparent significance out of all proportion to their spiritual importance. Thus we live in a world full of heaven-sent delusions. No observation of other lives can destroy them, for each man or woman must learn the lesson by experience.

"Think of all that has been written and all that has been said about love, and yet how year by year we see the same picture reproduced. When first a girl attracts a youth, or may be a man of mature years, what are his feelings? If only he can get her to consent to be his wife, he believes that his whole existence must be changed to one of joy; that in her company all other interests will be as nothing; that it must be impossible to tire of her presence, to be a moment absent from her without pain, that they will in fact continue lovers to the end. If he looks round on his married acquaintances it is nothing to him that he can find no such state of existence; others can never have felt as he feels, for no one had like cause. He may be half conscious that he is being tricked by his emotions, but he prefers not to question his mind on the subject. Nature is too strong for reason, and having her work to accomplish, fulfils her mission."

I was surprised to hear Sydney speaking in this way, and interrupted him by asking if he did not believe in the possibility of an enduring and true love on earth.

"Yes," he replied, "most certainly; but not in this fascination lasting. True love can only be tested by those who have learned the lesson of self-renunciation. If you wish to know whether you love or not, face these questions–Is it for myself this possession is desired, or am I striving only for the happiness of the one beloved? Should she change, and the beauty, if there is beauty, turn to the most repulsive ugliness; her apparent saintliness to sin; her affection to hatred, or her sanity to madness, should I still love her? If you can truly say this, and have sufficient imagination to realize fully the meaning of the change, yours is love; and if in after times, when trial comes, your self-confidence leaves you, such love may even then rest assured it is eternal, because it is of God. But we see this devotion more often exhibited in the passion of parent for child than in love between man and wife. The reason of this being that the latter relationship begins with the expectation of a love to be returned, and the former with a ministry of tenderness which can at the time receive no active response. It is ever owing to seemingly adverse circumstances that the finer qualities of man's nature are drawn forth, and I have more reason to be thankful for the misery and perplexity which my love for Vera brought into my life than for all the hours of happiness which I

have known. Much, however, as we may appreciate these disguised blessings in retrospect, it does not make them more agreeable to pass through; and this time which I spent at Heather Lodge was perhaps, with one exception, the most miserable period of my life.

"I felt that it was absolutely necessary to take the first opportunity of letting Mr. Soudin know the truth. As soon as he returned, and I had a chance of speaking to him alone, I started on the unpleasant task. He listened patiently to the outline of the story till I came to the marriage-licence, then turning livid with anger he lost all self-control.

"'I don't believe it!' he said. 'It is outrageous–monstrous! Why, the girl's not of age. He would have been bound to get my consent. You must know that the thing's out of the question!'

"When I explained that the age had been altered, he grew still more furious.

"'I'll have him up for perjury!' he cried. 'Get the marriage annulled, for after all it was never consummated; the thing's preposterous. He drugs the girl, gets her into his power, commits perjury, and hopes thereby to live on me for the rest of his life; but he is mistaken; the thing shall be put right at once!'

"As soon as he was a little calmer I tried to reason with him, and show that it would be no easy matter to prove that Vera was not a consenting party.

"'Had you not better,' I asked, 'go to Liverpool, and see the registrar before whom the marriage took place, and also examine the signatures? A prosecution for perjury might possibly fall upon your daughter if you are not careful how you act.'

"At last he consented to take the course suggested, on the condition that I did not leave until his return, and the following morning he started for Liverpool.

"I was left practically alone with Vera, her mother being still confined nearly all day to her room. I decided to let my powers, as far as possible, lie dormant, and to watch her only as I should have done before the development of my new sense; to see her as any other man might, and endeavour to judge how much of her inner character was obvious to those who came in contact with her in ordinary life.

"It is always easy thus to throw off a possession that has been recently acquired, and it is often a relief to do so. My animal nature gained in strength the moment it was released from the new spiritual bondage. Moreover, my companion seemed conscious of a similar relief; I had never seen her so bright and happy; she became at once a merry, playful child, recklessly mischievous and fascinatingly coquettish.

"In the afternoon, the day after my arrival, we walked together over the moors to a little village by the sea. Though the autumn was now far advanced, it was one of those Indian summer days in which each act of breathing becomes a

separate joy, when every soft breath of wind helps to intoxicate the brain. I felt as if with every mile I walked a year of life dropped from me, till, when we reached the seashore, I had arrived at boyhood and had cast away all care, all thoughts of the past.

"The girl beside me was no longer the wife of an enemy, but my child-playfellow; our spirits acted and reacted upon each other. We were alone with the seagulls and the waves. The cries of the former and the music of the latter harmonized with the reckless exultation that overwhelmed us. Barefooted we waded in the chilly water, or chased each other over the warm sand with laughter and shouting. Among the rocks and caves we hunted for curious sea-creatures, sadly missing our childhood's buckets in which to place the captives. Near at hand was a rocky basin, which became our aquarium; hither we brought, with mingling sounds of exultation and fear, the wriggling captives, pride in each new treasure demanding appreciation from the less fortunate.

"The clear pool was soon teeming with live creatures thus reluctantly brought into close contact, and through the forest of delicate seaweed we watched some fierce and deadly battles; whilst the more lymphatic species lay around, allowing their bodies with equal complacency to be made the stepping-stones to victory or the shelter from defeat.

"Thus in childish pleasure the hours went by, till, tired out with our play, we sat down side by side to rest.

"'Whatever would people think if they could see us?' Vera said, covering up her bare feet in the warm sand.

"It may have been her action, or something in the tone of her voice. In a moment the happy, boyish feeling left me. The years began to hurry back, the innocent pleasure to fade, and in its place the passion of manhood came with overwhelming power, baffling and mocking me. I looked at my companion–child-playmate no longer. Her face was flushed, her uncovered head a mass of soft, light, waving curls; her eyes sparkled with merry mischief, but beneath the mischief there was that look I had surprised before, the reflection of my own feeling on the girl's nature; but how differently did it affect me now! When first I had seen it, Vera had promised to be my wife; now she was the wife of another. It seemed almost incredible that a mere legal formality, such as her marriage had been, could so entirely alter our relationship; but still stranger how the knowledge of this alteration strengthened all the lower passions of my nature, at the expense of the higher. Every feeling that had hitherto been sanctified by love was now sacrilege against that love. I made a desperate effort to regain the mastery over my weakness; but, alas! I had kindled a new fire of temptation.

"Vera came close to me, and laying her hand on mine, said–'Alan, I think that I will forgive you, after all. I like you better to-day than ever before.'

"What had I done? My object having been to help this girl, my want of success was pitiable. Having deprived her of the knowledge of her marriage, and caused her to hate her husband, I was now bringing her once more beneath the influence of a passion which could only end in misery and degradation. Yet, as I looked at her, it seemed impossible to withstand the temptation of taking her once more, if only once, into my arms. She was waiting for my kiss of reconciliation; and more than this, of the torrent of love long restrained. I was powerless, and knowing that no strength of my own could save me, with one last cry for help, I gave over the contest. At the same instant I was free.

"Of all the strange mysteries connected with our nature, nothing is more remarkable than what is called the efficacy of prayer. As long as a man fights against his temptations he but increases their force, especially in such a contest as this. But should his will be really against the temptation, a path is always open. Let him once acknowledge his own weakness, and allow for a moment his spirit to cry for assistance, and he will find himself lifted from the burden of the body, in a way that those who have never experienced the sensation would think impossible. One thing only is necessary, but that is essential: the cry must be an honest desire of the heart, and not a weak prompting of habit.

"It is not that strength to resist the evil is sent as an answer to the prayer, but that the temptation is utterly removed, the force of the body being, as it were, for the time annihilated; so at least have I ever found it, and so it proved in this case. I could look now at my companion without fear, and love her with a love that I knew was innocent. The very remembrance of my past thoughts filled me with a wondering horror. Summoning all my strength of will, I strove to recall to her mind the page which had been obliterated, and to bring back her natural feeling towards Vancome, which had changed to hatred.

"Whilst doing this, I repeated the story, hoping thereby to assist her memory, but, from a then unknown reason, I failed utterly, and the only impression which she formed was that I had gone mad. When I tried to take her hand in mine so as to gain more influence over her will, she rose and left me.

"I could see her in the distance evidently getting ready to start for home. I dared not follow her, knowing that had I done so, she would in her fear have run bare-headed and bare-footed over the moor, rather than let me come near her.

"She, however, seemed undecided in her mind, and for the first time that day I began to be conscious of her thoughts. Seeing that I had made no attempt to follow her, or to exhibit any further signs of insanity, the sudden fear had evidently diminished, and she began to fancy that probably I had only been fooling her for the pleasure of seeing if she could be made to believe the story. At length, being satisfied that this was the explanation, she began to walk slowly towards the place where I was sitting, and then called to me, saying that it was time to go

back. I answered that I was quite ready, but that it seemed a pity to go so soon. My voice still further reassuring her, she came and looked over the rock, saying–

"'So you thought you could take me in with that rubbish, did you?'

"'Well,' I replied, 'that was my intention, but as it's evidently of no use, I must give in. Your imagination is not so easily influenced as I thought.'

"'I should think not,' she said. 'But you acted very well, and I really thought for the moment you had gone mad. It was very nasty of you to spoil our happy day in that manner. I suppose you did it in revenge.'

"'No, I did not, dear,' I answered. 'But come and sit down. We will say no more about it.'

"She did as I asked her, protesting all the while that I was a brute; but in five minutes I had managed to change the subject, and to get her to take my hand. Then without speaking I willed her to sleep. Slowly she leant further back; her head sank down, and in less than a minute she was quite unconscious.

"There would, I now knew, be no difficulty in impressing on her mind what had previously been obliterated, and moreover, there was plenty of time to consider whether it might not be well to keep her still in ignorance of some part of her experience with Vancome. But thinking the matter over, I decided it would not under the circumstances be right to interfere with the past. So I willed her to remember all, and to awake with the same feelings towards her husband as those which she felt before she left the ship; moreover, that she should not only understand what course I had pursued, but my reason for pursuing it, and my ignorance of the marriage.

"In her hypnotic condition she was able to answer my questions, and I felt satisfied that when she recovered, she would be able clearly to recall the past.

"Once more I laid my hand over her eyes, and bade her sleep, it being easier and safer to recall the patient to a natural condition, from a state of placid, rather than active, mesmerism. But on trying to rouse her, I was again destined to failure. It was impossible to bring her back to consciousness, or even to influence her now in any way. She lay in one of those cataleptic trances, which no power then known could break, and which form the chief danger connected with all such experiments. Even now, though I should have little difficulty in dealing with a case of this kind, I should be loath, except in emergency, or where the life of the body was endangered, to recall the spirit which is for the time free from its bodily trammels. But in those days I was unable to do so.

"At length alarmed, I took her in my arms and carried her to the little fishing village, where with some difficulty I managed to find a vehicle to drive back to Heather Lodge. It is not necessary for me to go into the details of the two anxious days which followed. During this time all the efforts, not only of the local doctor, but of two consulting physicians, had no effect in rousing Vera from her unnatural

sleep. On the third day, however, she awoke, and seemed little the worse for her experience.

"Mr. Soudin had, in the meantime, returned in a state of the greatest despondency, and as soon as the news of his daughter's recovery had relieved my mind of an anxiety, which had made it impossible for me to think of other matters, I had a long talk with him.

"His pride and reserve were broken, and I was relieved to find that he intended to make a full confession of his present monetary difficulties. In Liverpool his worst fears were realized. Not only had he seen Vera's signature, but the registrar had told him that as far as it was possible to judge, his daughter acted without the slightest constraint, and had seemed perfectly reasonable and collected. 'She had given her age as twenty-one, on oath, and had answered all his questions rationally. A solicitor, when consulted, had given Mr. Soudin little hope of the marriage being annulled, and had warned him that while the action would probably lead to no good, it might possibly end in his daughter and son-in-law being arrested for perjury. If, however, he continued, she possessed means of her own, it might be wise to make an application to have this money settled upon her.

"'Money!' cried Mr. Soudin, after repeating the lawyer's words, 'it is little use troubling about that. Not only has she not a penny, but I may as well tell you at once she never will have. I am ruined!' and saying this he broke down, burying his face in his hands.

"'I knew this,' I replied, 'some time ago. You might as well have shown sufficient confidence in me to mention it before; knowing that I should, for your child's sake, have been only too glad to help you. But I suppose it seemed safer to let the marriage take place first.'

"'It's all very well,' he gasped, still shaken with the sobs which he could not suppress, 'for you to talk in that way now that the marriage is impossible, and you are free to leave us all in our misery! Generosity, I have found, is only to be trusted when the personal interest of the giver is securely tied up with that of the recipient.'

"I felt inclined to retort that he, in common with most men, judged others from the standpoint which he had adopted for personal usage, but the abject misery of the man, and the fact that he was the father of Vera, restrained me, and I said–

"'It is useless to talk of the past, which is irrevocable. The question to decide is what can be done in the future.'

"'The workhouse is open,' he muttered, 'and I can hardly see how the matter can interest you. Vancome is a beggar–we are all beggars. A curse has come upon us since you first entered the house, and I sometimes think that you brought it.

You seem to possess some damnable power which I neither understand nor wish any longer to experience. It will be a relief to know that you have left the house.'

"'I feel sure you will later on regret such an accusation,' I answered, 'considering that you bought your bank shares before you ever saw me, and that the bank has been insolvent for years. Moreover, as you know, I did all in my power to prevent your daughter from marrying Lord Vancome. I have, however, a proposition to make. It seems quite clear that I cannot marry Vera, but there is no reason why I should not be able to help her. She is now Lady Vancome, and though her husband is penniless, the property which he once owned is in my hands, and will before long be legally transferred to me. I have thought the matter carefully over, and decided on certain conditions to settle these estates upon your daughter for life. The income which she will derive from them will be sufficient not only to enable her to keep up Vancome's late home, but also to live there very comfortably.'

"My companion was staring at me in blank amazement, and at last he said–'But to be candid, what are you to gain by this sacrifice? You can hardly expect me to believe that you intend to hand over property worth £100,000 for the benefit of a man you hate.'

"I did not reply for a moment; it was not the man's words but his thoughts which made me mad with rage; for I saw that he had not only placed the worst motive on my action, but that in his extremity he was prepared to accept my offer even at the price of his daughter's honour.

"Seeing that I was silent, he continued–'Of course you will have to pay Vancome an allowance for keeping out of the way.' Then a bright idea seemed to strike him, and he continued–'Why not pay him a good round sum to run off with some one else, and let us get a divorce? It is only a matter of price, and desertion is as good a plea as cruelty.'

"'This may be your idea of what is best,' I said, 'but somehow it does not appeal to me, nor would it fit in with my plans. I am going to consult my lawyer; and if it should be necessary, so as to make it easy for your daughter to protect herself, as well as the property, from her husband, I may have to make Vancome an allowance. But should Vera desire it, I shall place no obstacle in the way of his returning to his old home; my only wish is to leave her independent. As soon as these arrangements are made, I shall go abroad, and it is hardly probable you will see me again for some years.'

"Having said this, and feeling it would be impossible to restrain my temper any longer, I left the room. Had I remained with Mr. Soudin I should most likely have read some of the plans which he doubtless then was formulating, and so have been able to guard Vera more wisely, and prevent much of the evil which followed.

"I felt utterly depressed and puzzled. Little as I had cared for or believed in this man, the coarse selfishness of his nature, the want of even natural affection nauseated me. Life itself, mankind, the Creator of all things, seem degraded by the very existence of such a being. As the unselfish love of a father for his child is the chosen illustration of Godhead, so one in whom there is no sign of this love stands on the outer edge of darkness; doubly damned by the chaos into which he has wandered, and the reckless disregard of that one pure ray which might have been his salvation.

"The next day, before leaving for London, I had a long talk with Vera. She was now able to remember all that had passed during her absence from home, and was evidently very nervous, wondering how I should receive her after what had happened.

"'Mr. Sydney,' she began, 'I suppose you hate me, and perhaps your hatred is deserved. I can only say that I am very sorry for acting towards you in this way, and wish you good-bye.'

"'I am not angry with you, Vera,' I replied. 'We all must live to a certain extent as our natures lead us. Tell me, do you love your husband?'

"'I am not sure,' she answered; 'I suppose so, or I should not have consented to run away with him; but you see it seems long ago, and as I knew him for so short a time, it is difficult to be certain. It was wrong of you to make me forget all about the marriage, but you thought you were doing it for the best. How could you fancy that I should have gone with him if we had not been married first?'

"'I thought he might have deceived you in some way,' I said. 'But I acknowledge that my act was wrong, and ask your forgiveness. I have done all that is possible to make amends, but your father will explain about these details; and remember I shall always be ready to help you in any way. You will not forget, will you, that whatever happens I am your friend, and if you send for me I will come at once?'

"I was placing all the restraint I could on my manner, but I felt sick and giddy with the strain. At no time before had I loved this girl as now, when I had to leave her. She seemed to be conscious of this, but did not take the right way to help me, for coming nearer, and laying her hand on my arm, she said–

"'Alan, must you go? I want you to be near me. When you are by, I feel stronger and better, and oh! at times I am so lonely; the world seems so cold, so big, so evil, and I can trust you. Do stop, any way, till my husband comes back; that is the least you might do, considering that it was through your action we were parted.'

"'I dare not!' I answered. 'If it is pain to part now, how much worse it would be for me then! Can you not see also that it would be taking an unfair advantage of your husband? What I did at first, was done ignorantly, and it was

necessary after that to undo as much of the evil as possible, but now I ought to go.'

"'Oh! I don't know what I shall do!' she cried, and the tears began to come into her eyes.

"I might have been excused for thinking that at last she loved me; but I was not mistaken, I knew her nature too well. Such a girl might weep upon her lover's neck, feeling for the moment as though her heart were breaking; and the next week under other influence throw him over for some one near at hand, with the most formal apology, and feeling hardly a sensation of pain. I felt sure that as soon as I had left, she would forget, but the knowledge did not bring, as perhaps it should have done, relief; rather it added to my pain. What hold could any one have upon such an undeveloped character? In all such cases we can only wait till the spirit is born. A flower is beautiful, we see it opening its delicate coloured petals in the sunlight; the fairy butterfly is hovering near, bearing the germ of fruition, but it passes by, and we must wait. As some blossoms, once as beautiful as their more fortunate neighbours, fall to the ground, having apparently missed, though we know not why, the purpose of their existence here, so some men and women live and die, having missed the object of their lives. The angel of love touches them not; he hovers near, they feel the breath from his wings, but the birth of the spirit is reserved for a future seed-time, and the harvest is a failure.

"I left Scotland, and after making the money arrangements referred to, threw my whole heart and mind into my work, trying to drown other thoughts by the interest which each added power brought. Up to this time, as you will have seen, my gift was a mixed blessing, half-developed, and therefore more likely to lead to evil than to good; but now I began to make progress, to feel my feet a little; every week brought new and startling discoveries, power which I had hardly dared to hope for; wisdom that humbled me to the dust. But as the story of my year's work abroad, and the events that happened to Vera during the same period in England will take me some time to relate, I shall leave them till your next visit. I have already tired you enough, we had better now rest a few hours, and if you like I will send you to sleep by telling a short fairy story. It has been a habit of mine since boyhood to mentally talk myself into dream-land, and without doubt you will find my tale have an equally soothing effect upon your own mind."

So I lay back, courting sleep, whilst Sydney told me this fairy story.

"In a world like, yet unlike, our own, might once have been found men fashioned as are the people of earth, save that they dwelt in profound silence; they heard neither the sweet singing of birds, nor the roar of their mighty torrents, nor the sweet murmuring of the streams. Communication of thought was carried from one to the other by the movement of the lips, by the sense of touch, or by writing; for though their world was full of sound, they as yet had not the gift

of hearing. The time had not come when they should listen to the voices of the other spirits who wandered unseen in their midst, for the songs of the fairy folk contained much of the wisdom which it was better for the deaf and dumb to discover for themselves through the lessons of life. Yet at times, as the years rolled by, from every part of their world came messages of growing superstitions, of a professed consciousness of something which their written language failed clearly to convey, and of impressions which had been experienced, but which were outside the region of science. The wise men were greatly indignant at the growth of this seeming folly; they challenged the dreamers to appear before them, and prove the truth of their statements. Then one came forward, an old man, and he made signs to those around; and this was the interpretation–

"'Behold! as I stood among the hills, the heavens grew black around me, and great drops of rain fell on either side; out of these dark clouds there passed downwards to the earth a great fork-shaped flame which fell on a lofty tree; as it touched the great branches they split asunder, falling to the ground and leaving behind only a broken and shattered trunk.'

"And the wise men answered, 'Though such things happen but seldom, and in but few parts of the world, there is nothing new in what you have told us.'

"But the man continued, 'It is not of that I came to speak; wonderful as it seemeth to me, even though it may have happened in such manner before, and though you may have given the mystery a name. But when this flash had passed, I felt, yet I did not feel, something strike me; it was as though I had received some mighty blow, yet nothing touched me, and my head throbbed with pain, and my thoughts became confused.'

"But the wise men laughing, replied, 'It seemeth to us that the confusion of thought hath still continued.'

"Then the old man brought forth a piece of flat metal, and a great iron rod which he used for some work; and he began once more to address his audience.

"'Yet,' he said, 'I have felt this sensation before, but not so strongly, even when I have struck these two, one against the other,' and he thereupon hit the metal plate a great blow. 'It is there!' he cried; 'once more I felt it pass through my brain.'

"Some of those present seemed also to feel a like sensation, and one rose up, addressing the assembly thus–

"'For many years reports of strange sensations have come to us from all countries and people; moreover, these reports all bear a great resemblance to each other. Is it not well that we should investigate the matter more fully than we have done hitherto?'

"But the greater number of those present was opposed to him, answering, that already these so-called impressions had been tested from time to time by

scientific research, and that it had been proved beyond question that they were all founded on delusion, as they could not by any possibility have reached the brain through the sense of touch or sight or smell; and that, therefore, necessarily they did not reach it at all.

"So the man returned to his own place; but some of the common people, who read the report and had known similar impressions, were strengthened in a belief, which was gaining ground year by year, namely, that the wise men might perhaps not know everything, and that the learned of the future might even laugh at the learned of to-day, as the latter now mocked their predecessors.

"So the years went by, and the reports of wonders became more numerous and more confusing. Some said that they had language conveyed to them, which as yet they could hardly understand, and that this happened even when their eyes were closed and no person was near to them. A few even believed that they could partially understand this language, and these were placed under restraint as madmen.

"During all this turmoil, a child was born, which grew up fair and beautiful to look upon. None taught him, yet he became exceeding wise, though his knowledge was not the knowledge of the savants. He was born with the power of hearing developed, and soon learned the fairy language; and the bright spirits taught him more wisdom than was to be found in all the books of his world. But when he tried to convey to those around the glory of sound, the sweetness of the fairies' songs, the whispering melody of the leaves when the wind played with them, or the ceaseless music of the waves, he found that there were no words in the language capable of expressing his meaning, and had to try by parables to give even a faint idea of the inexpressible.

"Moreover, most of his companions mocked him, but a few listened, even those who had some foretaste of his gift, and these believed that he was a god.

"As his fame spread abroad, men came from the ends of the earth to learn, if possible, the language that needed no signs, that passed mysteriously and invisibly from brain to brain. He found it possible to awaken in a few of these the dormant sense which all possessed, and such were able to work miracles among their fellows.

"And the savants stormed, and then when they found it impossible any longer to ignore the new power, they themselves began to give names to the mysteries; and having done this they were consoled, considering that they had thereby exorcised the supernatural.

"But the waves beat no longer unheard upon the beach; and the birds are loved by many for their voices as well as for their plumage. The mother hears her child's cry, and the lover the footstep of the beloved.

"Some, however, are still deaf, and others have not yet learned the language

which is breathed so sweetly in the music of the fairies' songs."

PART II

CHAPTER VII

It was some weeks before Alan Sydney again returned to the story of his life. We often met, however, during this interval, both at his house and at mine. He seemed anxious to let me become better acquainted with his views and strange philosophy before describing any more of his experiences. So interesting did I find these discussions that, though still wishing to hear the conclusion of the tale, I did not press him to continue it. One evening, however, our conversation led back to the subject. We had been for some time discussing Buddhism; I had pointed out that many of the conclusions at which he had arrived resembled in certain ways the views professed by Eastern adepts.

"Truth is to be found in every faith," he replied, "and these occult philosophers have cultivated one side of knowledge which has been overlooked by European scientists. At the same time any one who has taken the trouble personally to examine the foundation on which the reports of marvellous powers possessed by certain Orientals are based will, I feel sure, have arrived at the following conclusions–

"Firstly, the metaphysical knowledge of these men is far in advance of their physical power to make use of it. In other words, they know many secret laws of nature, but usually fail in manipulating these laws to any useful purpose, often to any purpose at all. The reason for this is obvious. They have cultivated one part only of the sixth sense, and have done even this at the expense both of body and mind; instead of perfecting every faculty and keeping their personality evenly balanced, they have become deformed. It is as if a man hitherto deaf and suddenly conscious of the sense of hearing, should shut himself tip in a dark room and refuse to receive any impressions save those conveyed by sound; he would probably make considerable progress in hearing, but he would necessarily suffer deterioration in his other faculties.

"The knowledge and foretaste of power, which, through bodily and mental weakness, they can seldom exercise, have led many of the more unscrupulous

seers to resort to trickery. Now and again they are able to perform what men call a miracle, and probably every wonder that we read of has at one time or another been performed, more or less accidentally, by some Eastern ascetic, but knowing the powers that do exist, and being unable to control them at will, they too frequently, either for profit or fame, turn for assistance to the most barefaced impostures.

"The spiritualists are not free from the same reproach. It is safe to assume that as any one who possesses even a slight knowledge of how to make use of the powers of a spiritual sense, will neither require money nor desire fame, all spiritualistic or theosophic exhibitions, which have either of these ends in view, should be regarded with distrust. At the same time they should be interesting as exhibiting a craving on the part of the performer and also of his audience for manifestations of unrevealed yet partially conceived truths.

"Trickery is only powerful when it apes reality. The love of the mysterious is after all a craving for felt possibilities. A conjurer, scoffing at the supernatural which he strives to imitate, would lose his occupation if he possessed sufficient eloquence to convince his audience that there was no truth foreshadowed by means of his dexterity. As the girl-child loves to play with her doll because the maternal instinct lies undeveloped in her breast, so do men love to play with magic, foretasting therein a part of the power which some day shall be perfected. They both know better, but for the moment prefer a true illuminating fancy to a false disillusionizing fact. Yet when some motive of self-interest provokes the deception, only harm can come; the parable is then turned into the lie, the prophet into the charlatan.

"Not long after my arrival in India I met a man who interested me greatly. Up to this time I had little knowledge of Buddhism, and the outcome which I had seen of this religion had given me so far an unfavourable impression.

"Mr. Kanwick was of Scotch descent, though he had been born in Calcutta, and lived in India the greater part of his life. When we met he was a wealthy bachelor of about fifty-five years of age, with no occupation to tie him down. His knowledge of Oriental subjects was well founded, for he had spent most of his life in studying the manners, dialects, and religions of Asia.

"He was at this time engaged in writing a book on the Vedic language and religion, and I travelled with him in the East for many months, passing from one place to another. We visited many of the countries in Central Asia, and whilst he was engaged in studying one of the oldest and purest forms of worship, I was busy perfecting a power which, even in the earliest times, the Vedic philosophers seemed to have reached after. Were I to describe the strange experiences through which we passed, how, disguised, we found our way into sacred shrines never before visited by Europeans, or the various dangers we encountered, in many

of which we narrowly escaped death, it would occupy all the time we are likely to have together for the next six months. Aided by the sixth sense, by free use of our wealth, and by my companion's knowledge of the various dialects and customs of the people, we were able to overcome difficulties which would have been impossibilities to ordinary travellers. One evening, however, we met with an experience which brought my travels to an abrupt termination, and in which my companion lost his life.

"We had been staying a few days in a small town, and, having grown overconfident, we determined to visit a temple which was situated about five miles away. It was a foolhardy enterprise, for not only had no unbeliever ever been permitted to approach this place, but none save the priests of a special caste were allowed even to enter the sacred enclosure in which it had been built. I must, however, tell you how we came to find out this place, for it was so situated that but for an accident we might have lived for years in the neighbourhood without suspecting its existence.

"The country here is of very curious formation. On either side of the city perpendicular rocks rise out of the plain forming miniature table-lands, some hardly larger than a tomb, some with room enough on them for small farms, with well-marked natural boundaries, sheer precipices varying from fifty to over three hundred feet. The surface of these rocks is very irregular, and often thickly coated with soil in which grow many tropical trees.

"In a deep hollow on one of the largest and most wooded of these plateaus this temple has been built, but owing to its situation it is quite impossible to see any part of it until the top of the surrounding rock has been reached.

"Now we had as a guide a high-caste Brahmin named Hinma. We had adopted a method of paying him by results, which had proved so far highly satisfactory; the more information he gave us, or the more interesting the place to which he led us, the greater the number of rupees he received at the end of the month. It so happened that for some weeks past the value of his services had been small, and when he received his pay I saw that he was dissatisfied, and read this pass through his mind:

"'*If I only could show the temple at Aphar! But it is forbidden. I dare not even mention its existence; moreover, it would be absolutely impossible for me, and still more for the foreigners, to get even a distant sight of the place.*'

"I answered his thought aloud. 'Why are you afraid to speak to me of this temple? Do you not yet know that we are the all-powerful to whom silver is as nothing, and against whom none dare lift their hands?'

"'The Sahib is as a god among men,' he replied, 'but the god of this temple is more powerful than he. Thou seest into the hidden thoughts of men, but he sees all things, and his vengeance is terrible. None save his special servants may

see his dwelling and live. Moreover to mention the name thereof is to cause his anger!'

"So great was the man's fear of this deity that it took me an hour before I could get the information required, and then it was chiefly owing to the fact that his thoughts were less under his control than his tongue.

"I reported my discovery to Kanwick, and on the following morning, unaccompanied by our guide, we went to reconnoitre, and if possible to devise some plan by which we might at least get a glimpse of this mysterious abode of the god.

"There was little difficulty in finding the rocky citadel which concealed this temple. We walked all round the foot of the precipice which cut it off from the plain. The cliffs which rose above us varied from two hundred to three hundred feet in height, and I judged that the surface on the top of them must extend over at least one hundred acres. But it seemed absolutely impossible to reach the higher land, though we examined the sides of the rock most carefully. There was no indication of a path which even a goat could climb; whoever ascended or descended must do so apparently by the aid of a rope or ladder let down from above. The plain on the side furthest from the town was thickly wooded, and not wishing to excite the curiosity of any one who might be watching us, we sat down in the shadow of some trees to talk the matter over. The very mystery of the place tempted us the more to make some desperate effort to overcome the difficulty of exploration.

"We were sitting about two hundred yards from the cliff, by the side of a stream which, we had noticed, flowed from a fissure in the rock. Whilst thus resting and talking, a strange thing happened. The noisy stream which flowed at our feet suddenly became silent; we looked down in surprise to find that now only a little trickle of water passed over its rocky bed. My companion jumped up in excitement and looked towards the crevice from which the water came. Signing to me to rise quietly, he pointed to the cliff which we could see through a gap in the trees. From out the fissure in the rock which a few minutes before was filled with water, we saw two men pass, clad in the yellow robes of mendicant priests. As they came out of the channel and made their way into the wood, the water once more dashed out of the rock with more than usual force, so that in another minute the stream at our feet was a roaring torrent.

"'The key is in our hands if we can use it,' my friend said as soon as he had satisfied himself that the priests were out of hearing. 'That is the gateway, and no doubt the inhabitants have some arrangement inside by which they can for a short time divert the water into a reservoir, and thereby open the passage or close it at will.'

"'Yes,' I replied, 'but I cannot agree with you that we have the key; they

seem to keep that safely inside. If we want to get through we must wait patiently until they open the door for their friends, and then take French leave. Probably we shall soon wish we had kept outside. What do you think of doing?'

"'I shall get in at all risk,' he answered. 'It is too good an opportunity to lose; but let us go back now and make our plans, we can do nothing more at present, and if we are noticed our presence may cause suspicion.'

"During our evening meal we discussed the situation. I must own that I tried to persuade Kanwick to give up the idea of forcing an entrance into these sacred precincts. Cut off as we should be from all possibility of rescue, the idea seemed foolhardy in the extreme; but seeing that my friend had determined to go, I decided to share the risk.

"As soon as it was dark we agreed to start; and watch the entrance, as our only chance of slipping through the tunnel unobserved would be during the night-time.

"We had been in our place of concealment about two hours, and it must have been nearly twelve o'clock when we heard steps approach. The night, fortunately for our purposes, was dark, as the moon had not yet risen. It was impossible therefore for us to see anything, but I judged from the sound that the man, whoever he might be, was alone. He passed about a hundred yards from our hiding-place, and the noise of the stream made it impossible for my companion to distinguish the footsteps. Had I not by this time been able to concentrate my sense of hearing on any particular sound, I should have been equally helpless; as it was, we had the advantage of being able to follow the stream without fear of detection.

"When we came to the outskirts of the wood and were about ten yards from the cliff, we paused. I could see the figure of a man standing by the side of the crevice, and it seemed to me that he was groping for something on the surface of the rock. In another moment the water began to sink, and the figure disappeared into the gully through which the stream had now ceased to flow. We ran quickly to the spot, and with no little feeling of dread, began to follow the priest through the dark channel. Fortunately he had struck a light which he held before him, or we certainly should either have been drowned or swept back into the plain, for instead of following the bed of the stream, he had turned up a steep narrow passage to the right, and was now disappearing round a sharp turning. The moment he was out of sight we hastened after him up the incline, and were only just in time. There was a rush of water behind us, which in a moment rose to our knees; the path through which we had entered was once more the bed of a boiling torrent, but for the time being we were safe. A few more steps and we were out of reach of the water, standing in pitch darkness on the dry rock which formed the footway of a winding tunnel.

”We waited a few moments, fearing to go further without a light, and thinking it safer to let our guide get some way ahead before we struck a match. We had thus far accomplished our purpose successfully, but I fancy neither of us felt very comfortable. To return was now impossible, and if the other end of this tunnel should be closed we might find ourselves like rats caught in a hole, and either be starved to death, or have to wait until we were found by the next party of priests, when our fate would probably be as bad or even worse. I felt for my pistol, and then by the light of a wax vesta we began to grope our way up the winding staircase which had been cut into the rock. We must have used about ten matches when a puff of wind extinguished the one last lighted, and taking this as a sign that we were near the mouth of the tunnel, we decided to finish our journey in the dark.

”I was a little ahead of my companion, and had felt my way carefully over eight or ten more steps, when my hand touched the stem of a tree, and looking up I could see the stars above me through some thick foliage. I slipped aside into the underwood, and in a few moments Kanwick was by my side. The wind blew freshly against our heated faces, and it was with no little feeling of pleasure we realized that our first great danger was past, and though we might be chained to a rock, we were at least chained outside, not inside.

”We waited for a short time, uncertain what course to pursue. As we thus stood talking in whispers, the moon rose, flooding the scene around with light.

”We were on the wooded side of a steep slope which evidently led up to the precipitous edge of the cliff. Some hundred feet below in a lovely glen, the bottom of which must have been nearly on a level with the surrounding plain, a stream flowed, and in one part widened out into a small lake. Out of the centre of this lake rose the snow-white marble walls of the temple. It is almost impossible to describe the beauty of this building, so unlike is its style of architecture to anything else I have ever seen. It is quite circular, and has been built on arches which are supported by seventy square massive columns that rise out of the lake. On the top of these arches is what may be called the ground-floor of the structure. Round the outside of this level platform, at equal distances apart, are seven hundred marble pillars, thirty feet in height, and carved so as to resemble the trunks of trees, very irregular in shape but of about equal girth. Resting on these pillars is another platform, in the centre of which is also built a similar structure of about half the size of the one on which it stands. This building again supports a third, still smaller, on the roof of which rise fourteen columns in a circle. From the top of each of these spring three boughs, one towards the centre, and one on either side, the side boughs meeting those from the adjacent columns, forming arches, and the centre boughs joining together in a kind of open-work dome. The details were of course indistinct, seen in the moonlight, but the exquisite

proportion of every part, which is after all the chief charm, was clearly visible; the surroundings added also a kind of spiritual beauty to the scene, for as the moon rose the surface of the lake was divided by a silver line of light, the tropical foliage around cast a fairyland of shadows on the water, and from the temple rose the soft sound of music, the first chord of which had broken the silence of night when the moon's rays fell upon the marble dome.

"'The dream of my life is fulfilled,' my companion whispered as we looked out on the lovely scene. 'This is without doubt the temple of the moon, of which I once read an account in an old manuscript. It is reported to have been built by Zoroaster, and to have been kept in perfect repair up to the date when the manuscript was written. But I had supposed it to have been destroyed centuries ago, and there we see it to-day perfect in all its original loveliness. No doubt its preservation is due to its inaccessible position, and the care with which it has been watched over by the priests. Truly if the Oriental people know nothing else, they know how to preserve a secret. I am, however, inclined to think, from the dress of the priests we saw this morning, that the followers of Buddha must have now taken possession of it; but in this borderland of many religions, all founded more or less on Brahminism, we often find a combination of religious thoughts which more resembles the earlier faith, and this may prove to be the centre of some such creed; we shall doubtless soon have an opportunity of finding out.'

"Hardly had he finished speaking, when down the steps which led from the temple to the lake, a procession of white-robed priests could be seen moving slowly, and a long, curiously-shaped boat glided out from where it had been concealed by the trees. In a few moments it had reached the steps and the priests entered it. Then through the night air rose the sound of singing which harmonized with the music as the boat slowly glided out of our sight behind the massive columns on which the temple was built. Seven times the boat made a circle round the building, and then, with the priests still on board, turned towards the trees beneath us and was once more hidden from sight; the music and singing stopped, and all was again in silence.

"'They are coming this way,' I said. 'What had we better do?'

"'Move further from the entrance,' Kanwick answered, 'and keep as quiet as possible.'

"We crept with little noise to a thicket about fifty paces from the tunnel, but as though guided by some superior power set on our discovery, the procession came straight on to where we lay concealed. When they had reached our hiding-place the priests spread out, forming a circle round us, so that escape was impossible, and a voice spoke as follows, in Persian–

("I am quick at learning languages, and as Persian is by far the most useful in this part of the East, I had taken some trouble to learn it in our travels, so I

was able to understand what was said to us.)

"'Strangers, who have dared to enter the sacred enclosure in which rests the shrine where the followers of the true religion worship, in the name of Brahm, the only god, ruler of heaven and earth, we command you to come forth! Should you have been led here by his divine ordinance, then are you blessed, and shall be welcome to his holy shrine. Should presumptuous curiosity have brought you hither, your fate shall be even as the Almighty directs.'

"We both felt it would be useless to attempt flight, and folly to resort to force, so getting up, we went in the direction from which the voice proceeded. There, standing just inside the ring of priests, was a tall and venerable-looking man; his hair and beard were white; his complexion, for a Persian, was strangely fair; his features showed nobility and strength; his expression purity and kindliness. Simply telling us to follow, he turned into a path that led along the side of the hill, and which kept about the same level above the lake. In a few minutes we came to the mouth of a cave, and entering it passed through a short passage into a lofty cavern. The sides of this cavern had been so cut away as to form a perfect circular chamber, the domed roof of which was covered with mosaic of various-coloured marbles formed into strange devices and pictures. The floor on which we stood was the natural rock highly polished. From the golden altar in the centre of the cave a bright light cast various colours on the scene around, only upon the ivory throne which stood opposite the entrance the rays fell very pure and white. On all the other objects the colours were fitful, changing from time to time into every shade which can be seen in the rainbow.

"When we had all entered, the high priest who had bidden us follow him, having taken his seat upon the throne, spoke once more.

"'Followers of the Almighty, whom he has gathered together from all lands, and taught from all creeds the syllables of his holy word till the time came for you to be drawn to his holy temple, behold a new thing has come to pass. For the first time without warning and without welcome, whether through guile or led by the wisdom of the Highest, we have two strange children of the Great Father in our midst. As all who enter here by freedom of our will, and with full knowledge of the trial awaiting them, must pass an ordeal of light, so must these strangers, of whom we know nothing, but who have been sent to us for some great purpose. Are your minds with my mind?'

"And the priests standing round answered, 'We are all of one spirit, even of the spirit of the Highest, who speaketh by the lips of his servant.'

"Then the high priest turned to us and said, 'By some influence you have been drawn to the fountain of wisdom, but it must yet be seen if you are worthy to receive the knowledge which shall make you free. Having forced your way into this sacred enclosure, it is now too late to retrace your steps; you must go

onward to a nobler life, or pass into that state which men call death. But have no fear, the destinies of all men are decreed. Should you die it is but the sign that your new body awaits the spirit. Moreover, here death is robbed of pain, and the vision of the holy temple shall purify your spirit in the life hereafter.'

"Then pointing to my companion, he bade him go to the altar, and standing before it act even as his spirit directed.

"Kanwick stepped fearlessly up the marble steps. As he did so a great flame burst up, at the sight of which he shrank back, and in a moment the cavern was in pitch darkness, but there was no sound. Then in that awful stillness I knew all, for the thoughts of those around me spoke even as the thought of one man. I knew that my friend was dead, and how he had died, and why, and a great sorrow came over me. Yet hardly had I time to think before the room was lighted as before, but there was no sign of the dead body.

"When bidden to walk up to the altar, though I felt no fear for my own safety, my limbs trembled as they passed over a large black slab of marble, for I knew that beneath this revolving stone at some unfathomed depth lay the body of Kanwick. There was a hidden meaning in the priest's words, 'It is too late to retrace your steps.' When the fire again burst forth, instead of moving back to avoid it, I threw myself across the altar into the midst of the fire and immediately became insensible.

"On recovering consciousness I found that I was lying in a small room beautifully decorated; it was just such an apartment as you may find in any wealthy Persian's house. I felt drowsy, and had some little difficulty in recalling the scene in the cavern. The clothing previously worn by me had been removed, and I was now dressed in a red robe, similar in fashion to that worn by the priests. There was no trace on my body of any effect from the fire, which had doubtless been extinguished at the moment I had thrown myself forward, and I now know that my insensibility was caused by the powerful narcotic fumes which at the moment the flame bursts forth, rise from the altar and make death to the unsuccessful painless, even as the priest had promised.

"I was under the impression that my ordeal was now over, and that I should be admitted at once into the priesthood, but this was not the case. I had been lying in this dreamy state for perhaps twenty minutes, when one of the Persian hangings was pushed aside, and a young girl entered the room. She was a Circassian, very fair and beautifully formed; in her hand she carried a golden cup full of wine which she handed to me, saying in Persian–

"'Drink, beloved of God, the wine of joy.'

"But as I held out my hand for the cup, and was about to drink it, being parched with thirst, a feeling of fear restrained me, and I placed it at my side.

"What could this girl be doing here? Might she not possess some knowl-

edge that it would be worth my while to find out? Her dress was befitting a priestess of Venus, and strangely out of keeping with all that I had observed before. Unless I was greatly mistaken in my judgment of faces, the priests whom I had seen were men who had overcome passion, and whose thoughts were absorbed in striving after spiritual purity and perfection. How came it then that this young girl should be in their midst, and why was she sent to me?

"'At whose bidding,' I asked, 'do you bring this cup of wine?'

"'It has been sent,' she replied, 'from the little temple where live the daughters of the moon; the queen bade me bear it to thee as an offering of love, and she has appointed me to be thy servant, to minister to thy wants, and to obey thy will, even if I may find grace in thy sight.'

"I was very much perplexed. As far as I could make out, this girl knew no more of the meaning of her visit than I did, and I was certain that no evil thought was in her heart.

"'What,' I said, 'if I reject the cup of joy and send thee back?'

"She hung her head, then kneeling down by my side and looking beseechingly at me answered–

"'Thou wouldst not send me from thee; I will do whatsoever thou desirest, and serve thee faithfully. As the moon reflects the glory of the sun, so is it dark with me if I may not see thy face!–as the flower withers without light, so must I droop if hidden from thy presence. If thou but drink the cup which the queen offers, thou wilt then know the joy of love.'

"As she said this I suddenly became conscious that she was repeating a lesson, acting a part, the meaning of which she did not understand; and with this knowledge, all danger which the temptation might have had for me was removed. Beginning to have some idea of the truth, I looked straight into her eyes and said–

"'Who taught you this lesson? Who told you to say this to me?'

"Her part had been doubtless well prepared, but this question was not one among those for which she had an answer ready, and after hesitating a moment she spoke the truth.

"'The priest of temptation.'

"'And what would you have done had I drunk the wine and bidden you stay with me?' I asked.

"'I should have stayed,' she answered simply, and her thoughts followed her words.

"Then I said, 'Return to him who sent you, and speak these words–"He, to whom you sent me, said–there are forces spiritual and forces material against which all must contend ere they reach the borderland of wisdom, but woe unto those who use the innocent children of the Highest as brands to kindle the slumbering embers of passion!"'

"The girl would have pleaded with me again, but I silenced her, saying, 'Go, and if he bid you to return, you may do so.'

"I was not long left in solitude, for in a few minutes a priest in yellow robes entered the room. He was not one of those I had previously seen. His face was clean-shaven, and he did not look to be much over forty years of age; his features were refined, but rather hard; his expression noble, but cold. He bowed down as he entered the room, and then addressed me in these words–

"'Thou who art a god amongst the children of men, wiser than the wisest, pure as are the waters in the lake of Gitem, in whom the spirit of the Almighty is reflected as in the crystal mirror of Tor, we beseech thee to hear the prayer of thy servants. We, the priests of the Most High, seeing that thou hast power beyond the sons of men, would offer thee worship in the temple.'

"As he spoke, two other priests entered, one bearing a yellow robe richly embroidered with gold and covered with jewels, and the other a crystal crown, from which proceeded a strange mysterious light which would have cast round the head of the wearer a radiant halo. As I pictured the effect of one thus robed and crowned entering the temple, a scene, doubtless called up in the mind of one of the priests, at the same moment flashed across my brain. I saw men standing robed in white, and in the centre of these I seemed to lie, dressed in the kingly garb, and crowned with the shining crystal crown, but my forehead was covered with the dew of death, and there was a look of pity on the faces of those around.

"Then I realized that this was but a new temptation, and with some slight show of anger answered—

"'The fools of the earth desire to be clad in fine raiment, and to feel for a moment the glory of earthly power, but to those who have once seen the light which proceeds from true wisdom, riches and honour are as dust, the shouts of men as the hum of insects, and the kingdoms of earth as ant-heaps. If there are among you men who have attained to even a slight knowledge in the mystery of life, take, I pray you, this message back to them from me: "I would rather be a disciple at the feet of my Master, than rule over a dominion of fools. If there be none here worthy to teach me, then is the wisdom of which you boast but the froth of foolishness, and your power but the low cunning of the savage."'

"When I had finished speaking, the priest without answering turned, and followed by his two attendants left the room. The curtain fell back over the entrance, and I was once more alone.

"After this food and coffee were brought me, and feeling tired I lay down and slept through the rest of this eventful day.

"When I awoke a light was burning in the room, and sitting by my side was the high priest himself. As I looked into this man's noble face I felt certain that my trials were over. It was impossible to believe that he would descend to act the

part of tempter; and in this view I was correct.

"'You have,' he said, 'passed through the three temptations which for centuries have been used to try those who are admitted to the white-robed order of priesthood, the trials of perseverance, purity, and meekness. In future, as you are one of us, no secret may be kept from you, and any special wisdom you possess should be freely taught to all. Your case is, however, one of unusual interest, as you are the first man who has been admitted into our ranks without many years of careful preparation. We have in various parts of the world disciples, whose business it is to train those they may consider likely to become fitted for the high calling, but it is not often that any of these converts attain to the highest order, which you have now reached.'

"'Tell me,' I said, 'to what creed you belong.'

"'To no creed,' he replied. 'In this temple at one time the followers of Zoroaster worshipped; then it fell into the hands of the Buddhists, and became one of their most sacred shrines. But the wise, gathered together as they were here, soon learned to cast off the errors which spring up in a mixed community, and three hundred years ago one Zifanta became high priest. He was a man possessed of unusual power, not such as the scattered mystics possess, which can only be employed at certain times, and under the most favourable circumstances. He was able to leave the body at will, and to converse with the spirits of the dead, whereby he acquired great wisdom and worked mighty miracles on earth. He, moreover, changed the religion of his followers, bidding them to seek in every creed and among all people the truth which Brahm, the one and only God, whispers into the hearts of his faithful children, who are scattered over the face of the earth. He preached against the subjugation of the body after the manner employed by the Buddhist adepts, saying that the body should not be regarded as the enemy of the spirit, but rather for the time being as its helpmate. He affirmed that without the aid of matter the spirit on earth was powerless; for as the wing-feathers of a bird plucked from the pinions are scattered hither and thither by every fitful breeze, so is matter helpless without the forces of the spirit; but as a bird deprived of its plumage can no longer leave the earth, and becomes the prey of any prowling beast, so the spirit, when the body is injured or weakened, becomes a prey to passing delusions, and is unable to accomplish any noble work. Therefore, among our followers, have we many grades. Had you fallen in the second trial, preferring the love of woman to entire devotion to wisdom, the girl you saw might have become your wife, and you would have joined the order of disciples, who live where they will, and act for us in the outer world.'

"'But what,' I asked, 'if I had failed in the third trial?'

"'Any one who allows the crystal crown to be placed upon his head must die, for without humility it is impossible to worship the Almighty, or to rule the

powers of earth; and this trial is applied to all, whether they fail in the second trial, or whether they succeed, for it is equally important for the disciple to be free from pride as it is for the priest.'

"'But how did that girl come to be here?' I asked.

"'According to our doctrine,' he replied, 'men and women are equal in the sight of Brahm, and without the female power no great progress can be made; but here among those who are struggling after the higher life, the priest and priestess live without carnal love, and for this cause it is essential to test all who are admitted to the white-robed order. The girl you saw is, however, a novice, one of those who are being trained, and it may be that she will go back into the world and marry one of the disciples, or she may, after certain trials, be deemed worthy of the white robe of virginity.'

"'But,' I replied, 'does not this seem rather a careless, if not unholy, way of bringing a man and woman together, and thereby perhaps deciding their future life, even though they may be quite unfitted for each other?'

"'What do you fancy,' he answered, 'is the guiding influence that as a rule draws a man and woman together? Sometimes, but rarely, spiritual attraction; more often animal fascination. We do not, however, decide lightly, but after great care, and we believe that in our selection we are guided by higher power. So far the marriages which have taken place have been greatly blessed. It is a sign, probably, that this girl who was rejected by you is destined to become a priestess, but at present she knows not the meaning of love, and so it is impossible to say. Innocence is not regarded here, as it is too often in the world, as a sign of purity, for innocence is a negative, holiness a positive, quality. But come, in a quarter of an hour the moon will rise, and it is time to go to the temple.'

"I followed my guide out of the house and through a grove of trees, till we came to the edge of the lake. A boat was waiting which, when we had entered, carried us silently without any apparent means of progress, to the temple steps, and after we had landed, as silently returned to its former place. When we had walked up the steps and passed between the marble pillars, I saw that a wide-open colonnade extended round a circular inner shrine, which was enclosed with a solid wall. In this wall, and opposite the steps, was a beautiful carved archway, the entrance to which was closed with folding-doors of embossed silver. As we drew near, they opened; at the same moment the moon rose, and I heard again those soft strains of music which had reached me the preceding night whilst I lay watching from the hill. I will try to give you some idea of the scene which was presented to me as I followed the high priest into the temple.

"At first the light was so dim that I found it difficult to distinguish objects clearly; but as the moon rose higher, and my eyes became accustomed to the light, the full beauty of the building was disclosed. Although, from outside, the temple

seemed divided into three floors, the dome of this inner shrine extended to the summit of the building. The second and third double rows of columns, through which the moonlight now poured, supported the inner dome, and formed covered colonnades from which it was possible either to look down into the temple, or out upon the lake and woods around. As in the Taj of Agra, the walls were covered with writing formed of crystals and other more or less precious stones, while the floor was covered with marble mosaic worked into various designs. In the centre was a clear deep pool, from the surface of which rose seven thin columns of water, one rising fifty feet, and the others which surrounded it about thirty, before they fell in light spray into the circular basin. There were about a hundred persons present, all robed in loose white tunics; some were standing, but the greater number were reclining, or sitting upon tiers of broad marble steps.

"With the exception of myself, there were only two present whose dress in any way distinguished them from the others; one was the high priest, who wore round his waist a golden girdle set with what appeared to be precious stones; and the other a woman who was standing near him, on whose breast lay a jewel cut in the shape of a heart, from which proceeded a pale soft light. The woman, whom I rightly judged to be the high priestess, must have been sixty years of age; she was tall and still beautifully proportioned; her hair was silvery white, her complexion smooth and clear; but at the time I hardly noticed any of these details, so absorbed had I become in watching the varying expressions on her face. She was standing in shadow, but the light from the luminous jewel on her breast lit up her features so that they were clearly visible.

"I have never seen any other face so radiant with divine love, meekness, and purity, so full of gentle power and trustful calm. A strong impulse came over me, and rising from my seat I went and knelt down before her; as I did so she bent and kissed me on the forehead; then taking my hand, she brought me to some steps which led to the central basin, and bade me go down into the water. The music ceased, the fountains stopped, and then through the silence that followed she spoke aloud, so that all the assembly, who had risen, could hear.

"'Father of all, grant that as this water changes the blood-red robe of thy child into the garment of purity, so may Thy spirit purify his heart, changing fear to trust, passion to love, and pride to humility, until as a pure and crystal mirror he may reflect on earth Thy beauty and Thy light, even as yonder moon, now that the sun is hidden from our eyes, reflects the glory which man may no longer behold.'

"From every side came the response, 'Grant this our prayer, O Father of all!'

"When I rose out of the water, I was almost dazzled by the lustrous whiteness of my robe, which had somehow been robbed of its scarlet colour; moreover,

both my spirit and body seemed strengthened and purified. Then the high priest came near and welcomed me in the name of all present, saying–

"'Child of the Most High, gladly do we, thy brothers and sisters, welcome thee to our family of priesthood; may thy coming aid us in the endless search for truth; may thy power, added to our power, hasten the glorious time when the order of the universe shall no longer be arrested by man's blindness, but the will of the Almighty be performed on earth even as in the kingdoms that are around the earth.'

"As one by one the priests and priestesses came near to greet me, I noticed that there appeared to be about an equal number of men and women present; most of these were advanced in years, but among them were some who could not have been much over twenty. On the faces of all, whether old or young, fair or dark, the same calm expression of trust, purity, power, and meekness was stamped.

"The moon had now risen, and its light fell upon the temple floor; on this spot two of the priests laid a thick rug and cushions on which one of the youngest girls lay down. The music once more began to play, but now very softly. It was a strange and beautiful picture; the lovely girl with her long dark hair falling over the white robe, lying thus in the soft light; the priests and priestesses standing round in partial shadow; the noble proportions of the temple, the lace-work of arches and pillars between which the moon's rays fell. But I had little time to think of all these things, for in a moment I saw–but not, as I know now, through the medium of the bodily eye–the spiritual form of the girl rise from the body, and as the dew is drawn from the earth, pass upward and then vanish from sight.

"Ajar, the high priest, who was standing beside me, said, 'You are conscious that the spirit of Mintor the priestess has left her body for a time, and passed to some other sphere?'

"And I answered, 'Yes, I saw it pass upward.'

"'It is confusing,' he replied, 'to use the word see, for the eye, which is an organ of the body, receives no impression from the spiritual form. The spiritual perception we call *viam*, and the verb *view* with us is used for all impressions which reach the mind independently of the bodily organs. I am glad that you possess this gift so far developed, as there are but few present who have yet attained the power, except under certain favourable conditions. Those who are worthy to wear the white robe have each some special spiritual gift, but these gifts vary greatly. Some can converse with those at a distance; some *view* what is passing in the world around; others, as in the case of Mintor, can leave the body and pass into the spirit-world. This is the most coveted of all gifts, as from those who possess it we can learn new wisdom. The founder of our faith had still a greater power. He could, on leaving the body, dissolve it into gaseous

form, and his spirit, whithersoever it went, was able to draw from nature the needed material, and to take human form wherever or whenever it pleased; but since he left us, few have been able to do this, and never with safety, for under certain conditions they lost the power, and having as it were no root upon the earth, their spirits were drawn to other spheres and returned no more. The cause of this is, we know, physical weakness, and he who shall again succeed must possess a body equally developed with his spirit; such a one I believe you to be, and it is possible you may succeed, should you be willing to undergo the training that is necessary. But we expect to receive from Mintor, when her spirit returns, some guidance on the matter.'

"Having said this, he took me by the hand and led me up to the place where the body of the girl lay as though in deep sleep; then all those present knelt down and seemed to be engaged in prayer.

"'The strength of the prayers of all present are with thee,' he continued. 'Kneel down and take both of Mintor's hands in thine; see whether it may be possible for thy spirit to join hers in the life beyond, for in the spirit kingdom only can that knowledge be received which can give power over the world of matter.'

"I did as bidden, and the light seemed to become more and more powerful, then all grew dark, but through the darkness I heard a voice saying, 'Come.' A great pain passed over my body and I was free.

"It would be quite impossible for me to give you any true idea of the exquisite delight I experienced when now for the first time conscious of untrammelled life. No one would believe how much pain is inseparable from every movement of even the healthiest body until he has once been freed from the burden. We gauge pain and pleasure simply by the sensations that are above or below the average of existence; when less than usually burdened, we call life happy; if more than usually tried, we call it painful. As a bird confined from birth in a tiny cage is unconscious of its cramped suffering, so the spirit of man having no remembrance of freedom, regards its present house with toleration, and is even unwilling to be released. I could hardly feel surprised now that unselfishness is a necessary condition of spiritual growth, as the love of others could alone draw a free spirit back to its chains.

"Of what I passed through during this and similar experiences I shall now say nothing. After I am dead you will find a sealed paper, on the cover of which is written 'A spiritual autobiography. If you feel it wise to open and read it, or even to publish part or all of it, you can do so, for by that time you will have my influence to guide you, and I shall be able to judge better which course is the wisest for you to take.'

"I shall not continue my story any further this evening, as you are anxious

to ask me some questions, and it is already late."

"There is one thing," I replied, "which I cannot understand, namely, the death of your companion. Considering the nobility and kindly disposition of these priests, the tests of worthiness seem almost cruel and barbarous."

"Your feeling," Sydney answered, "is very similar to that which I experienced at the time, and though I have not dwelt on the subject for fear of interrupting the narrative, the death of my friend was not only a deep grief to me, but also caused a shock from which it was some time before I could recover; but after my spiritual freedom in the temple I was able to understand things better. Life, which we prize so dearly, is looked upon by those who have the highest knowledge, not as a pleasure, but as a necessary and painful lesson. Death is an upward movement into a more perfect condition; moreover, through the knowledge which these men possessed, they considered themselves but as merciful instruments for saving pain. The duration of life is not determined by an accident to the body, but solely by growth of the spirit. When a man or woman has become fitted for another sphere, the outward growth must be cast off. Sometimes this is done slowly, through disease; sometimes in a moment through what men call accident; but in either case the thing is inevitable. If men only knew it, they could shorten or lengthen life by retarding or aiding the growth of the spirit, but in that way only."

"Do you," I asked, "then imply that the more slowly a man learns his lesson the longer he lives?"

"Sometimes," he answered, "but there is another reason for death. An evil bodily habit often retards the proper growth of the spirit, in which case the soul has to be re-incarnated. How often do we see some man with a fine and noble disposition utterly ruined by one bodily vice, that, though hateful to him, has become too powerful for his will. The fight up to a certain point is useful, and often lasts many years, but a time comes when the spirit begins to suffer, and then the end is near. I can often tell very nearly how much longer a man will live, by reading his inmost thoughts. From a superficial view, deterioration seems frequently to set in long before the end; but this is owing to the fact that we judge by outward signs. As long as a man can cry from his soul, if only in his better moments, to be delivered, he is learning, if no other lesson, that of humility."

"Then there is one other question," I said. "Can it be right for one man to try to lead another into temptation?"

"That is a very difficult question to answer," he replied, "and one which I have spent many hours in discussing with Ajar the high priest. There is much to be said on both sides. Of course in a state of perfection it would be unnecessary, and one can easily picture a case in which as a lesser of two evils it might be justifiable; but I believe under these circumstances it was a mistake, and the

practice is now discontinued altogether, with many others which were relics of a past superstition."

"Does this community still exist?" I asked.

"It does, and is likely to continue to do so," Sydney replied. "From this centre flows forth the beginning of a new faith, which is slowly, under many names, spreading over the earth. It is from rumours of this hidden power that arise many of the mythical stories of Eastern magic; but only those fitted to know the truth will ever be allowed to come near the shrine, for the powers of the earth are nothing against the powers of the spirit."

"Do you not often miss the companionship which you must have found among these people?" I asked.

"I spend much of my time with them still," he answered. "Strange as it may seem to you, who are for the present bound down by the limitation of space, it is as easy for me to visit them as it is to come to your house. Distance is unknown in the spirit-world, and even whilst man remains on earth, as soon as he is able to control his spiritual perceptions, the influence of the body becomes daily less noticeable. But you will understand this better later on."

CHAPTER VIII

When I next met Sydney after the conversation given in the previous chapter, he seemed to me far from well. His face was pale, and his eyes shone with unnatural brightness.

"You are tired to-night," I said, when we were again sitting together in his laboratory. "Do not trouble to go on with your story unless you feel inclined to do so."

"I am not too tired to talk," he replied, "but have been trying an experiment which fatigues the body; I can rest while continuing the account of my experiences. It will, however, be necessary to pass rather briefly over the time spent at Aphar, which is the name given to the rocky plateau on which the temple stands. So much of my life was connected with purely spiritual experiences, the full account of which you will some day have the opportunity of reading, that it will be well to confine myself at present only to those matters which are necessary for the full understanding of my subsequent life in England, and to the powers which during this time I developed and perfected.

”Each time that my spirit left the body and went, either by itself or in company with other spirits, into the world of unseen life which surrounds us here I gained more and more knowledge, until at last it was considered safe for me to try that most difficult of all experiments, the casting off for the time being of those materials which form the body, in the hope of being able to recall similar elements at will in whatever place the spirit might wish to regain its bodily form. I think it highly probable, however, that I should not so soon have risked the danger, had it not been for a certain knowledge gained during one of my hours of spiritual freedom.

”I should explain that in the trance condition, when the soul is free to wander untrammelled, and to come into communion with those who are invisible to mortal eyes, it is also equally possible to visit those who still live upon earth, though they will not be conscious of your presence, unless they also possess some of the powers of the sixth sense.

”I had a strong desire to see Vera again, and to find out if the arrangements made for her future had worked satisfactorily. It was not long, therefore, before I took the opportunity of discovering this by the aid of my new gift, and I was horrified at finding that not only were things far from satisfactory, but that unless I could interfere, a still more serious evil would probably arise.

”Now though in this state I could watch all that happened, I was powerless to act; but if I once dared risk death by destroying my body, it would be possible for me to draw the needed particles together in England or elsewhere; and it was the thought of Vera’s danger that chiefly induced me to run the risk. Before doing so, I laid the whole case before the high priest, and he decided that the matter should be fully discussed in the temple on the following evening, and the opinion of those present taken; for it was to the interest of all that the experiment should be successful, and even necessary, as he pointed out, that I should be aided by whatever help they collectively might be able to offer.

”When we were gathered together, I stood up and briefly told my reasons for wishing to again return to my own land. It was not necessary to use many words to such an audience. Some were able to read my inmost thoughts; some to see the place and people I wished to visit; some even to recall every detail of my past life. There was, however, not one there who could foretell the future, not one who knew if I should return to them again, for even the higher spirits know not what shall be. One and only One can penetrate the dark cloud which hangs over futurity. The greater the knowledge we have, the more easy do we find it to forecast the probable course of events. The parent can prophesy to his child, and the wise reveal to the foolish many things that seem hidden, for nature moves by law; but neither man nor spirit is able to do more than this. Yet I realized that a feeling of confidence was in each heart, and that I should be aided by all the

united power present. For myself, I cared little whether I failed or not: only my wish to help Vera, and the hope that I might be of use to others, made me anxious to return to the body.

"A solemn silence followed, after which it was decided that I should not go forth alone. Two of those present were chosen to accompany me in spirit, while their bodies were entranced; and the others would remain in the temple watching us, that if it were possible to aid me in any way, assistance might be given.

"At last the moment arrived, and Luloor and Karman, the two who had been chosen to accompany me, lay down, and as their bodies seemed to pass from wakeful activity into deathlike slumber, I became conscious of their spiritual presences lingering over me, waiting for the time when I should join them. Not only were they present, but the temple was thronged with countless spirits ready to welcome me into the world of freedom which lies so close, and yet so far away from our material earth.

"It is not possible to describe in language, nor would I do so even if possible, how the spirit may disperse these various chemical bonds which form its vesture here. To one watching, the form seems to dissolve as the various elements pass into the air, even as when by the influence of intense heat the solid metal becomes transformed into invisible gases.

"The views which many people, even though well educated, hold with regard to matter are most extraordinary. Without acknowledging it, they consider anything that is solid as on quite a distinct plane from that which is liquid or gaseous, and though they are well aware of the fact that it requires but a comparatively slight alteration in temperature to turn this solid earth into a ball of gas, even this knowledge does not really affect their unconscious prejudice. So again with regard to the views held about the body: though even a child can tell you that the body is for ever changing, how few can realize when they meet some loved friend who has been absent a few years that the hand they touch is not the same they touched at parting; that the eye which looks into theirs is a strange one; and that not one single particle of the body before them have they ever seen before! The spirit alone remains. How many bodies do we bury before the final funeral day comes round? Why should we care more for the last fragments than for the lesser fragments gone before? We gather from the water, earth, and air, directly or indirectly, all our spirit's clothing. We use these gifts a little time, and then return them to the givers. In man's present state the will acts unconsciously, our animal instincts drawing slowly such particles as they require. With a higher knowledge the spirit acts more directly upon matter, ruling it, and with conscious power attracting or repelling the elements at will; but there is no more violation of natural law in such seeming miracles than there is in the machinery which can turn out in less than a second some work which in

years gone by may have taken a man days of labour to accomplish.

"It is, of course, the same with the material covering of the body, save that to gather together particles such as are required for clothing is far simpler and easier than to draw those required for the more complicated formation of the human form.

"For instance, there were many present among the priests who could bring together any combinations of gaseous matters and convert them into whatsoever they wished that had not life. Thus even gold was considered here of no value. They could create the outer semblance of some of the lower forms of life, though in no case is it possible to give the spirit of life–even in its lowest form, such as is the plants, for this divine gift is eternal, and cometh and goeth by the will of the Creator alone.

"But to return to the scene in the temple. As I stood in the midst of the white-robed assembly of mortals, encircled by the countless host of spirit forms, the fear of destroying my one link to the earth passed away, and I began to free myself from the bondage of the body; not as I had hitherto done, by quitting it, but by force of will and through knowledge taught me in the spirit-world. I let the particles which formed it free, changing them into those few elementary substances from which, through a rearrangement of atoms, our complicated structure is composed. Thus, while those around could still notice no change in the apparently sleeping forms of Luloor and Karman, my body had become invisible. The great experiment had so far proved successful, though it still remained a matter of uncertainty whether I should be able to regain my material form.

"It had been arranged beforehand, in order better to dispel the anxiety of those who were watching, and to avoid any additional risk, that on this first occasion my spirit should not wander far, but return soon and recall, if possible, its material shape. I believe that it was owing to this precaution that I was successful, for not only was I able thus to receive the aid of every member of the society, but the shorter the time that the spirit is in freedom, the less difficult is it to return to a bodily existence. It will suffice for the present to say that I succeeded, and from that day continually made fresh experiments, staying away longer, and returning to the body at various places, each time at a greater distance from the temple.

"At first my spirit was always accompanied by Luloor and Karman, but as I grew more confident, I began to dispense first with one and then with both my companions. At last, without difficulty I could take up a new form in any part of the world, and in one sense the limitations of time and space were partially removed.

"It has been necessary for me to dwell thus briefly on my life at Aphar to enable you to understand my further relations with Vera; but I have purposely

avoided going into any unnecessary details, and do not intend to refer again to the matter at present. Indeed, if it had been possible to make myself intelligible without mentioning the subject, I should have preferred it. But it would have been hopeless otherwise to explain the power which I acquired, and the entire alteration in my views of life which dated from this time; for this experience changed and revolutionized my character in such a way that it would have been impossible for you to follow my further actions with any degree of comprehension.

"I propose now to let you have an account of what was taking place in England during my absence, but I shall let Vera tell it to you herself, in her own words, or rather it shall seem to you that this is so. But remember that the girl will appear to you as she was at the time, not only in appearance, but in thought and character."

Even as Alan Sydney spoke I found myself in complete darkness; then I heard Vera's voice.

"I have come," she said, "to tell you the story of my life after Alan left me and went to India."

As she was speaking the light once more fell softly on the room; my late companion had gone, and I was alone save for the presence of the beautiful girl, whose weak yet lovely face I have already endeavoured to describe.

PART III

CHAPTER IX

"Listen!" Vera said, moving forward and sitting down on the couch beside me. "It is a strange experience. My position, to begin with, was unusual and somewhat upsetting to a girl of only eighteen. I was married to Lord Vancome, a man I did not even like, who had moreover disappeared; while the man I admired and trusted had also left England, after giving me a large fortune. I was in possession of Somerville, my husband's ancestral home, and of all his estates, neither of which had he power to enter without my consent. My father, whom I had always believed to be wealthy, would also soon be dependent upon my generosity.

"The day that Alan left, his lawyer arrived from London, and explained

the position to me. Being married, I had become freed from all parental control; the estates and money were tied up in such a manner that my husband could not touch them; and, to my surprise, I found out from the conversation that a thousand pounds a year would be paid to Lord Vancome as long as he took no steps to interfere with my inclinations, but that should he at any time take legal action to compel me to live with him, this payment would be stopped.

"The lawyer also explained how, in the event of my husband taking this step, which seemed very improbable, the law could be easily avoided by a person who was, like myself, in possession of a large private fortune.

"Having made all these complicated details as plain as possible, and after advising me to consult him before taking any important step, he asked to see my father.

"What passed at this interview I do not know, but from that day I was treated by my parents in a way differing considerably from anything hitherto experienced. I was flattered, petted, and allowed to do exactly what I pleased without comment or rebuke.

"We soon decided to leave Heather Lodge, and spend a short time in London, after which I had made up my mind to go with my parents and live at Somerville. Nothing of importance happened during our stay in town. My father was busily engaged in making arrangements with his creditors, whilst I spent most of my time in the new delight of shopping on my own account.

"Somerville had been bought, together with all the old pictures, tapestries, and furniture which had belonged to my husband's family, so that I was spared the expense of furnishing a large house. But there were, nevertheless, opportunities for extravagance open even in this direction, to say nothing of dress and jewellery, so that the days passed pleasantly.

"It was not till May that I first saw my new home, and even then I left London with regret. My father had gone down two or three times to see that everything was in order. Servants had been engaged, and the place was quite comfortable when we arrived.

"Somerville is a fine old house, but unfortunately the man who had decided upon the position chose it with more regard to appearance than health. In the park around, which covers about a thousand acres, there are hundreds of what modern builders would call 'eligible and imposing sites,' yet this perverse man placed his building in a hollow, surrounded on three sides by rising ground, opening only to the south. The slopes are covered with magnificent trees; a stream rushes down behind the building and falls over a beautiful waterfall into a lake. This expanse of water, the foliage and enclosing hills, make the situation relaxing, and in summer time the air is very oppressive.

"I was, however, at first much too delighted with the place to think of these

defects. We arrived on a beautiful evening, bright, yet cool; the sunset made a lovely background for the trees. Through gaps in the dark foliage the red light fell in patterns on the moss-covered stone roofing of the house, or was reflected from the surface of the lake. The birds were singing gaily, their song mingling pleasantly with the sound of falling water. There had been heavy rain, and the air was full of the sweet, yet bitter, smell of earth, decaying leaves, and spring flowers.

"The house, which had been built during the reign of Charles I., was a long, low, stone building, with mullioned windows. It gave the idea of being larger than it really was, but owing to its moderate proportions, the rooms were very comfortable. There was little oak to be seen in the house, the panelling and furniture throughout being of mahogany, which was nearly black with age. The walls were covered with tapestry, pictures, armour, and many relics of bygone sport.

"While looking round I thought of my husband, and tried to picture him as a child playing in the old rooms. For a moment I wished that he were there and could tell me the stories connected with some of the relics.

"'Father,' I said, 'we shall, after all, have to ask Vancome down, if only to learn something about my new family history.'

"A look of annoyance passed over my father's face, and he answered crossly–

"'Nonsense, child! I hope you will not think of such a thing! There is an old housekeeper who has been here for goodness knows how many years; I kept her on that she might be useful. Whatever you want to know Mrs. King will no doubt be able to tell you.' Then, apparently remembering the altered position of affairs, his voice changed as he continued, 'Well, dearest, and what do you think of your new home? It is a lovely place for a young girl to be mistress of, and if sensible she will be in no hurry to hand it over to any spendthrift master. Should you require a little knowledge or advice, who can give it you better than your father? In me, little one, you will find a man who is willing to take the trouble and responsibility off your hands, and at the same time leave you free to do just as you choose.'

"This was not the first time that I had noticed how strongly my father was opposed to the idea of any meeting taking place between my husband and myself. I am now inclined to fancy that the reason we left London at the commencement of the season was owing more to his influence than to my own inclination. He had always been picturing to me the delights of country life in my new home; and it is quite possible that the fear of Vancome returning to London had a good deal to do with his action. Nor did he confine himself to this course only. Every story he could rake up which presented my husband in a vile or ridiculous light

was repeated to me, and I have since found out that many of these reports were highly coloured. My mother, in a feeble way, backed him up.

"'Darling,' she said to me on the night of our arrival, when I went up to her room to kiss her before going to bed; 'what a lucky girl you are! Marriage is not by any means all that you young people think, even if by some rare chance you do secure a good husband. To be tied down to one man, and have to put up with all his little fads, jealousies, or tempers; never to be able to call a day your own, or to make friends of one of the other sex without the possibility of a scene! Well, most of us have to take the chance of this kind of life at the best, or go unprovided for; while you, owing to the generosity of Alan Sydney, have, without any of the disadvantages, everything you can desire–wealth, freedom, and position. With such a fortune the world is at your feet, if only you keep that scamp of a husband of yours at arm's-length. Without your consent he can do nothing, but if you once allow him to get a footing here again, good-bye to your happiness, your money, and your power. Do not forget what I have said, dearest, and run away now, for I am very much done up after my journey.'

"As I lay in bed that night I thought over what my mother had said. How changed were these opinions now from those she had expressed a year ago! Then it seemed that marriage was the one aim of a girl's life; that love had some meaning, though she had always told me that love and poverty never long exist hand-in-hand. But what glowing pictures she had painted of wealthy married life! Now we had ascended to a higher plane still, and I found the three degrees of comparison–first, love and poverty; then love and riches; and best of all, riches without love. I was, however, rather doubtful if this last stage would satisfy me for long, though I failed to see any remedy. Alas! I loved the wrong man, and regretted deeply the folly which had persuaded me to throw him over on that unlucky night.

"But it was useless to dwell on the past; so, trying to fancy that I was as fortunate as my parents seemed to think, I cried a little, and fell asleep, wondering what I was crying about.

"That night I had a most unpleasant dream. I thought I heard a sound as of some one moving in the house, and though trembling with fear, I got out of bed and went to the door to listen. Some one was evidently coming along the landing which led to my room. After trying the handle to make sure that my door was locked, I turned round with the intention of getting into bed, but found, much to my dismay, that I was no longer in my own room, but in the hall down-stairs. In front of me on the further wall hung a picture–a portrait of myself. The eyes seemed turned to me with a look of deep, pitiful interest. While standing thus in wonder, the door behind me opened. I turned, yet though the sound of footsteps passed me and went on toward the picture, I could see no one.

”Then it seemed to me as though this invisible presence cut with a knife round the edges of the canvas, and the painting fell forward with its face on the floor, leaving a deep black hole through which the stars could be seen to glimmer in the heaven, whilst at the same minute a gust of cold wind came into the room.

”But worse was to follow, for through this strange doorway into the outer night, three horrible winged creatures like bats entered with noiseless flight, followed by a large owl. These foul vampires fluttered around me, and as I fiercely fought at the winged brutes, striving to drive them from me, the owl, which had settled on the picture-frame, sat blinking its eyes and rolling its head from side to side. At last, utterly exhausted, I sank down upon the ground, and the hideous creatures fell upon me, biting through my thin covering, and staining the white linen with my blood.

”Then through the dark opening a snow-white dove passed, as a streak of moonlight, into the room and fluttered over me, and its soft eyes were turned to mine. No sooner, however, did the vampires become conscious of its presence, than leaving me with one accord they rose upward and tried to seize it. Scarcely had their loathly forms, however, come in contact with the white fluttering wings, than, as though struck by some flash of unseen lightning, they fell lifeless on my breast; and at the horror of their dead touch I awoke! Yet even as I looked around my room the blinking eyes and nodding head of the owl seemed still before me.

”I sat up, listening, and stared into the darkness. The sound of footsteps and the opening and shutting of doors could be distinctly heard. It had doubtless been such sounds that had in some way influenced my dream.

”I was now wide-awake, and could distinguish my father’s voice speaking to one of the servants, so all fear of the supernatural vanished. I struck a match, and drawing a warm wrapper over me went out on to the landing to discover the cause of the disturbance. I had barely opened my door before a maid with blanched face came hurrying towards me.

”’Please, my lady,’ she said, ’Mr. Soudin wants you in your mother’s room at once;’ and not waiting for me to ask a question she hurried on.

”Frightened by the girl’s expression, I ran down the passage, but on reaching my mother’s door, hesitated. It was partially opened, and I could hear the sound of rambling speech. Then for a moment there was silence, but as I entered a piercing cry made me hasten forward.

”The fire cast a lurid light over the room, throwing shadows now here, now there, upon the objects around. My father stood beside the bed, his face turned from me, as he held a glass in one hand and with the other supported my mother, who was sitting up surrounded with pillows. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes fixed as though upon some horrible vision.

”I am afraid that I never loved my parents, though it is not easy to say why,

for in a certain sense they had always been kind to me. They had fed, clothed, and educated, but never really made a companion of me. My father was always either engaged in business or pleasure, and my presence as a rule seemed to irritate him. My mother had, almost before I can remember, given up interest in any one; she spent her time chiefly in reading novels, and gave as a reason for thus neglecting her duties the bad health and excessive nervousness which made every movement or sound torture to her. Before marriage she had been a recognized beauty, and for many years enjoyed the gaiety of social life; but at last she had fallen under the influence of some preacher who had thoroughly frightened her. Then for a time she devoted herself to various charitable undertakings, and found religious dissipation in attending conferences and comparing sensations with those who were similarly affected. But this enthusiasm did not last. Finally, she developed a distinct form of hysteria, all her time being devoted either to her health or books, the latter romances either of religious or purely sensational emotion.

"As a child I had been left to nurses and governesses, seldom allowed to enter my mother's room, and whenever the opportunity occurred, it was quite apparent that I was there on sufferance, and that the sooner I left the better it would be for every one concerned. When old enough I was sent to school, and as I was nearly seventeen when I left, you can fancy that my associations with home life were not strong. But though my love may have been weak, it did not prevent me from feeling both pity and terror as I looked on my mother.

"Up to this time I had never been brought face to face either with acute suffering or death. As I stood in helpless perplexity, her rambling words still more alarmed me.

"'I see it all!' she cried. 'Damned! after all I am damned!–Look! the road is broad, and hedged in on both sides with flowers–let me get out of it.–Ah! I cannot!–The thorns cut into my flesh, look–look!–did I not say so?–The smoke is rising there in the distance;–it is coming this way, a great cloud sweeping over me–suffocating me.'

"With a terrible cry she struggled violently for a moment with her hands, tearing wildly at her throat; then with an awful groan she fell back dead!

"I will not dwell upon what followed, or how my father, who had never seemed to care for her in life, now that she was gone referred to her as the only bond which had bound him to earth. He, however, soon grew resigned to what he called 'the mysterious dispensations of Providence.' I had, moreover, during the weeks that followed, to put up with what was to me an exceedingly painful form of retrospection on his part, which usually took place after dinner.

"'My dear,' he would begin, 'if only we could foresee the future, how differently should we act! Many a time have I felt peevish and irritable because your

sainted mother was unable to fulfil those duties which her station in life required. It is true that at times I considered there was little excuse for this neglect; but I have been chastened, greatly chastened for such suspicion. A divine Providence has torn from me the jewel which I failed to value, and I must now wander alone through this valley of tears. But resignation, my child–resignation! In vain do we kick against the pricks, and draw our sword to contend with fate. Let us rather ponder on the lesson thus given us, that we may be purged from our evil ways!'

"This sort of talk would continue for some time; the more depressed he became, the more necessary he seemed to find it to continue filling up and emptying his glass, till at last the tears of emotion mingled with the port, and he sank back in his easy chair, to meditate, I suppose, with his eyes shut.

"During the day he seemed fairly cheerful, and spent much of his time with the gamekeepers; for, as he explained to me, it was absolutely necessary for the place to be properly kept up, so that when the shooting season came round, I might be able to entertain my friends. No doubt he meant his friends, but that was the way he put it.

"While he was thus busying himself with outdoor matters, I had the indoor arrangements to attend to, which threw me much in the way of Mrs. King. She was a dear old character; but had my father known her sentiments, it is probable that he would never have engaged her.

"She entirely refused to accept the present position of things, and treated my separation from Vancome as a little temporary joke, which it was her duty to bring to an end as speedily as possible.

"'My dear lady,' she said one day, after giving me a more than usually long piece of family history, 'I shall be glad when Master Frank–my lord, I mean–comes back. Such a nice young man as he is, too, and the prettiest child he was for miles round. You should just have seen the way as every one did spoil him. There were no resisting of his pretty ways. A bit larky, I know, but bless your heart, boys ain't worth much if they don't show spirit! Pity it were his poor dear father and mother both died afore he was a bit older; for though my lord, as was, did give him a free hand, he wouldn't have let him gamble away the old place, so that his wife, bless her, had to buy it back again–not he!'

"'But you don't think I am going to live with him again?' I said. 'It is true that in a foolish moment I married him, but then things were different; I didn't know what he was like, and very likely you have no idea of what he is now. You should hear of the way he goes on in London! It is not the gambling I mind so much, though that is bad enough; but the actresses and ballet-girls with whom he associates–oh! it is simply awful!'

"'Oh! my poor, dear, innocent lady!–whoever can have gone a-talking to you about such things! But, bless your heart! you believe an old woman, there

ain't no real badness in Master Frank. He always was a bit too fond perhaps of a pretty face, but then all of 'em is much the same. It is the girl's fault, I reckon, nine times out of ten; and many's the day I've had to bustle off some young minx of a housemaid, or maybe even a scullery wench, for the way they'd carry on, and he no more than a boy of fifteen! I ain't got any patience, that I haven't, with the girls of the present day! No self-respect, or keeping in their place. Why, I've even heard 'em a'quarrelling as to which he were fondest of, and which he had kissed last. But I soon had the hussies out of the house in those days! And I got pretty careful about the choice of their successors; they weren't overdone with good looks the next lot, I can tell you! Well, you see, when a young man goes out like into the world, he has got to sow his wild oats a bit afore he settles down; but you take an old woman's word for it, the young lord's good at heart, and happy you'll make me when I see the two of you together. Ay! and when I hold the young lord that is to be in these arms, as I did his father nigh on twenty-seven years ago!'

"After this manner and, as I got to know her better, in an even more familiar strain, did the old housekeeper do her best to alter my decision. Her arguments might have lacked logic, but she was a clever old thing in her way, and the love which she really felt for her young lord was more powerful than her justification of his faults. The stories of his childhood, picked doubtless out of many less attractive, were always in his favour, and showed his bravery, affection, and brightness. What, however, influenced me more than anything else were her pictures of the romantic side of married life, which differed entirely from anything I had been led to fancy. She would conclude a long rambling discourse on the subject in this manner–

"'Ah! little can you know what a woman misses as never has a chance of being loved–never can turn her mind back to the joys which come flocking down on a bride. Thanks be to heaven! I knowed it, though it weren't for long. But when I looks at an old maid, why I feels just fit to cry. To have gone through life and not know nothing about it! Never to have felt that there was one man as loved you, and would have done anything to call you his own–to feel each year as it goes by that your chance is getting less of waking out of this sort of half-and-half existence, and beginning to live! It is just this. A girl as isn't married ain't natural; and things as ain't natural ain't good in no ways. We was told to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and they as can and don't, is to

my mind going right dead against Scripture!'"

CHAPTER X

"Two months passed, and it is probable that soon I might have tired of the monotony of this existence, had not my school-friend, Amy Howell, come to stay with me. She was one of a large family, and her father, a country clergyman, having recently lost money, had now some difficulty in making both ends meet.

"At school we had been great friends; she was a year older than myself, and as great a contrast in appearance as in disposition. Her short, black, and rather coarse hair curled round a pretty forehead; she had a dark, clear complexion–the colour of cream in which a few drops of coffee have been mixed; a bright, deep colour; full, pretty-shaped, pouting lips, ever ready and ever seeming ready for kisses; while the natural gaiety of her nature peeped through the thick lashes which partially concealed her large hazel eyes.

"She possessed a fortunate knack of always being able to make herself agreeable, and of appearing to take an interest in any subject that might arise. Her enemies called her insincere, a flatterer, and time-server; but I cannot say that I ever noticed these faults myself. Her worst enemy could not have called her dull.

"She soon became a great favourite with my father, who found her a sympathetic listener to his woes whenever he felt disposed to air them. Mrs. King could not speak too highly of her, and the servants were unanimous in their praise of her consideration and kindness.

"'It is surprising why people are ever nasty,' she said to me one day, when I was commenting on her popularity. 'It is so easy to make people like you if you only try. To be cross with others makes one cross with oneself. Now you, for instance, are always kind, and think what a happy life you have!'

"'I don't know so much about my kindness,' I answered; 'any way, it's quite a different thing from yours. Now look at the way you got over old Mrs. Scott yesterday; I simply can't bear the woman, with her conceited vulgarity!–and her patronizing manner puts all my bristles up. I feel I could scratch her! While if she had been your lover instead of an ugly old woman, you could hardly have appeared more affectionate!'

"'Well, perhaps I'm not quite so naturally truthful as you are, dear,' she said. 'I do not like her myself, but why should we show it? It's so nice to be liked; and you never know when it may be to your advantage to make a friend, and I'm sure it is never any good to make an enemy. She might set some one against me whom I might really like. Besides, the truth is this–I cannot help it. Whenever I see a person, male or female, young or old, a distinct inclination comes over me to purr. I want them to take notice of me, and stroke my back; so if they do not start at once I'm obliged to rub softly against their feet, and let them know I require a caress. I read a book once about the transmigration of souls, or something of that kind, which said that people have been animals once. It's rather a funny idea! I like to fancy what each person has passed through in a previous existence. I think I must have died an untimely death as a kitten, and have to work out the rest of the purring stage here.'

"'What do you think I looked like in the last stage?' I asked.

"'Oh, I think you were a fawn, and it is that which makes you shun that old spotted leopardess, so that you feel inclined to retire into the next cover, you poor little timid thing, hiding away even from your husband!'

"'Why, you don't think I'm afraid of him,' I asked, 'do you?'

"'Well, how can I tell? If I had a husband I rather fancy I should be wanting to have him handy. Wouldn't I just make him wild about me! Of course I know how you feel, and the way he has acted. No doubt you are quite right; but I should want to make him sorry that he couldn't take me in his arms; and shouldn't I just make him jealous! Look at your position. Don't I wish that I had your chances! He can't come unless you let him, so you can do as you please; ask a lot of nice people to the house, and enjoy yourself. I should flirt a little perhaps! It's wrong; but you know I don't set up to be good, and I'm certain it would be impossible for me to resist the temptation. Then I'd take care to let him know all about it. Yes, dear, that would be the way to punish him–drive him mad with jealousy! You may be quite certain that he manages to find out all about your doings, and I call it just pampering him the way you go on. He knows you're quite safe, no doubt. Mr. Sydney's gone to India; you are shut up with your father and your school-friend, while he is free to enjoy himself, and knows that one day he will be forgiven, and can well afford to wait.'

"'He is quite mistaken if he thinks that, I can tell you!' I answered rather angrily, being annoyed with the way she had put the case.

"'That may be,' she said, jumping up and giving me a kiss; 'but men are so conceited, dearest, and when he hears that you are moping here–they are sure to tell him you are moping, because women are always supposed to mope in the eyes of the male sex when deprived of their company–he'll believe it. Besides, think what people will say–that your husband was tired of you in less than a

week, and that you are waiting here in solitude till he sees well to return. No, if I were you, he and the world should see that you don't want him, and that there are plenty of people dying to fall in love with you. Men never care for what they can have–at least, so it's said. But if you leave the thing to me, I'll answer for it we will bring him as a beggar to these gates before many months are over, and he will cry to be let in on any terms!'

"'But I won't have him on any terms,' I said. 'Nothing would induce me to live with him.'

"'Oh! that doesn't matter at all,' she replied, 'so long as we bring him to the door. There is no fun shutting the portal to one who thinks the place not worth an assault. People never believe in the old maid's desire for celibacy, unless she produces her proposals. That is why I intend to make all my lovers propose by letter; then when I'm an old maid, I shall have them framed and hung round the room, with photographs of the best-looking, and incomes of the wealthiest underneath.'

"I have given this conversation rather fully, as it may help you to understand my friend's character, and also how the changes in our manner of life, of which I am going to tell you, came about; for this talk, and many on the same subject, no doubt influenced me more than I fancied at the time.

"I was bitterly angry with my husband, and the fact that he had made no sign of wishing to see me aggravated the feeling. I heard from my father that he had returned, and pictured him enjoying his life in town. The idea that he imagined that I was quietly waiting his coming, was unbearable, and after a little opposition, I eventually adopted the plan which Amy suggested.

"Somerville is about five miles from the Cathedral City of L—-. It is a gay little place, owing chiefly to the barracks, which are situated about a mile on our side of the town. The large number of officers quartered there at this time favoured our plan.

"I left all the arrangements to Amy; her brain was better fitted for the work, and she wasted no time in setting about her task. She persuaded my father it was absolutely necessary for his health, that he should have some congenial company to assist him with the port, and to cheer him up during his smoke. She showed such pity for his lonely state that, one evening when I happened to come into the room rather suddenly I found her kneeling at his side, and if I am not mistaken, she was even allowing him to give her a fatherly kiss. I don't remember feeling envious, but it vexed me, and she evidently noticed that I was annoyed, for before we parted that night, she said–

"'Your poor old father seemed so overcome when I spoke of his lonely evenings, that I could not help showing a little sympathy; but I think I've worked it all right. At first he said that he wanted no change–that he was contented in

his present position. That was just when you came in. But when you left us alone together again, I tried another plan. I can see he does not like the idea of Lord Vancome coming back here, so I pointed out that if you were deprived of all society you would perhaps get tired of this kind of life, and want to change it. He then questioned me about you, and I incidentally mentioned that you had recently complained of never seeing any one, and that you had spoken on more than one occasion of your husband. That roused him. 'She must have society,' he said, 'you're quite right, my dear. I will see to it. I will ask one or two of the young fellows over from the barracks. There is Captain Frint, and Major Jackson, both capital fellows. I've played whist with them once or twice at the Conservative Club in L—-.'

"I told her that she was a bad girl, and that she had no right to have spoken about me in that way; but she only laughed and kissed me, saying I was a sweet, pretty little innocent, who would turn the heads of fifty captains. Then she tripped off to her room, humming to herself–

'Where are you going, my pretty maid?'

"I fell asleep trying to answer the question.

"My father kept his word. The next morning he said that if I had no objection he was going to invite some friends over to dine, so that he might have a little whist in the evening. On the following Thursday evening they came: Colonel Collins, Major Jackson, and Captain Frint.

"As soon as Amy and I were alone together in the drawing-room, I asked her what she thought of the selection.

"'A 1,' she replied. 'The old Colonel seems a dull old boy, but Captain Frint will do for you splendidly as a start, while the Major shall be taken in hand by your humble servant. He looks a bit dangerous; it will be safer, therefore, if I take the risk, as should he be troublesome, it is easier for me to slip out of his clutches, but as you live here it might be awkward. Does the plan suit you?'

"'I don't know that I quite understand what you mean,' I replied; 'but I certainly prefer Captain Frint to the Major, and as for the old Colonel, he is quite impossible; he wouldn't make a bridegroom of eighty jealous!'

"Thus in comparative innocence we set the ball rolling, which was to carry both of us to the very border of destruction.

"The whist party did not come off that evening. Through the influence of the younger men, it was turned into a card-game which could include six. We played for money, and though the stakes were low I was rather uncomfortable about Amy, as I knew she could ill afford to lose even a small sum. Fortune,

however, favoured her, and she rose from the table two or three pounds richer for the night's play; while, chiefly owing to my ignorance of the game, and a certain recklessness, I was a considerable loser.

"It was a bright moonlight night, and as my father and the Colonel seemed anxious to continue playing cards, we left them to try their luck at piquet, allowing ourselves to be persuaded by the younger men to go out for a stroll. At first we kept close together, but Amy soon carried the Major off to show him some view of the waterfall, and I found myself alone with Captain Frint.

"We walked for some time in silence; my companion seemed absorbed in thought, and I took the opportunity of studying his face carefully. His skin, which was clear and pale, in this light looked unnaturally white. His features were well formed, and finely cut, while the intensity of shadow added to the effect, giving his face a statuesque coldness and nobility; his head was uncovered, and I noticed from the first, how well-shaped was its outline: his forehead, which was naturally broad, seemed even larger than it really was, as the hair had receded from the temples. The lower part of the face was disappointing, the jaw too small, the mouth and chin effeminate.

"I was thus taking stock of my companion, when he turned and our eyes met.

"'How rude you will think me, Lady Vancome!' he said; 'the scene here is so like fairyland, that for a few moments I forgot my own existence, though conscious of yours. I'm rather given to these fits of absent-mindedness, which are evidently caused by some defect of the brain, for if anything interests me, my faculties go to sleep. I was just wondering whether fancy was not the only reality, and science a very dull fairy tale, for when our companions disappeared round the corner, they left me in sole possession of the Garden of Eden.'

"'Had it not been for the inconvenient presence of Eve, whom you were doubtless trying to forget.' I said this thoughtlessly; then, seeing the trap in which I had so easily been caught, I felt a hot blush pass over me as I continued–'But don't let me disturb you, Captain Frint. I would on no account interrupt your pleasant dream, and will join the others.'

"'Don't go,' he said, putting out his hand as though to stop me. 'Eden without Eve was found too dull for Adam, and I should be deprived even of his occupation. There are no beasts here to name.'

"'You can let loose your inventive faculty,' I said, 'and when you have finished with the animals you can invent Eve. You see, as fancy is the only reality, there can be no difficulty in the matter.'

"'But even fancy,' he replied, 'requires inspiration, and if you leave me, its light will be extinguished. Don't you know that as it takes two to quarrel, it takes two for inspiration–the inspirer and the inspired? Even children don't care

to play alone. Do you not sometimes find it dull in this lovely home of yours? But I forgot, you have a companion, and I should fancy a bright and lively one. I suppose, however, that your husband will soon be back now: I heard that he was suddenly called away to America shortly after your marriage. It must have been very annoying to both of you!'

"What could I say? It had never occurred to me before that sooner or later it would be necessary to explain things. It was quite evident that whether I did so or not, people would soon hear of my husband's return to England. It seemed therefore better to give my own version rather than allow some worse report to get about, so I answered–

"'I would rather not go into the matter, but perhaps I ought to say that my marriage was a mistake, and that I think it very improbable that you will ever see Lord Vancome here!'

"Captain Frint looked at me for a moment, evidently so taken aback that he was unable to speak. It was quite plain that no report of the scandal had hitherto reached him. Then his manner changed: the half flippant tone in which he had before spoken was no longer noticeable as he said–

"'I am very sorry indeed. I had no idea of your trouble, or of course should not have referred to the subject. I hope you will forgive me.'

"'There is nothing to forgive,' I said. 'You must have known some time, and now I shall feel more comfortable when we meet. But do not let others know what I have told you; for though it is sure to come out, there is no occasion to make one's private affairs public while it is possible to keep them quiet.'

"'You may trust me,' he answered; 'and I shall always consider it a favour to be allowed to help you at any time and in any way. You have, I know, your father, but there are occasions perhaps when a younger man might be of some service. In any case I hope you will look upon me as your friend.'

"As he was speaking I heard the sound of laughter, and Amy called out to know where we were hiding. When she and her companion came up, she assured us that they had been looking all over the place to find us, which, considering that we had never moved from the terrace, seemed rather ridiculous.

"As I was never fond of sleeping alone, I had recently persuaded Amy to share my room, and this gave us extra time for conversation. As soon as the maid had left us on this eventful evening, I asked Amy what she thought of the first result of her scheme.

"'Capital!' she replied, 'things could not be moving better. Your father has a companion who suits him, so have I, and from what I could see you appear to be getting on fairly well.'

"When I told her what had passed, she laughed, saying that I was a born flirt with all my seeming artlessness, and that to arrive at the Adam and Eve stage the

first evening was fairly good; but to end in private confidence about my relations with my husband was even better.

"I asked her how she got on with the Major, saying that she seemed pretty merry on her return.

"'Oh! he's just delightful!' she replied, 'but such a humbug! He tried to talk in epigrams, but as he is not over good at it, and endeavours to make them complimentary, the result was ludicrous. This is the kind of thing, you know.' And she mimicked his voice and rather affected drawl. 'Nature is only natural when cultivated, and in your presence I feel that woman is only cultivated when natural.–As a girl puts on reserve she drops refinement.–The sound of gentle laughter is a sign of gentle breeding; the suggestion of prudery the seal of plutocracy; the coyness of the lips shows a canker in the life.' When he got to this point I thought it best to turn back. On our return journey he perpetrated the following atrocity–'Two minus two is represented by the circle of eternal content: two plus two by a right angle which some unkindly fate has crossed.'

"'The great advantage of this kind of conversation is that you never have any occasion to understand it unless you like; the worst of the habit that it sometimes tempts the man to risk a remark which he dare not produce without its swaddling-bands. He must exhaust his brain terribly with the effort, and no doubt this is the reason that those who go in for this kind of affectation often seem so terribly stupid.'"

CHAPTER XI

"During the following month we made many new acquaintances, but the Major and Captain Frint were by far our most frequent visitors. Either Amy got over her dislike to epigrams, or her companion, on becoming more familiar with her, dropped the affectation, for they seemed fast friends.

"Captain Frint, on the other hand, while seeming anxious to be with me, was strangely reserved, and the restraint which he obviously kept over his feelings piqued and irritated me. Whatever women may say to the contrary, I fancy that they seldom like a man to show that he is able to keep his admiration too completely under control. It tends rather to awaken a distrust in the force of attraction, and we would rather that he at times forgot himself sufficiently to enable us to rebuke and chastise him.

”From what I could gather, Amy had nothing to complain of in this respect from her admirer; in fact she told me that there was some difficulty in keeping him within reasonable bounds. Her kitten-like nature probably encouraged him to show more familiarity than he might otherwise have thought prudent. As he was very wealthy I could not help wishing that Amy’s attractions might prove strong enough to lead to a proposal before very long; and this scheme of mine seemed sufficient justification for the encouragement of intimacy between them.

”In following out this plan it was of course necessary that I should be thrown more often in the company of his friend than otherwise might have been considered prudent, for though accepting Amy’s suggestion to a certain extent, I had no intention of going beyond a little harmless flirtation.

”It had been arranged that on a certain day, we four, accompanied by my father, should ride over to Hanston Castle, a ruin which was locally considered of great interest. On the day fixed my father had an attack of gout which prevented his coming, but as I was now competent to act as chaperon, we did not think it necessary to alter our plans.

”It was a lovely summer morning on which our military escort arrived. We had decided to start early and lunch at a small inn near the Castle; spend some little time wandering about, and return as soon as the air was sufficiently cool to make riding pleasant. We found it very hot going over, and I felt quite done up before we had come to the end of our twelve miles’ ride. Everything was in readiness for us at the inn, thanks to the forethought of our companions, who had sent over some provisions beforehand.

”It was too hot, however, to enjoy even the excellent cold lunch provided, but the iced champagne was like nectar after our exertion. It may be that without knowing it we all drank more freely than usual. Personally, as we wandered round the old ruin afterwards, I felt conscious of more dreamy contentment than usual, and it struck me that Amy showed even more than her wonted spirits.

”But I was not able to criticize her for long as she challenged the Major to a race, declaring that he could not catch her before she reached the flag-staff on the top of the Castle. As neither Captain Frint nor I felt inclined for violent exertion of this kind, we wandered on round the battlements till a shady corner tempted us to sit down and rest.

”Whether it was the wine or the exercise I do not know, but as I threw myself down on the soft grass in this shady spot I felt a reckless delight in existence never before known. The place was absolutely secluded; a massive, moss-covered wall rose above us on the left; on our right was the buttress round which we had just passed, while in the empty moat in front some magnificent trees were growing, the foliage of which provided us with welcome shade.

”My companion sat down beside me, and after offering a cigarette, which

I accepted, lighted one himself. For a few moments we smoked in silence, then a desire came over me to make this man who had lately seemed so cold, acknowledge that he was my slave. Not that I cared for him, but rather because I was interested to know the meaning of his late behaviour. I felt convinced that he was fascinated by me, and yet since the first evening of our acquaintance he had never said one word which could justify me in this opinion. Had it not been that whenever I turned in his direction I found that he was watching with that unmistakable look in his eyes which speaks so plainly, I might have imagined that I was wrong.

"Little by little I tried to draw him on to confession, guided by an instinct which most women possess, and which requires neither study nor thought. Often this instinct guides by ways that would seem diametrically opposed to the purpose, but which have, when followed out, the desired effect; for it is by subtle and unstudied opposition that men can most easily be overcome, and for this reason an artless girl, often without knowing it, exerts a power where the most skilful coquette would utterly fail. Nature in such cases, is a better teacher than experience, and many girls are blamed for leading men on by artifice who have never even thought on the subject.

"In the present case, however, I was not unconscious, though I allowed my natural instinct to guide me, but for some little time with small success; for though after each veiled attack my companion's face grew paler, and the look of repressed feeling was more plainly noticeable on his features, yet he continued to talk on trivial subjects, and all attempts to turn the conversation into a personal channel were adroitly set aside, though with manifest effort on his part.

"Probably when nature planned men and women it failed to make allowance for what are now called considerations of honour, and possibly this may have been the cause of my difficulty. Trusting, therefore, that it might be more easy to arrive at the desired point by starting on another path, I said–

"'Are not men supposed to be more honourable than women?'

"'I do not know,' he replied; 'but as men have more temptations to dishonour, they have more opportunity of showing off the quality and gaining credit; yet I fancy that the great battles are lost or won more often in private than in public. The noble deed that the world hears of is often the impulse of a moment–some unconscious act of heroism; there are many who can do great deeds under the inspiration of the hour, but how few can safely meet temptation day by day successfully, in moments of weakness as well as in times of strength! The day may come when the sword of honour is forgotten, and the man falls even before knowing that he is in the presence of danger.'

"'You are very solemn and dull to-day. What has happened? Are you ill?' As I said this I put out my hand and just touched his arm. 'Can I not help you in

any way? Tell me, what has been disturbing you so much lately? We are friends, you know, and friendship is a poor thing where there is no confidence. Besides, if you remember, I have already confided in you once.'

"He was trembling visibly, and looking up into his face, I knew that I had conquered.

"'I cannot tell you this,' he said; 'do not ask me.'

"'Oh, very well!' I replied, pretending not to understand him. 'Of course a girl's sympathy is not likely to be any use to you. It was absurd of me to fancy that it might be, and very probably you think I am not to be trusted.'

"'It is cruel of you to say that,' he replied. 'There is no one I would sooner trust. There is no one whose sympathy I long for more. But cannot you understand that there are some things that I may have no right to speak to you about–have no right to feel, perhaps; but our feelings we cannot always control, though our words we can.'

"'Oh, I don't want you to make me your confidant about anything which you consider I had better not hear,' I said, purposely still seeming to misunderstand him. 'Of course I can quite see that you may have something on your conscience which it would not do for you to tell me. However, I am sorry.'

"'It is not that I've done anything that could not be told to a woman,' he replied, getting up from the ground and standing over me. 'Oh! why cannot you understand that it is to you, and you only, that I may not speak, because to tell you would be to make things worse, not better?'

"'Whatever are you talking about?' I cried. 'Tell me at once what you mean. You have said either too much or too little, and I am justified in asking you to explain fully; or if you prefer to keep your secret from me, it must be at the cost of our friendship.'

"'Vera,' he said, bending over me, 'have you not seen–do you not know that I love you? Love you so deeply that, had it been possible, I should long ago have torn myself away from the scene of temptation; but oh! my love, I could not! I have striven to hide my feelings so that you might never know, and I, fool that I am! believed it was possible. All I asked was to be near you, to worship you; and what is the result? You will now despise and hate me. Had you loved your husband it would have been different, for till I knew that he had treated you badly–till I felt that you were in the sight of heaven not really his wife–I only admired you, and thought what a fortunate man he must be. But when you trusted me with this sorrow, a new feeling sprang up–a fire that could not be quenched. Oh, I know how vile I must seem in thus taking advantage of your confidence. Have I not thought over it day and night, saying to myself it is her very loneliness which should make the thought of love impossible! But I deceived myself with that old and oft-repeated deception of friendship, of self-

renunciation, of living for you. Oh, Vera, I could not help it. If you could only know how sweet, how lovely you are, you would forgive.'

"He knelt down and kissed me on the forehead; then, apparently losing all further power of control, before I could decide what to say or do, he put his arm round me and kissed me on the lips and on the eyes. I leapt up, terrified by his passion, and conscious of a strange mixture of anger and pride: anger that he should have dared thus to insult me; pride that my beauty should so far overcome his reserve and honour.

"'Captain Frint!' I said, trembling so that I could hardly speak, 'I hate you–hate you! I thought you were a man to be trusted. I hope we shall never meet again.'

"He stood before me, looking on the ground. His face was deadly pale; his features were drawn and pinched as though he were suffering from acute bodily pain.

"'You are right,' he said at last, though in so low a tone that I could barely catch the words. 'I am a brute–the vilest of men! There is no excuse, so I will not make things worse by speaking. The only thing that is possible I will do. You shall not see me again after to-day.'

"As he spoke I could hear the strange sound which his parched lips made while he stammered out the words. When he had finished, for a moment I thought he would have fainted, but after a pause he seemed to recover somewhat, and continued–

"'Vera, you can never know how I have tried to be honourable, and though you will not believe me, had I foreseen that this could have happened, I would willingly have suffered the pain of parting from you before, rather than thus have given you cause for hating me. Oh, to think that I, who worship you so, should have dared to profane those pure, sweet lips, have dared to offer you my cursed love! Why is fate so cruel? If we had met a year ago, that which is now sin might have been so different! I cannot tell–I dare not even think of it–you might have loved me! This law which now separates us would have come no longer like the angel of death between us, and what is a curse would have proved a blessing! Hell, the eternity of which stretches before me, might have been changed to the gate of heaven. Why are things so ordered that fate has made my love poison, and turned that which should have been the greatest of earth's blessings into a curse? I must never see you again–must try even not to think of you. To do the latter is impossible, but the former I will do.'

"There was no mistake possible. The words he spoke were not caused by an exaggerated impulse of the moment; still less was he acting a part. He loved me, as I thought no one had ever done before, unselfishly yet passionately. I felt certain that if I said nothing, he would keep his word, and that this would be the

last time I should have an opportunity of speaking to him. I did not like the idea of thus losing his companionship, but what was to be done? After thinking a minute, I said–

"'Captain Frint, I am very sorry that this should have happened. I quite thought that you had too much respect for me to act in the way you have done– even though you cared for me. I suppose that what you suggest is best, if you feel that your power of self-control is so weak that you cannot see without insulting the girl you profess to love. This being so, it is certainly imperative that you should go; but you must remember that if you suddenly give up calling, and act in the way proposed, people will probably talk. I can hardly think that you are so weak as, in the excitement of the moment, you fancy, and therefore if you will promise faithfully never to forget yourself in this way again, I will forgive you this once, though mind, never again. Come,' I continued, holding out my hand, 'let us be friends–mind, friends and nothing more. You must get over this silly fancy. There are plenty of nicer girls than I am, unmarried and waiting for you. To one of these you can express all those pretty sentiments without a prick of conscience.'

"'Thank you,' he said, 'I will promise not to forget, but can never hope to follow your advice. Do you think it would be possible to change so easily? You do not understand, and perhaps it is better you should not, how deeply I feel; but your forgiveness is the more generous, as this very depth of feeling is my only possible excuse.'

"We sat without speaking for a few minutes, and then he suggested that we had better go and look for our companions.

"After wandering about for some little time we found them comfortably reclining against a buttress on one of the towers. As we went up the winding steps we could hear them talking about the view. Amy, I thought, had evidently less occasion for a chaperon than had her qualified protector; but I was more doubtful about this point after having seen her face, which was flushed and showed signs of an unusual, though suppressed, excitement. The Major has proposed, I thought.

"I had no opportunity of finding out if this surmise were correct till I went up to our room that evening; and even then Amy, instead of answering my question, at first persisted in hearing what Captain Frint had been saying to me.

"'He looked like a ghost when you came up,' she said; 'whatever had you been doing to the poor man?'

"So I had to tell her, and was glad to find that she quite approved of my action, saying that it would have been a great mistake if I had let him go, and that it was only fair to punish him for his impertinence by a little extra tantalization.

"'If he had gone,' she said, 'he would have soon forgotten and taken up with

some one else. Now you can keep him miserable as long as you like, for he is a safe man, you see, even as I told you.'

"I should have felt disposed to argue the point, for her way of speaking annoyed me, but at the moment I was too anxious to hear her experience, so I said that it was her turn now to explain.

"'There is not very much to tell,' she answered; 'you came up at rather an inconvenient moment. Our friend had been giving me a long discourse on love, which rather perplexed me. At last he became more personal, and was saying that he loved me to distraction, but that for some reason he dared not at the moment ask my love in return–when we heard your footsteps down below, and he at once changed the subject.'

"'I am sorry we came so soon,' I said. 'What did he mean, I wonder?'

"'That is the curious part of it,' said Amy. And we spent half-an-hour trying to make various guesses, but not one of them came near to the mark, as we discovered later on.

"As time passed, I grew more and more annoyed with my admirer. He was polite, respectful, and reserved, but decidedly uninteresting, and evidently so afraid of falling again, and showing his love for me, that he became stiff and formal the moment we were alone together.

"Why, I thought, cannot men be more reasonable? There surely is some line between frigidity and fire. Moreover, as I got over my alarm at his first outburst of affection, I began rather to desire some sign of my influence, and even tried now and again to break through his reserve by indirect reference to what had passed between us, but for some time without avail.

"This piqued me, and one evening when we were alone together, I was seized with a mad impulse to make him break his promise.

"'I am glad to see,' I began, 'that you have got over your difficulty so easily. You know I told you at the time that you under-rated your power, and exaggerated your feeling. Certainly there has been no sign lately of a repetition of your fault. In fact I am inclined to think that you are even rather tired of my company.'

"'You are mistaken,' he answered; 'there is one way, and one way only which I dare take. If I were to go ever so little beyond it I might go too far and again offend you. It is possible to be friendly with those we care little for, and to be cold to those we love; but to be intimate without showing our true feeling with one we care for above all others is, I believe, impossible. The strain would be too great. Some time or other the line would be crossed, the veil torn aside.'

"'But,' I asked, 'don't you think you are making a good deal out of a little? Suppose you do like me, would it not be better to accept the position and have done with it? Face facts bravely. I do not love you, and in any case cannot marry you; but there is no reason why we should not be good friends. What more can

you want? It's no good being cross because you cannot have the impossible. You are worse than the love-sick maiden who fell in love with the man in the moon, for she was content to look at her idol, and you are not even satisfied with being able to talk to and see yours, but must needs sulk.'

"'You must know that it is not that,' he said. 'I am not cross, but I am afraid of myself. You cannot know how ashamed I felt after that day in the Castle, and as you were so forgiving and allowed me to see you again, it is doubly necessary for me to be on my guard.'

"'Well, you have been very good since,' I said, 'and as it is evident that you are to be trusted, for the future you may be a little more natural, and not quite so stiff and proper. You may be quite certain that I shall not for a moment allow you to go too far. But I cannot see why a man and a girl cannot be friends without the ridiculous idea they are bound to fall in love. I really believe it was nothing else than this on your part, and you must make up your mind to get over it. To help you to do this I am going to be quite open and frank with you. I shall treat you as a companion whom I like, and you can forget I am a girl, and treat me in the same way.'

"'I will try,' he said, 'but am rather doubtful of success. If you were not so pretty it would be easier.'

"'Pretty–Oh! rubbish!' I replied; 'whatever has that, even if it were true, got to do with the matter? You can make up your mind if you like, with the help of that powerful imagination of yours, that I am as ugly as sin. Don't you think you can?'

"I looked full in his face; for a moment his eyes met mine, then he turned away as I rattled on–

"'Don't you think it would be rather nice if you made up your mind to dismiss all this foolish nonsense about love, and were to try the experiment of true friendship? You could say to yourself, "Here is a girl that I like, who is willing to be friends with me, but nothing more; I will show her what an unselfish friendship means." If you will try and do that, I, for my part, will forget all about the past, and be very nice to you. I shall be very strict, but at the same time endeavour not to take offence at little things, especially if I see you are trying to be good. Now what do you say to that?'

"'Say?' he replied. 'Why, that you are far too good and noble to have anything to do with me. That if after what you have said I fail to show you true friendship, I am unworthy to be called a man! But, Vera—-' He stopped, the word had evidently escaped him accidentally.

"'Well,' I broke in, 'I don't call that a very good beginning; but after all, there is no particular reason why friends should not call each other by their Christian names.'

"'I forgot,' he stammered, 'I so often think of you by that name that it slipped out by accident.'

"'Well, never mind, I promised not to be too strict,' I answered. 'But you must take care not to forget when we are in public, because you see people are so bad they cannot understand true friendship; but to show you that I have forgiven you, I will just for once call you Albert. It's rather a nice name, and seems to suit you. I think men, when they have been a long time away from home, must feel rather lonely if they never hear their Christian name. I suppose no one now calls you that, do they?'

"'No,' he answered, 'and if you will sometimes, I shall be glad to think that no one else ever would.'

"I put my hand up as if to cover his mouth, saying, 'Hush! you are already on the verge of transgression. Now, in future, when you are talking you must watch me very carefully. If I put my hand to my lips you will know that you have said something which is objected to. If I am seriously angry, I shall put up both my hands. Now don't forget!'

"The weeks of early summer passed quickly and pleasantly by. It is true that my conscience occasionally troubled me, for the agreement which I had made with Captain Frint did not work out exactly as intended. Our friendship at times would have been open to misconception had some unseen observer been present. I will do my companion the justice he deserves, by saying at once that he seemed to strive against his love; moreover, his conscience troubled him, I fancy, more than mine disturbed me, and after each outburst of demonstration he suffered apparently from a deep fit of remorse, which struck me as rather amusing than otherwise.

"But familiarity bred contempt, and little by little we both got more callous over what I tried to justify as playing at love-making. It was some time before I had any idea that this play was likely to become serious as far as my own feelings were concerned; but after a time a suspicion arose in my mind which I tried to stifle, that some great change had taken place in my heart. I found that life had begun to assume a different aspect. Time no longer hung heavily on my hands, but was divided into about equal periods of depression and exultation. My thoughts were running on one subject–the man who loved me.

"Then for the first time I began to realize the hopeless position in which we were placed, for though I believed that to live such a life as we now enjoyed would continue to satisfy me, yet even this was manifestly impossible; and I felt regret that we had drifted thus far upon a path which could only lead to the sorrow of parting. Up to this time any consideration for my companion's feelings in the matter had never occurred to me; but now I understood, and was more sorry for him than for myself. I had come across his path, and perhaps ruined his life. He

had struggled nobly against his passion, while I had refused to let him go, and without any intention of returning his devotion had kept him from escaping the temptation. Now it seemed that I was being entangled in a like web, and it was impossible to see what would be the end of it all.

"Amy surprised me very much one morning by saying that she should be obliged to go home at the end of the week. She expressed great regret at leaving, but at the same time gave a reason for her return which, though unanswerable, was to me unsatisfactory. I felt convinced that she had some further object in view, which she did not care to mention. For a few weeks past our talks had been less confidential, partly owing to the fact that as I grew to care more for Captain Frint, I was less anxious to speak about him; and also that when we discussed the Major, while professing to have nothing further to communicate, Amy seemed desirous of avoiding the subject.

"On the Monday after she left I heard that Major Jackson had gone home on leave, and this seemed partially to explain her sudden change of plans."

CHAPTER XII

"I shall not attempt any explanation of a remarkable experience which happened some little time after Amy left, but shall give you a brief account of it.

"One lovely evening near the close of summer, sitting alone in the garden, dreamily listening to the soft hum of the insects and the distant murmur of the water, I was suddenly roused by the sound of a footstep, and turning toward the direction from which the sound came, I saw, greatly to my astonishment, Alan Sydney.

"At first sight I could hardly believe my senses, for though, after all, there was nothing so very extraordinary in his having returned to England, yet I fancied that he had gone away for some years, and I had lately hardly ever even thought about him.

"He was much changed, though it is not easy to describe in what way the alteration struck me. I had always been rather afraid of him, and I felt the fear now even more strongly than in the past. Yet his face, as he came nearer, bore no expression of severity, but only kindliness and pity.

"'You are surprised to see me, Vera,' he said; 'but you know I promised always to help you, and have, therefore, come now.'

"'I am delighted to see you back,' I answered, holding out my hand to him. 'But why did you not write? My father will be delighted! You must come and see him at once.'

"'Not now,' he replied, 'I only came to talk to you, and must go directly. Moreover, I do not wish you even to mention that you have seen me.'

"Saying this he sat down by my side, and I, wondering greatly why he had come, said–

"'Oh! I shall not hear of your going! You must tell me all about your travels. But, first of all, what made you fancy that I required your help now? You have already done so much for me it is difficult to imagine what further assistance so lucky a girl can need.'

"'Perhaps,' he said, 'I have done too much. It is often the case that those who would help, by their very effort to do so, only hinder. But tell me, are you happy?'

"As he said this he looked into my eyes, and there was something in his look which seemed to open my heart so that I could see what I had never fully known before. I tried to speak, but could not; then burying my face in my hands I wept. He placed his hand upon my head, and at his touch a feeling of rest and calm stole over me.

"Then he said–'Vera, why will you turn into the way of trouble? I have tried again and again to save you, but it is impossible to help one who wilfully, or even heedlessly, chooses that road which can only lead to sorrow. Every step taken over it has to be retrodden, and the smooth pathway will then be overgrown with thorns; the light of passion will have died out, and in weariness and darkness each step must be one of uncertainty and pain. I know how you have endeavoured to blind your eyes by false reasoning which can never help you, but the day of self-revelation always comes. You would argue that it is not your fault if men fall in love with your beauty, and that, placed in your position, it is more than usually difficult to act. But there is one thing that can always guide us–if, leaving our own position out of the question, and, caring nothing about our own salvation or our own end, we think but of others–of how each action will affect their lives. "Love and do as you like," said one of earth's noblest men. But it must be true love.

"There is a man who, in a limited sense, loves you, and whom, though in a still more limited sense, you love. He has tried nobly, considering his weakness, to keep that love pure, and when he found that his lower nature rebelled against his higher, he was willing, even anxious, to suffer the pain of separation rather than harm you. How knowing this, did you act? Did you consider him? Did you think–if I let him go on I shall be his eternal curse? He is now honourable, but he will become mean. Have you any idea what this implies to a man? When he

is with you he may forget; but think of the solitary hours when he sees himself as he is, and knows that he is damning the girl he loves! If there is any nobleness in his nature, he must conquer his passion, or destroy his conscience. And each day it becomes more difficult to do the former–more imperative to do the latter. And you, consciously or unconsciously, have taken the very course which makes the path most difficult for him. Professing not to care for his love, you have well-nigh made it a point of honour that he should not leave you, whilst under the pretence of friendship you have taken every means to increase his infatuation. Already the infection of his feeling has influenced your nature. What will be the end? One of three things must happen. He will conquer either himself, or you, or the battle will destroy him. There is no other way open if you continue to act as you are doing now. The first would be the best, but whether it is now possible I doubt. Either of the other alternatives must lead to his utter misery and yours. Do not blind your eyes, Vera! You do not know how soon the fatal moment may come when it will be too late. And remember, do not think about yourself or your own safety–that will never help you. Think of the man who loves you, and save him.'

"He stopped speaking, and for a few moments I was so overcome by his words that I did not move, but still sat with bent head, my face covered in my hands. When I looked up he was no longer by me.

"It was growing dusk, and I could not see him. I called his name, but there was no answer. He had gone! Shame prevented me from trying to find him. No wonder, if he knew all this, that he wished to have nothing further to do with one so vile!

"It is surprising how hateful actions seem when placed in words, which, when only hid in the heart, trouble us little. If there be a God who can read the inmost thoughts, how great must be His love, or how overwhelming His contempt for us!"

As Vera said this I found myself in darkness. The vision had gone, and being very tired I slept.

PART IV

CHAPTER XIII

I have already mentioned that Alan Sydney was fond of hunting, and it so happened that a few days after the incidents related in the last chapter I overtook him riding to the meet. Since hearing his experience in India, and seeing more of his remarkable power, it seemed strange to me that a man with his advantages should still care for hunting, or even continue to live in the way he did at all. I took this opportunity of asking him some questions on the subject.

"I will try to explain to you," he said, "what seems, but is not, a contradiction in my life. One of the strongest powers which influences character is association. What a man once loves and cares for leaves him very slowly, and even death, as we call it, namely, the change in our surroundings, does not destroy the tendency of the past. No doubt it is owing to this that so often we see traces of the beast nature in man. Of all tendencies the desire to hunt, a necessary instinct of the lower creation, is most noticeable. It was doubtless this instinct that influenced me when young, as it has influenced so many; and I have explained to you before that I still find the sport of great service in taming and controlling my body."

"But," I said, "your body must by this time be under such complete control that it would seem unnecessary."

"There you are mistaken," he replied. "As long as the spirit is bound to earth it must be held more or less under the influence of animal instincts and animal requirements, which, if not rightly regulated, would react on the higher nature. It is quite true that, if I wished, it would now be only too easy to quit this material prison; but I have work to do here, and if my spirit once became free from earthly bonds it would never be able to take them up again, or influence the world through material agencies. Moreover, every new power gives added interest to each action of life; and I can assure you, that even in hunting there is ample opportunity for study, and even in some cases for gaining valuable experience."

"In what way do you mean?" I asked.

"Firstly," he answered, "there is the pleasure of watching man's influence over the lower orders of life. Now it may seem strange to you, but it is far more difficult to influence a beast than it is a man. The power of will passes more reluctantly from me to my horse than it does from me to you; and long after I could make any man act in the way I wished, I was still unable perfectly to influence the will of a single lower animal. Yet for all that, there are men who have little or no power over human beings, able to exercise quite unconsciously a remarkable influence over beasts. This opens out a subject of great interest, which is more easily studied while hunting than at any other time. I have for some years perfected my control over horses, but it does not in the least detract from my interest in watching the unconscious action of other minds on the animals which they fancy they guide only by bodily force. You will see that I ride, as others, with bit and bridle, because I do not wish to cause attention, but they are un-

necessary. This horse is absolutely untrained. I have never been upon its back before, and have good reason to know that it has never been hunted. I selected it simply because it has great bodily strength and endurance, together with the capacity, though not the training, for hunting."

We were in a lonely part of the country, and I asked Sydney to give me some example of his power over this untrained horse. He laid the reins upon its neck, and then told me to mention anything which I wished to see the animal do.

"You can choose any likely or unlikely movement possible for a horse," he said; "only I should prefer that it did not roll."

There was a big six-barred gate at the right of us, and I said, "Let him jump that."

I had scarcely spoken before the horse turned, faced the gate, and cleared the top bar by about two inches.

"Come back over the hedge," I said. The horse did so.

"I should not care to jump into a hard road in that way with a loose rein," I remarked.

"No," Sydney replied, "it would not be wise; for though if a horse jumps perfectly there is no danger, yet often on landing a tight rein is useful. If, however, you watch the riders out to-day, you will see that two-thirds of their horses would jump better if they were left to their own devices. So many riders give the horse a check, not as he lands, but while he is in the air; and this causes more accidents than most people imagine."

I then tried the horse in other ways, making it rear and kick, getting it to open the gate by lifting it with its teeth, and to do many other curious movements, which showed that its entire body was absolutely under the control of its rider's thought.

"With such a horse," I said, "you could do anything in the hunting-field, but I have seldom noticed you much to the fore when out with us, though of course every one knows that you ride well."

"I have two reasons," he answered, "for not leading; as there would in that case be no opportunity of studying others, and also, that it seems to me hardly fair. There is no danger to me in facing any possible obstacle, however tricky or difficult, and I might lead others to follow who, through no fault of their own, would very probably come to grief."

We had by this time overtaken two other riders, and our private conversation was at an end.

I shall never forget that day. We had a most brilliant run, and I kept close to Sydney on purpose to watch his horse. Now that I had a key to the mystery, it was easy to notice the human instinct that guided its every movement. The country was difficult, or I should have found the occupation even more absorbing; as

it was, much of my time was taken up in looking after my own animal, which unfortunately by no means always took its jumps in the way I desired.

We had been galloping at a great pace for twenty-five minutes, and many of the riders were now far behind, when I noticed that we were approaching some fairly stiff rails, on the further side of which there was a broad, deep ditch full of water. If there is one obstacle to which I object more than another, it is a combination of this description.

Three or four of the horses cleared it in safety, but a girl, riding just in front of Sydney, was unable to get her horse in hand. Consequently, instead of clearing the top rail the animal came with its full weight into the obstruction, broke the top bar, and getting its legs entangled in the lower timber, turned completely over into the water. So entirely were the horse's fore-legs fixed in the lower bars, that the girl seemed in great danger of being drowned.

It is not easy to imagine a more awful position. To be pressed down with one's head beneath the water by a horse's weight, at the same time knowing that it is impossible to do anything to assist the animal in freeing itself!

Sydney had taken in the position, and I saw his horse dash forward at full speed. When it came close to the broken rail, it swung quickly round, and striking the lower bars with a violent kick, sent the pieces flying in different directions. It thus freed the struggling horse, and then without a moment's pause plunged into the water. Sydney was now able to seize the lady's bridle, and for a moment everything seemed in confusion; then the rescuer's horse made a gallant plunge, reared up in the water and fell backward between the broken rails. The daring attempt was successful; the weight of the falling horse had given just the impetus Sydney required to lift the other animal and to free its rider, and amid the cheers of those who had now gathered round, the lady was borne in safety to the bank, terribly frightened, though uninjured.

I hastened up to see if Sydney was hurt, but though his horse fell backwards, it had not even bruised him, owing to the skilful way in which at the last moment he had slipped aside. He now stood on the bank with a piece of the girl's broken bridle in his hand, and the bits of timber strewn round him.

As we rode home later in the day, he surprised me by saying–

"It was a foolish action, and I feel ashamed of having given way to the momentary instinct which prompted it."

"What! saving the girl's life?" I said.

"No," he replied, "but the way I did it. You can easily fancy that I possessed other and simpler means of saving her without attracting attention to myself. But it is very difficult at times to check the inclination which we all have for exciting bodily action."

"Well," I answered, "I do not think, considering the power you possess, any

one could accuse you of making a display of it. Why, the breaking of the bars by your horse's feet was, I fancy, unnoticed by any one except myself. Others probably thought they had given way under the strain; while even your horse's rearing up and falling backwards would be considered only a fortunate accident."

"That is quite true," he replied, "I was not thinking of display, to which weakness my nature at present tends very slightly; but rather that for the time being I allowed my body to do what my will could have effected better without its assistance. However, this is its day out, and perhaps it was only fair."

I have mentioned this incident to show that Sydney, even while he possessed faculties so remarkable that one might have expected his body to influence his mind no longer, at times still allowed the former to hold temporary sway. He always impressed this point most strongly upon me, saying that those who profess most emphatically that they have the power to ignore material things, are, often, without knowing it, under the most serious bodily servitude, the servitude of disease; and that though it is quite true that the body should be brought into subjection to the spirit, this can only be done by keeping it always, as far as possible, in perfect action and health.

CHAPTER XIV

I was sitting alone in my study one morning about two days after our run, busily engaged in writing an account of it, when I found that Sydney was standing beside me. I started up, his presence taking me by surprise.

"I never heard you come in," I said.

"No," he answered, "I have been at Aphar since we last met, and seeing that you were alone I returned here instead of going to my house. As we are neither of us busy to-day, I thought you might like to hear the continuation of my story."

We talked for some time about various subjects which led back eventually to the experiences which Vera had related to me.

"Tell me," I said, "was the girl really present? Or was this simply a delusion which you threw over me?"

"It is rather difficult to explain," he replied. "Vera was neither with you in body nor in spirit, yet it was her past nature that spoke, called up by the force of my will, even as it was her past form that you saw. I cannot fully explain this even to you, for in common with others you hold a false estimation of what peo-

ple call time. Past, present, and future are convenient terms for men to use; but as a fact there are no such limitations, though it may be as difficult to comprehend this as it is to try and think of a universe that had no beginning and shall have no end. Many people accept the truth of this latter mystery, but would laugh at the possibility of the former; yet they are inseparably knit together. It is this which makes what we call sinning so terrible; it is the inability to understand this mystery that has led to some of the revolting views which are held in connection with the eternity of punishment and the indestructibility of Satan. But to continue my story.

"Though I made the strongest appeal possible, in the hope of saving Vera from the trouble which must follow if she still continued to allow her lower nature to rule her, I at the same time felt convinced that her moral power was not sufficiently developed to withstand the temptation. Impressed as she was at the time, this feeling was too likely to be transient. Future events proved that this view was correct. Whatever struggle Vera may have made at first, the effect was not noticeable after a few week's' time, and I knew that all my watchfulness would be required to prevent some great misfortune. It would have been easy to remove Captain Frint out of the way of temptation, either by what you might call hypnotism or in many other ways; but I was guided now by an influence which showed me that such actions can only delay the growth of nature. Under certain circumstances they may be justifiable, but should be employed only as a special opiate. For as in certain cases chloroform may be used on the body to prevent pain, but when the cause of the evil is not removed, proves only a dangerous means of delaying its effects, so the temporary destruction of another's will-power can only be right if employed in a special emergency.

"Though my chief interest was centred in Vera, I felt far more compassion in this case for her lover. It was a sad sight to see the terrible battle that at this time raged in his heart. One night while my body lay entranced, I visited him in spirit. How few of us suspect the double nature which lies concealed behind the superficial manner of any man or woman we meet. That proud bearing, that laughing face, that self-confident ease of manner, what may lie beneath each of these, those only who read the heart can say.

"The man was on his bed; his face was deathly white and damp with the dew of agony. He was speaking in that low, terrible accent of despair which some persons in moments of mental pain utter when alone, if they think that none can hear them. There is something very strange and weird in such soliloquy: as a rule we talk for effect, but in moments like these the words follow the mind, disregarding all rules of coherency or consistency. Part of the cause of this confusion is that the mind, acting more quickly than speech, leaves a sentence often unfinished.

"'Oh! that I might die!' he cried. 'Now–even now–I have no power–Vera, I shall harm you–you whom I love more than life–I have harmed you–I see it day by day–little actions show it–and, oh God! I dare not think of it–where is the end?–what can all this lead to?–misery! Oh! my mother–you who taught me to love that which is noble–to hate and scorn a weak and unmanly action–can you see me now? Do you watch me hour by hour, learning to despise and hate me?–Oh! that I could die and go to you–or if death is but the end–if there is no awakening, how peaceful to close one's eyes and know no more! It will kill me–kill me–when every spark of good that once was in my heart is gone–But why not now? I am going mad!–Things all seem confused–right and wrong–honour and dishonour–love and hate have no meaning–Vera, when I see you, I forget–I am happy–wildly, madly happy–yet I know not why. You belong to another, and I hate him. Oh! we are friends–only friends–and love is no earthly passion, but a communion of souls–What a farce–what folly! Would a soul feel as I do? it is a mockery–there is no soul anywhere–I doubt if there is a God. We are apes, dancing for the amusement of an audience of fiends! Oh! Vera, what have I said? That there is no spirit in you–it is impossible–I am the fiend who would drive the pure angel of your spirit into hell!'

"Thus did the wretched man ramble on until, exhausted by the excitement of remorse, he lay down and fell into a troubled sleep. While watching him I was conscious of a spiritual presence beside me, and knew that there had been another witness of his agony. The spirit of a woman was present, and I saw her, as it were, bending over him, and knew that it was his mother. What unending, untiring love was here! That pure affection which Saint Paul tried to explain when writing to the Corinthians by the word [Greek: agápê], which taketh not account of evil, but covering all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things, never faileth!

"I felt deeply concerned about the fate of this man, after what I had just seen and heard. His mental weakness, his morbid and excited rambling showed plainly that his mind was unhinged, and was beginning to give way under the strain put upon it. Moreover, to one who knew even as little as I did of the spirit world, the presence of his mother indicated some coming change in his existence, probably his death; for though there are exceptions, it is not often that the spirits of the dead are allowed to watch over the living: and this is a loving order of Providence, for as they cannot influence material things, their knowledge could only cause them useless suffering and be of little value to those they love. Sometimes, however, for the purifying of the souls of the dead, they are permitted to witness the misery of the loved when it is the outcome of their own selfishness on earth. And this is verily the Gehenna, or place of purification spoken of, in which the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

I stopped Sydney at this point to ask him a question. "You," I said, "often mention passages from the Bible. Tell me what you think about this book."

"I think," he replied, "that much of it is the word of God echoed on the mind of man, and that it is terribly neglected and sadly misunderstood. It is so written that all who will, may understand it as far as their mind is at one with the author. The purer, the wiser, the holier a man becomes, the more will it continue to reveal, till it shall stand out at last the miracle of miracles–the Book which contains all the mysteries of earth, yet is capable at the same time of concealing them from those who are not yet ready to receive the knowledge; for it follows its own teaching, and casts not its pearls before swine. To the beast nature it gives the bit, bridle, and lash, till they shall be guided by these to higher ground and purer air; but to the unselfish and pure, it is the true revelation of the Word of God. Of course it has had to go through the treatment, which an uncivilized humanity bestows on all spiritual gifts–the curse of worship. Once men had an elephant god, then a sun or moon god, and many have now a paper-and-ink god. For the animal nature clings to matter, and to good solid matter that it understands. Hence the extraordinary dislike which so-called believers in the Bible show for anything which is called spiritualistic or scientific; whereas the book they worship is, without exception, in the right interpretation of the word, the great book on spiritualism, and the most advanced treatise ever written on the higher branches of a science, to which the world at present is only feeling its way. It is the funniest sight in creation to see pigmy man getting angry, and struggling fiercely to protect the Word of God from His works; but after all, though it does not help the book, it may help its would-be protector, for he means kindly by his patronage, and cannot be expected to foresee with what reverence the greater wisdom of the future will hold the book of knowledge.

"But I had better continue my story now, and leave this subject, which opens out so many fields of thought, that there is no saying where we may wander.

"I knew that Captain Frint had been invited, together with some other of Mr. Soudin's friends, to stop at Somerville as soon as the shooting commenced, and I looked forward to this time with considerable anxiety. Vera would then be thrown much into her lover's society, and if she wished it, doubtless would be able often to attract him away from the sport, in which case they would be alone together. In the meantime I was watching Amy Howell's actions, yet without feeling that I had the right to interfere.

"Much had passed between this girl and Major Jackson, toward the end of her stay at Somerville, of which Vera knew nothing. The Major was, as you have already heard, wealthy, but this money had only been left quite recently, by an uncle who, up to this time, had given him a liberal allowance. The story is not

very interesting. Sir Ralph Cane, after the death of his widowed sister, adopted her only child, William Jackson. The boy was brought up with his bachelor uncle, and became the presumptive heir to his property. The uncle, however, had a perfect mania against marriage, and told his nephew that if ever he took a wife, he must give up all hope of inheriting a fortune. This restriction did not trouble young Jackson at the time, nor in fact for many years; but while he was quartered with his regiment, in an out-of-the-way part of Ireland, he met a young girl with whom he imagined he was desperately in love, and married her privately. When Mr. Hancock, the girl's father, who was an unprincipled scoundrel, found that his daughter was married, and heard of the reason for secrecy, he commended the young Captain's prudence, and agreed to help him in every way to keep the marriage a secret till Sir Ralph Cane's death. As the old man was then seventy-six, he might have been expected to leave them free at any moment; but he nevertheless kept them practically separated for ten years. They had only one child, a boy, who was born seven years after the marriage, and was therefore at the time of which I am speaking, three years old. It is probable that if Major Jackson had not met Amy, he would have sent for his wife, though he no longer cared for her; and there is still less doubt that had his father-in-law been alive, he would have been compelled to do this, whether he wished or not. As it was, he made no mention of his uncle's death in the letters he wrote to Ireland, and his wife being in so out-of-the-way a part, had little chance of learning the news. Yet though the Major was infatuated, he had no intention of being prosecuted for bigamy, and after consideration decided to put his version of the case before Amy, and chance the result. He had been working up to this point when Vera discovered him at the Castle (an account of which incident you have heard), and it was some little time before he had another opportunity. When Amy heard the news she was not only much upset, but very angry. In a way she cared for this man, though his wealth was probably the chief attraction. The thought of having to give up all her bright dreams of ease, and comfort, and return to her poverty-stricken home, was very bitter. Major Jackson had fully expected an outburst of indignation, and was, or appeared to be, duly repentant for the way in which he had acted. He pretended that he had no hope of getting her to consent to his plans, which were that he should retire from the army, gather his wealth together, and with it and the girl he loved leave the country. He persuaded her that his wife would be sure to get a divorce, especially if he consented to make her a liberal allowance on this condition; that he would then be able to marry Amy, and she would be an honest woman, able to live in society without reproach. In fact, he talked much the usual nonsense, going only as far into the regions of improbability as he thought safe. For though the girl was unprincipled, she was no fool.

"To make this unpleasant account as short as possible, he eventually suc-

ceeded. Amy decided to return home for the purpose of getting certain things together which she might require, and he was ostensibly turning all his property into cash. As a matter of fact he did no such thing, the idea being strongly impressed on his mind, that a few thousand pounds would probably last as long as the girl's attraction. Vera had asked Amy to return as soon as possible, and as the Major had been invited for the shooting, they decided to meet at Somerville, and take their departure together a few days afterwards.

"Nothing happened to upset these plans, and the party met, as had been arranged, on the thirty-first of August. It was not long before Jackson was confirmed in his previous suspicion, that Frint and Vera were engaged in a dangerous flirtation, and the idea occurred to him, that it might not be impossible to persuade these two to join him. He had hired a yacht, which was now lying ready at Southampton, and he would by no means have objected, under the circumstances, to the company of a friend, who, being in a similar position, could not possibly reproach him. He decided, however, to consult Amy before doing anything; and in this he was wise, for while approving his plan, she gave him no little valuable advice as to the method most likely to succeed. In fact, she finally concluded that as the matter required delicate handling, it would be advisable for her to take the chief part of the task into her own hands. Her decision led to the following conversation between this clever schemer and Captain Frint–

"'Do you not think,' she said in the course of a conversation, 'that marriage is often a great mistake? That people would be much happier if only they had courage to put an end to this relic of barbarism?'

"'It often seems so,' her companion answered, wondering not a little what this unmarried girl had in her mind; for it is more often that we hear these sentiments from those who have experienced the bond. 'But,' he continued, 'we should require considerable alteration in the law and in public opinion before it would be wise to break through the custom.'

"'I don't know,' she said; 'public opinion will not change till the few, who are brave enough to oppose it, act. And the law is always a laggard, leaning on the crutch of stupidity until someone kicks it. Now look at Vera. She is tied down to a man for whom she cares nothing–a regular blackguard–bound to him by a mere legal act, and nothing more. Yet on account of this meaningless bond she is destined to go through life deprived of love, unprotected, and missing all the true joy of home. Now if I were a man and loved her, I should refuse to consider that a farce like this had any right to keep us apart, and if the world chose to think differently, well, so much the worse for the world!'

"'But you do not,' he said, 'consider the girl, and the position in which she would be placed. It is all very well for the man–he would lose little by such an action; but the woman's social life would be ruined.'

"'I ought to consider the girl's side,' she said, 'and I do. But men never understand us. Which do you think is better–to lose social life, as you call it, or real life? To be able to go everywhere and care for nothing, or to remain at home and be happy? But even the social question is only a matter of time if there is wealth. There would probably be a little scandal and then the world would forget all about it.'

"'I do not fancy,' he said, 'that you understand Lady Vancome. I feel certain that she would never consent to such a proposal even from a man she loved. And what is more, she would never allow herself to fall in love.'

"'Oh, indeed!' Amy replied laughing. 'So you think, Captain Frint, that girls are the same as men, and fall in love or out of it as prudence and conscience dictate. Vera could no more help falling in love if the right person turned up than–well, than I could! And what is more, she would disregard conventionality and follow her inclination if, mind, I say if, she did so at her lover's bidding; and so should I.'

"'You say that,' he replied, 'because you have not been tried; but I feel quite certain that you would never do anything of the kind.'

"'Can you keep a secret?'

"'I fancy so.'

"'Will you promise me, on your word of honour, however much you disapprove of what I am going to say, that you will not, directly or indirectly, act in opposition to me, or tell any one my secret?'

"'I promise.'

"She then told him what she intended to do; at the same time, by way of justifying her act, she libelled innocent Mrs. Jackson in a most outrageous manner. These libels were entirely the result of imagination, as she knew nothing about her, and had not felt inclined to inquire. Then, little by little, she drew the subject round, and without giving her companion a chance of remonstrating with her, spoke once more of Vera.

"'I feel so sorry to leave her,' she said, 'and wish that she and you were both coming, but of course you are far too proper a person to dare to think of such a step.'

"'I think,' he answered, 'that it is hardly necessary to go into my feelings in the matter, as whatever I wished, you must know full well that Vera–Lady Vancome, I mean–would never consent to do such a thing, even if she loved me, which is most improbable.'

"'It is nice to see such modesty,' Amy answered; 'but I know Vera pretty well, better a good deal than you do, and have no hesitation in saying that if she loves you, and I feel certain she does, you have only to ask her to come, and she will be delighted to follow you even to the other end of the world. However, I

have said enough. If by any chance you two should care to join us, we should be most pleased. We leave here in three days from now, so you have not much time to think over your plans, but should act at once. I shall not refer again to the subject, but if you decide on anything you can let me know.'

"Having said this, and thinking it better not to give her companion time to reply, she got up and left the room.

"That afternoon Vera and Captain Frint were alone together. The girl was leaning back on a comfortable wicker lounge in the cool fernery which opened out of the house. The half-veiled sunlight which passed through the amber-tinted glass roof fell on her head, and lit up her soft wavy hair till it shone like the natural silk in which the chrysalis lies hidden. Behind her on a rockery of porous stone, delicate maidenhair and other semi-tropical ferns grew in luxuriant profusion, their roots entwined in the rockwork or twisted among the various mosses which covered it. A toy rivulet wound in and out among the ferns, now and again escaping from its confined bed and trickling over the rocks. This little watercourse was caught up at last by a miniature lake, and soaking through the bed of porous stone which formed the roof of a grotto, dropped down into a larger pool beneath, where gold and silver fish lay dreaming. The pleasant sound of water and the delicate scent from the flowers of an overhanging creeper made this favourite spot suitable for quiet talk or half-dreamy rest.

"Vera, who was peculiarly sensitive to her surroundings, could hardly have chosen a more unsuitable place had she known of the proposition that was about to be made to her, and supposing she wished to refuse it. Though she did not know, she suspected that her companion had something important to say, for Amy had not neglected an opportunity in which to throw out a few hints on the subject.

"'Vera,' Frint said almost as soon as the girl had made herself comfortable, 'how lovely you look to-day!' And as he said this he bent over and kissed her hair.

"She took no notice, and he kissed her forehead. She half raised one hand and he kissed her cheek. She put one finger on her lips, and he touched it with his own.

"'You are very naughty to-day, Albert,' she said. 'You must sit down over there where you will be out of the way of temptation.'

"As he sat down he said, 'Vera, I have been thinking a good deal lately.'

"'I wish you would give up the bad habit,' she replied. 'It is a foolish thing to do, and usually ends in making you grumpy and uninteresting. Let us be children, and live in the present as long as we can. Let us play, and be contented with our toys. If a child once begins to analyze his wooden horse, the interest vanishes, and he wants a real live one. If you persist in analyzing your game of

love-making, you will end in wanting me to run away with you.'

"'But,' he said, 'in this case it is so difficult to know where to draw a line.'

"'Then don't try. That is what I told you just now not to do,' she said. 'Why cannot you be contented?'

"'Because I love you, and want to have you always with me,' he answered. 'Because I hate to see another man near you. Oh, Vera! it is all very well to talk about playing at love. When I am with you it is all right, I am happy. But when I leave you it is like going down to hell. It cannot go on, it is killing me. I must have you all in all or I must go. Tell me,' he said, 'do you not know some such feeling? Is it to you only a game of play? Am I nothing more than a toy which at any moment you could cast aside? Oh, Vera! do you not in your heart love me even a little?'

"'You are quite interesting to-day, Albert,' she said. 'You play your part to perfection. I will try to live up to you and play mine. We will pretend we are in earnest. Yes, dearest, I love you.'

"He fell into her mood. It would be easier in this way to say what he had decided to tell her.

"'Then let us picture a position,' he said. 'Amy and Jackson have decided, we will suppose, to run away together because, for some reason, they are unable to be married. And we will suppose that they are anxious for us to join them. A yacht is waiting to carry them away from this chilly land, and in some bright and sunny country they will live together, beyond the reproach of man, contented in their mutual love. Now the question is shall we go with them, dearest? It is impossible that we shall much longer be able to live as we are doing now. People will begin to talk, and then we shall be unable to see much of each other. Do you love me enough to do this? I know that I have no right to ask you.'

"When Frint looked up to see what effect his words had upon Vera, he was surprised, and even frightened by the expression on her face.

"'Tell me,' she said, 'is this true? Do you really mean what you say?'

"'It is true, dearest,' he answered.

"And then he told her the story, winding up by a passionate appeal that she would come. Though Vera had guessed something from Amy's words, and had promised not to repeat anything which Frint might tell her, she had little expected the whole truth, and was perfectly overwhelmed by the sudden proposal. Had she been allowed to think it out quietly, I feel convinced that she would have refused to go; but her lover, having thrown all scruples to the wind, and seeing his fate in the balance, got up and knelt beside her, and placing his arm round her, overwhelmed all reason in a torrent of passionate language and endearments till the smouldering embers which she had striven to smother burst out into a fire which she had no longer strength or inclination to control. Casting all thoughts

of prudence, all fear of danger from her, she told him of her love, and burying her head upon his breast swore that without him she could not live, and would do whatsoever he desired.

"'I trust you, dearest,' she murmured, 'and would have no will but yours. Where you bid me go I will go; with you is life and joy, without you all is darkness, and I only seem to live. What do I care about the world, if you think that I am doing right?'

"I stood near them all the while, invisible to their eyes, and uncertain if I should reveal my presence. But some force restrained me; the time had not yet come.

"As I stood again beside the man's bed that night, I knew why I had not been permitted to interfere. A higher power than mine ruled and ordered his life. I have witnessed many terrible scenes. No person able to see into the inner lives of others can fail to do this, but neither before nor since have I been so moved to pity as on this occasion. The man slept, and his dream-thought wandered at first to one subject and then another. But in every case his fevered brain pictured some terrible scene. At last, as it were, the changing waves of painful thought concentrated in a series of pictures.

"In the first of these he was sitting in a dimly-lighted room. He was a boy once more, and his mother read to him pages from the Bible, but the texts were disconnected. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea.' 'And the smoke of their torment ascended up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night.' 'Blessed are the dead.'

"The scene changed. Vera was beside him even as he had seen her that day in all her beauty. They were sitting together on the deck of a vessel; the sun shone brightly, the sea was calm, and the gulls floated over them, moving splashes of glistening white against the deep blue of the sky. Yet even as they thus sat dreaming of love, and surrounded by calm and sunlight, he felt that they were sinking, and that no power could save them. Slowly the blue line of water rose till it was on a level with the deck, but still the motion of the vessel held the water in check. It rose to the bulwarks, and glistened in a dark steely line above it. Fear held them from moving, save that Vera threw her arm around him, pleading for a protection which none could give. The line broke in foaming torrents over the deck. There was a moment of struggle, and then darkness. From the midst of the darkness he heard a voice saying, 'Look up, for the hour of judgment is at hand.' Then he looked up, and behold hell lay open before him, the hell of human tradition in all the ghastly horror which man, in the deformity of his imagination, has conjured up out of his instinctive cruelty to make part of the creation of

love. There lay Vera, condemned to eternal torment. The terrible anguish of her expression as I saw it through the medium of his distorted brain haunts me even now. Her white child-like arms thrown out in hopeless supplication, as she cried aloud to him in pitiful tones to save her, or at least to come near in this awful solitude of suffering; but he was unable to move or speak. The terrible realistic flames enveloped her; flames which none can quench, which violate every law of nature save one, which neither purify nor set free nor stay corruption, but only cause the pain which is their note of warning. Nor was this all. As if one torment that must necessarily absorb all powers of feeling which we know on earth–nay, which merciful nature would stay at once by her opiate of insensibility–were not enough, other horrors of man's imagination were added which are too revolting for words, yet which had all at one time been taught to this wretched man as essential parts of the Gospel of God, the good news of love. Had he not been mad such a picture must have been a revelation; if he, selfish as he was, could be thus overwhelmed with remorse and horror, what of the Father, the Creator who for ever must watch his child; who, being almighty was not bound; who being the Creator of all things was the Creator of this! As it was, the strain of anguish roused him from his dreams. He sat up in bed and cried aloud, 'My God! My God! It is not too late! I will save her! Though I die–though I be damned for ever! Vera, oh, my love, I will save you from this!'

"And even as he spoke, I was conscious that we were surrounded by a great company, and that the sweet sound of spiritual praise that no earthly ear can hear passed on, for ever vibrating through the universe of God. But the first chord was struck by a woman's love, for the mother now knew that her son was saved."

CHAPTER XV

"After breakfast on the following morning, Captain Frint found an opportunity of asking Vera not to say anything to either the Major or Amy of their plans, but to leave all to him. He was standing in the girl's sitting-room dressed for shooting, and had his companion been more observant she might have noticed the strange fire which burned in his eyes, and the suppressed excitement of his manner.

"'You are going out then, to-day,' she said. 'Well, perhaps it is better. It might seem strange if you did not; and after all we shall soon have as much time

as we like together; so much that I expect you will soon get tired of me.'

"He was unable to answer; but before leaving he bent over and kissed her on the forehead. Had she seen his face she must have known the truth–for love, self-sacrifice, pain, and madness were written there.

"About two o'clock in the afternoon a mournful procession returned to Somerville. Captain Frint was dead. No fault or suspicion could rest on any of the party, for the accident had happened in the sight of Mr. Soudin and four of the beaters. The Captain, before getting over a stile, had placed his gun on the opposite side to avoid danger, and while leaning over to do this, some obstacle had caught the trigger, and the contents of one of the barrels had entered his heart.

"Fortunately a messenger had been sent on to break the news, and when the body arrived Vera was lying insensible on her bed; nor did any one see her again for many days. But at night, when all had gone to rest, she got up, and taking a light, crept softly to the room where they had placed the body of the man she loved.

"It lay upon the bed, the hands folded, the head raised as though in sleep upon the pillow. The eyes were closed. Never in life had that face looked so noble as it now appeared in death. The lines of thought, of passion, of pain were gone: the expression of the mouth was that of a contented child. There was no smile on the lips; nor have I ever seen, nor should I like to see, that smile which we so often read of on the face of the dead. When the spirit goes away and leaves the body, the features no longer under control fall back into the natural position of perfect rest, which is only partially noticeable during the sleep of grown-up people, but sometimes perfectly represented during the same condition in childhood. I have seen a dead child, that, save for the whiteness of the skin and lips, showed no change of expression other than that which I had often noticed during slumber.

"As Vera looked upon her dead lover, the spirit of life, which is the spirit of true love, was for the first time born in her heart. The Angel of Death was to her, as to so many, the winged messenger of God bearing the germ of eternity. As some fair blossom, differing not in appearance from others, that have already been made fruitful, will for some reason remain long barren, so many natures linger here, fair it may be in form, but missing the pollen of fruition. To some it is borne by the fairy butterfly of love; to others only by the death's-head moth of suffering. Some, as the barren flowers, fall and die, having, perhaps, made the earth more beautiful by their presence, yet leaving no fruit. Their harvest-time is yet to come, but under other circumstances and beneath other skies.

"It did not occur to Vera, as she bent over the dead man, that he had died to save her. She thought that an accident had separated them; that God, in His anger, had punished their sin.

"'Oh! that I might have died instead of you!' she murmured. 'Oh, God! it was my sin–not his–my fault. Why did you spare me and slay him?'

"Could she have looked upon the picture of herself there would have been no reason for answer; fear, anguish, and desolation were written on her face–what a contrast to the peaceful expression of the dead! Her eyes were strained with weeping, her swollen throat ached so that she could scarcely speak, and though she stood barefooted, and with only her thin night garment to cover her, yet every limb burned as though with fever. Her beautiful hair hung in tangled tresses down her back, and waved in wild disorder round her forehead and neck. As she knelt upon the bed and kissed the dear dead face, she seemed almost to cover the body with a pall of golden silk.

"'I want you, Albert,' she whispered. 'Oh! come back–come back, my love, my love!' And when she had said this she fainted.

"I carried her back to her own room, for I did not wish that any one should know her secret. And having done this, I returned once more to where the dead lay, and bent over and kissed the face of the man who had died to save from harm her whom we both loved.

"Captain Frint's death necessitated the breaking up of the shooting party, and Amy and Major Jackson took the opportunity thus afforded of carrying out their plans. They left England in the yacht, and travelled for some time together; but as is nearly always the case under such circumstances, instead of finding happiness, they tasted the fruit of selfishness, which is pain and disgust. It says a good deal for the girl's cleverness that she was not left entirely destitute in some foreign country; for with a forethought which showed that she had not altogether overlooked the possibility of desertion, she, before leaving, made her lover settle a considerable sum upon her. When he eventually left her in America, less than a year after the elopement, she was consequently fairly well provided for. She had one child, a girl, and not caring to return to England, she settled in New York, and soon afterwards married a clever scoundrel, named Halcome, who, though at the time badly off, succeeded eventually in making a moderate fortune. At his death, Amy returned with her only child to England, where she was soon received into good society."

"The man she married was called Halcome," I said. "Was not that the name of the girl we met at Sir James Folker's dinner on the night of the spiritualistic performance?"

"Yes," he replied; "she has always passed as Miss Halcome, for her mother, who is now dead, kept the secret of her birth even from the girl herself."

"Was the man whose face I noticed the Major's legitimate son?"

"Yes. After a life of horrible dissipation and vice, Major Jackson, by this time Sir Henry Jackson, died, and his son came into the property. Jackson ac-

knowledged his wife soon after leaving Amy, and the awful life which he led this unfortunate woman has often made my heart bleed. I interfered on the evening to which you refer, partly in the hope of saving her further trouble, and partly because I knew the terrible secret of the young people's relationship."

"Is Miss Halcome like her mother in appearance?" I asked.

"Yes; she bears a most remarkable resemblance both in manner and face to what Amy was at her age, though if you had seen Mrs. Halcome a few years back you would hardly have believed it possible; she had grown coarse, and stout, and lost all her good looks, for this style of girlish beauty wears badly. She, however, retained her bright and pleasant manner to the end, though her temper in private was bad. Before Sir Henry's death she was more than his match, and by threats of exposure she managed to extort a considerable sum of money from her former lover. But she did it so discreetly that no breath of scandal was ever whispered against her. She, moreover, never revealed to any one her maiden name, and her family have no idea that she returned to England."

"I am surprised that Jackson cared for any scandal after the life he had lived," I said.

"It would have been the last straw. He was at the time seeking a valuable Government appointment, and though his life was notoriously vile, this did not prevent him obtaining it; but a public scandal in Court is quite a different thing. The conscience of the people of Britain, who know only what the papers tell them, is more sensitive than that of their rulers. I am, however, glad to be able to close this unpleasant account; those chiefly interested are dead. They sowed to the flesh, and of the flesh they reaped corruption and pain. But we must not forget that they are still children of the great Father, loved by Him, though still wandering in the dark and fighting against the law of order and love which can alone bring happiness. Let us hope that now, when they have been freed from the bodies they degraded; their spirits, reclothed, may be purified through the pain which is bound to follow them; for *whatsoever* a man soweth, that shall he reap, and neither repentance, prayers, nor tears can alter the inevitable harvest."

"Do you not, then," I asked, "believe in repentance and the forgiveness of sins?"

"Certainly," he replied. "Without repentance there can be no upward progress, no hope of salvation; and the Father's forgiveness waits only on our ability to receive it and become conscious of His love. But though the moment we receive our Saviour's lesson and accept the fatherhood of God we know that we are cleansed from all sin, it will not alter the inevitable law of retribution; we must suffer, either now or hereafter. For every sin that we commit, we shall have to give account when the Day of Judgment comes–it may be to-day, or after many years. Of all the detestable doctrines that were ever taught, the creed that

a man can sin and by repentance do away with the painful consequences of that act is the most degrading and the most dangerous. It is the outcome of a low animal instinct, which recognizes forgiveness as a purely material quality. As soon as man is brought to understand that by every deed of cruelty, by every mean action, he is raising a lash for his own back, and that as surely as it is raised so shall it fall–not because God wishes to hurt him, but because he is wilfully going out of God's light–then, and not till then, will he learn to love order and strive to follow its rule. The intention which many persons cherish of a future repentance is simply a contemptible form of selfish cowardice, and what is called repentance itself is often little or no better. I have more respect and hope for the man who dies cursing God as he has lived to curse Him, than for the blubbering, repentant sinner who, having by his selfishness fought all through life against his Maker, and having been the damnation of those who crossed his path, thinks to propitiate an angry deity by saying he is sorry. Yes, he is sorry–sorry that he can sin no more, and that the whip is waiting–sorry even, perhaps, that he ever sinned, for he has found out that even in this life it did not pay. But would he take the trouble to repent if he knew that it made no difference to his future happiness or sorrow? If this is so, he is no better than the dog which grovels on its back at the sight of an uplifted cane. Which is the better animal, the one which stands up to take the blow, or the one that lies at your feet? Does the wise master spare the coward and thrash the braver animal? No; if he hits at all he will hit both for their own good; and the one on his back will probably get the worst of it; and so will the repentant sinner.

"But come, we have wandered far enough out of the way, and I have by far the pleasantest part of my story yet to tell. I will go back to the truly repentant sinner whom we left weeping, not for herself or for her own pain, but because she had harmed the man she loved, and God, as she thought, had punished him by death.

"I will pass over some months, during which little of importance happened. Mr. Soudin, always a weak man, and having now little to occupy his time, fell more and more into the habit of drinking. He had for years taken more than was good for him, but not in a way to cause remark, his head suffering less than his body. But now, being much alone, he frequently overstepped the line of orthodox sobriety–a line which society draws in this case, as in all others, where its own convenience is affected.

"Fortunately for Vera she had at last found a companion who was in every way worthy of her affection. Agnes Thomson was at this time about thirty, and had little physical beauty, though her eyes and expression redeemed her from plainness. She possessed one of those natures which seem created from birth to minister to others, and are never so happy as when occupied in relieving distress,

or in making the lives of those around them brighter. When in the presence of such we are unconscious of effort, see no strain of renunciation; they minister to those around them, as the bird feeds its young–because they want to. Such persons, though often imposed on, are seldom appreciated at their true worth, on account of the high quality of their natures. I have even heard it said, 'Oh, there is no merit in such unselfishness–she cannot help it.' But what an unconscious tribute to the soul is this! And what has such a spirit passed through before it so perfectly reflects its Maker!

"It was chiefly owing to my action that this girl went to Somerville. She had broken down while looking after an orphanage in Manchester, and the doctor had said that it was absolutely imperative that she should give up all work for some time. She dreaded the idea of parting from the little children, and struggled as long as possible; but the body at last gave in, and I was then able, by indirect influence, to bring her and Vera together. As soon as Agnes came to live with the beautiful young girl, she loved her as she had loved her orphan children, and indeed as she would have loved any man, woman, or child, good or bad, fair or ugly. She saw that her companion was suffering, and had little difficulty in drawing from her the story of her life; and Agnes wept with her, feeling all the time as if she had been in the young girl's place. When she came to think over it afterwards, what she called her conscience reproved her for not having even remonstrated. How wrong it all was! And she felt that she ought to have given reproof. Fortunately she never acted down to her conscience, which being an illuminated reflection from the creed of lesser minds, would only have retarded her influence. She taught her lessons, without knowing it, by the example of her own life.

"Two months after she came, Mr. Soudin was taken dangerously ill, and as his body had of late exhausted all its power in trying to digest four times as much food as it required, and had also been drenched with alcohol, he sank rapidly from weakness, dying the common death of starvation through excess of nourishment which so often takes the form of either diabetes, gout, or dropsy. As the death of each man is felt through loss of sympathy, he was but little regretted, and even his daughter, after the shock, was unwillingly conscious of relief.

"Thus Vera was left alone with her companion, whose bright influence day by day made itself felt, and revealed to her the lesson which is so hard to learn, that happiness on earth comes but by reflection. Pour out joy on others, and it shall overwhelm you. Forget yourself in others, and the tormentor strives in vain to harm you. See good in all things, and hell cannot hold you.

"But it is time that I told you something of Vancome. I had made him a fairly liberal allowance on condition that he did not try to interfere with his wife's freedom. As soon as he returned to England and the conditions were explained to

him, he consulted his solicitor with the hope of being able to get hold of Vera and her fortune, but his adviser gave him little prospect of success, and he decided, at any rate for a time, to accept the offer. He was the more willing to do this owing to his superstitious dread of some fiendish power which he believed me to possess. It is a curious fact that evil natures always regard an exhibition of force incomprehensible to them as some eccentric trick of the devil. The most superstitious men will be found among those who profess atheism. They scoff at the idea of God, while trembling at the shadow of Satan; and dread a dinner party of thirteen while denying the Last Supper.

"For a year Vancome followed much the same dissipated life as he had done previously to his marriage. He gambled, at first with caution, for he was no longer desperate, and for a time was successful, being thus enabled to indulge all his other extravagant tastes. But about the time of Mr. Soudin's death his luck turned, and he began to lose heavily. One night while playing piquet at the W—- Club he was caught cheating. He had been suspected for some time, and a trap was laid into which he fell. As there was no room for doubt he was expelled from the Club, and no longer dared to show himself in society. His future, all the future that he cared for, was ruined, while his title only assisted to advertise his shame. For days the papers increased their circulation at his expense, and the scandal in high life was placarded on every station and shouted through every town. His wife was commended for her forethought in having refused to live with him, while the more scurrilous papers exhausted their energy in raking up as many past scandals in his life as they could discover, feeling that there was little danger of an action for libel.

"It was during this outburst that I decided to see him. I had no longer any bitter feelings towards this man, and though while feeling certain that he would think at first I had come to gloat over his misery, I hoped to show that this was not the case, and that my desire was to help him. I found him sitting alone in his chambers; he had been drinking heavily for some time to drown his misery, and as I came in he looked up with dull glazed eyes which at first showed no sign of recognition. But suddenly they changed; his face became livid with anger.

"'Fiend!' he cried. 'It is your doing–and so you have come to see the end of your work! But you are mistaken–we will go down to hell together–you shall not escape me this time!'

"He took up a revolver which I had noticed lying on the table, and pointed it at me.

"'There are five chambers,' he said, 'and one is enough for me–I can spare you the other four!'

"I looked him in the face for a moment, and then said, 'Vancome, you cannot kill me, and for the present you shall not kill yourself, for at the moment you are

not responsible for your actions.'

"'I will kill you!' he cried. 'Damn you! I will!' And he strove with all his might to pull the trigger, but was powerless. His right hand sank slowly down till it lay by his side, and his revolver dropped between his fingers on to the rug at his feet. He staggered back to his chair, and I went up to him, and placing my hand on his burning forehead made him sleep.

"At this moment the door opened, and a young, showily-dressed girl entered.

"'Oh!' she cried. 'Goodness, what is the matter?'

"'Lord Vancome is ill,' I said, 'and will have to be carefully watched. Is there any one here who could look after him?'

"'Ill,' she laughed, and her laugh, as her speech, told her origin and life. 'D. T. ay? Well, I was a-thinking of cutting it just now–that settles the business!'

"'Wait a moment. Lord Vancome is not suffering from *delirium tremens*.'

"I said this, not because I wished for her services, but because there were enough reports about already without her adding a false one.

"'Who are you?' I asked.

"'My!' she said. 'Well, you are a beauty! Where do you hang out not to know Totsey Ben of the —- Theatre?'

"I was not previously aware of Totsey Ben's existence, but though she did not give me the details in words, I now knew that she took a very minor part in a comic opera being played at that rather disreputable theatre. I could see also the vile and filthy slum in which she had passed her childhood, and many of the coarse and revolting experiences connected with her early life before she blossomed out into a ballet-girl. Nor were the visions connected with this transformation scene much more entrancing.

"This girl, and such as she, without refinement, possessing only the coarse animal attractiveness, had been the chosen associates of Vera's husband, a man who had been brought up surrounded with all the delicate associations of noble birth and culture. It takes many centuries to create a gentleman and refined taste; but sometimes only a few years to revert to the lowest order of civilized brutishness.

"'Well,' I said to the girl, 'I do not fancy you would be of much use as a nurse, so perhaps you might as well pack your things and go.'

"'I reckon you're about right," she answered. 'But before I clear out, I will have my money or know why.'

"She went up to Vancome and shook him.

"'Leave him alone,' I said. 'Can you not see that he is ill?'

"'Ill!' she cried. 'I knows that there sort of illness! Ain't a bad sort neither till you wakes up with a splitter!' She took hold of a half empty whisky-decanter

that was on the table, and putting the bottle to her mouth, took a draught of the raw spirit.

"'Girl,' I said, 'you shall have your money; it is dearly enough earned.' And I laid some notes on the table. Her manner immediately changed.

"'Oh! you're a swell, are you?' she asked; and I was surprised at the extraordinary difference the new expression made in her face. She looked now what some men would call pretty, and her manner of speaking became less offensively vulgar. 'Sorry I made a row, but my temper's been tried simply awful these last few days. I know how to behave, I do!' And she curtseyed to me with her cheek resting on her hand, which was evidently part of the accomplishment taught her at the theatre.

"'Go and look in the glass,' I said.

"She took up the notes, and going to a long mirror, looked, expecting to see the simpering expression called up for the occasion; but though there is little hope of rousing such a one even by fear, I thought it better to give her one chance before she left.

"What she saw it is unnecessary to tell you. I called up before her mind pictures of what her future life would probably be, as she sank lower and yet lower on the downward path. She stood there motionless with horror as the pictures changed from bad to worse, till at last she saw the well-nigh unrecognizable image of herself as she lay in one of the hospital wards: then with a shriek of fear she turned, looked at me for one moment with terror-stricken eyes, and fled from the room.

"I sent for a trained nurse, and, with her assistance, watched over Vancome till he recovered. Before many days his dislike wore off, and in the depth of his misery and loneliness, he turned to me as a friend, the only one now left to him. When he had sufficiently recovered, I persuaded him to go abroad and travel.

"I saw him off. When we parted he said to me–'I am very sorry to lose you, and still more sorry for the way in which from the first I have acted. It is no use going into the matter. You are a strange being, Sydney; it is hard to know what to make of you. I used to think you were the devil, and now am half inclined to fancy you are an angel. But angel or devil, you are certainly not a man, for no man would have done all you have for nothing. You never make use of an opportunity even if it is thrown in your way. Now why did you not let me die? You could then have married Vera, and, as the books put it, lived happy ever after.'

"'I will tell you why,' I said. 'There is no such thing as the happiness you speak of. You have tried to find it in one way; others try to find it by other means, but they all fail. No one who seeks for happiness ever gains it. It is the same with all. One man seeks fame; for years he struggles through pain and weariness, till at last, maybe, it comes, and he finds the desired angel but a poor, thin, unsatis-

factory phantom, pointing with one finger at death; and he laughs that he could have wasted his youth and health in search of such a miserable, mocking spectre. The idea that wealth gives happiness is about the most comical delusion that man suffers from. There is one plane of enjoyment which is determined by the man himself; one delusion that this plane can be altered by climbing the treadmill of prosperity. A man puts his foot on the step, and immediately descends to the same position; and many continue to climb after happiness in this foolish manner all their lives. Unknowingly they may perhaps turn the mill of invention and progress, and this is most likely the object of the delusion. No, Vancome,' I concluded, for the boat was starting, 'try a new way, and you shall yet turn cursing to blessing. Good-bye.'

"This is the last time that he ever saw me; but I know that he remembered these parting words, and did not altogether live the rest of his life in vain. Two years after this, whilst shooting in Africa, he was attacked by cholera, and died. During his short illness I never left him. When I came to his bedside he was insensible through the pain of the first attack. The case was quite hopeless; but I was able to save him further suffering, and he never regained consciousness. His body was embalmed, sent to England, and buried in the family grave at Somerville.

"I had spent the greater part of these two years at Aphar. Vera no longer needed my help. She was learning from her friend the joy of living for others. Agnes still yearned after the little orphan children she had left, and so contagious is true enthusiasm, that unconsciously she infected Vera with the desire to help her in this work. One day a sad case came under her notice. One of the Canons of L—- Cathedral was lunching at Somerville, and the conversation drifted to 'Workhouse Management,' a pet subject of the Canon, who was on the Board of Guardians.

"'It is very fortunate,' Agnes said to him, 'that you who take a real interest in the poor are on the Board; so often these matters are left in the hands of those who care for little but their own interest.'

"'I hope,' he replied, 'that I have been able to do something, but under the present system the work is enough to make any man's heart bleed. For the old people we can do something, but for the little children it is terrible. Once let them get into the workhouse, and seven out of ten are ruined for life.'

"'I know,' said Agnes, tears coming into her eyes. 'It is terrible! Herded as they are together, without love, or personal sympathy, the evil which is always surrounding them works like leaven. Do you know, Vera,' she continued, turning to her friend, 'that the little things when they came to me at the Orphanage often did not know how to kiss. Oh! it made my heart ache, trying to teach a little girl of seven to kiss me.'

"'Yet these are not the most painful cases, to my mind,' the Canon said.

'Only last week two children, such dear little things, were brought in by the relieving officer. Their mother, a widow, had for four years struggled hard to support them, but work for which she was unfitted, at last brought on consumption. When she died there was nothing for it but to bring them to the pauper school. They will now have to be separated from each other. The boy, who is a plucky little fellow of nine, has always looked after his younger sister, and when he heard that she must be taken from him I never saw such abject misery on a child's face. "She sha'n't go," he said. "I promised mother to look after her–she sha'n't go!" And the two poor little lonely things clung together and had to be separated when they fell asleep. I would not let the officer tear them apart.'

"'It's shameful!' Vera said. 'Why do people let such things be?'

"'God only knows!' the clergyman answered. 'Because they are, I suppose, too selfish to care. If they could only be made to see for themselves the misery, it would not be tolerated; but they pay the poor-rate and think no more about it. Would that some voice could make them hear; the evil could so easily be remedied.'

"'It sha'n't happen in the case you have mentioned, any way,' Vera said; 'shall it, Agnes? We will have them here and look after them, poor little things.' And Agnes, whose heart was too full for words, could only answer by getting up and kissing her friend.

"Thus it came to pass that the work began, but no one with a heart can begin such a work of love and stop. I have known women fairly well off start such an undertaking, and nearly starve themselves to death for the sake of the little ones. There is always one more that must be saved; the home is full, the money running out, but the sorrowful face pleads too strongly, and room must be found. And so it was with Vera and Agnes. Somerville could soon not contain its inmates. A new home was built in the park; fresh hands had to be employed.

"There was no danger for Vera now; in such work there is no time for weariness or sin. Little hands drag the selfishness out of those who tend them; tiny lips satisfy the aching want of love. Happiness that has so long evaded pursuit, comes unsought and overwhelms the givers. Faith, never learned through doctrine, is discovered by the evidence of a love-awakened heart when it first realizes that such as these little ones are the angels who behold the Father's face; and that inasmuch as we have done it unto one of the least of these, we have done it to our Saviour; and through Him found salvation."

PART V

CHAPTER XVI

When I next went over to spend the evening with Sydney I reminded him that there was a room in his house which he had promised some day to show me.

"Be patient," he answered, "you will see it before very long."

My companion was in more than usually good spirits. He was in one of his bright, amusing, and kindly satirical moods, and for some time he kept me in a state of nearly continual laughter by recounting his early experiences with the sixth sense before he properly understood how to regulate this new power.

"During the next two hundred years," he said, "the earth will be a lively place for those who are fond of observation. If I am not much mistaken there will be great progress in the growth of spiritual science, and as its professors will probably possess a very imperfect knowledge there may be some little confusion. Fancy how unpleasant it will be to many people when their thoughts become common property, and their actions can no longer be done in secret. When a cad, however polished, will appear as a cad; and children will be sent to school to undergo heart-training and not to learn deportment; when the future members of Parliament will have to study the art, not of elocution and subterfuge, but of caring more for their constituents than for their own interests; when the wife will no longer ask her husband why he returned so late, because she will know as well as he does; when the detective will be banished into the region of history, and the judge require neither witness nor jury; when curiosity, the cause of so much vice, shall be exercised only in spiritual things, and men and women walk naked yet unashamed both in body and spirit.

"Of course all this will come gradually, and future generations will find no more inconvenience than would young children if the change took place to-morrow. All our so-called modesty and our deceit are unknown to them, being merely the outcome of training. The child is open enough until by mental or physical smacks he learns to cover his body with garments, and his thoughts with words most suitable to concealing them. When such clothing is transparent the man will become in this respect as a little child.

"This will be the time of which Emerson speaks, when he says–'Every man takes care that his neighbour shall not cheat him, but a day comes when he begins to care that he do not cheat his neighbour. Then all goes well; he has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun. What a day dawns when we have taken to heart the doctrine of faith! To prefer as a better investment being to doing, being to seeming, logic to rhythm and to display; the year to the day, the life to the year, character to performance.'

”The desire to perform is the one great hindrance to progress. So many wish to do, so few to be. If we are great we cannot help doing great things, and if we are small-minded no effort shall magnify our output. It is for this reason that I give a limit of two hundred years for even this partial development of a sense which is already latent in many. In the present rush of action growth is retarded, discovery thrown into the melting-pot for gain, whereby its most valuable component parts escape in the form of invisible gases. But come with me, and I will show you the secret which is hidden behind that third door.”

We passed as usual into the laboratory.

”Sit down, and while we smoke I will tell you a few things which it is as well you should know before we go further.

”I think,” he continued, when we had settled ourselves comfortably, ”I have already explained to you that, contrary to the general belief, Wordsworth was quite right when he said–

’Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.’

”There are very many cases where it is necessary for certain reasons that the spirit should be re-incarnated on this earth many times before the earth-lesson is learned, and before it is able to unite with the feminine element and thereby rise to more perfect existence. Life, like matter, is indestructible, but as atoms unite and reunite to form what we call elements, and these again unite and reunite to form chemical compounds, so life or spirit, which is one and the same thing, is ever being drawn together by attraction.

”Thus, for the sake of argument, we will say that the life of a flower unites with that of another flower, and rises thus to the animal kingdom where free existence is possible. I use this expression only for convenience, as no arbitrary line can be drawn between the two kingdoms. Then again, the lower animal life unites with its female element to form the higher; and so on up to man. This explains why the lower we go down in the scale the greater is the number of lives to be found on each level, for it requires millions to blend together before the higher orders are reached. This is why also in animals you see certain sides of characters which are all noticeable in man. They are, as it were, the bricks making ready for the future temple. So the spirit of man is also imperfect and one-sided lacking the feminine qualities to be found in woman. A time comes, however, when two suitable natures meet, and after death their spirits blend together even

as Swedenborg has written, and they form what he calls one angel; that is to say, a still more perfect being. And this joining together does not cease even then, but angel unites with angel and archangel with archangel up to God. Thus none can harm his neighbour without injuring part of his future self, for all at last shall be one.

"This view is repellent to the carnal mind, as it destroys what he is pleased to term his individuality; but this is only owing to the fact that his mind at present is unable to comprehend unity with personality. An interesting example of the confusion arising from this difficulty will be obvious if you hear a deist and a trinitarian argue together."

"But," I said, "I do not like the idea myself. I wish to retain my own consciousness, and have no desire to be merged in others."

"Do you not retain your own consciousness now?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly."

"And yet," he continued, "millions of lives have united to form that consciousness."

"But I don't care about the past," I said, "it is the future. According to you, in my next existence I shall unite with some other spirit and lose half my own individuality."

"I do not think you will," he replied laughing, "because you do not love as yet, and love only is the attraction which draws kindred spirits together. When they desire to unite, they will. Till then they must remain incomplete. But those who are thus joined together are conscious not of loss, but of the most exquisite gain; and this union is foreshadowed by the joining together in marriage of man and woman here."

"But it cannot always be the spirits of husband and wife who are thus united."

Sydney laughed.

"Hardly," he said. "Marriage is but a material convenience, and there are not many who have reached that state when the unity of souls becomes desirable; but nevertheless there are those living whose marriage is a foretaste of a union which shall be made perfect through death. But often the complement of a spirit is not on this earth, though they have met in some previous existence."

"Do you know," I asked, "to whose spirit yours will be united?"

"I do," he answered; and the accent on the words drew my attention to his face: there I read such depth of love and hope as I have never seen light up the features of man or woman. "It was," he said, "while in the spirit-world that I learnt much of what I have now told you. But I learnt more than this, for I was able to look into the past, and to see the why and wherefore of many things that had previously puzzled me here. It was something that I had thus discovered

which induced me to buy the land and build this present house. Beyond that panel, through which we are going, lies one of the secrets of my past. But I must explain one more thing to you before we go.

"The higher the form of spirit life, the longer it usually takes for souls to unite. In the lower orders these changes may occur every few minutes; in the higher, centuries may intervene."

Sydney now got up, and motioning me to follow, went to a sliding panel, touched a spring, and we passed together into a narrow passage. After descending some winding steps, which must have brought us to about twenty-five feet below the level of the house, we passed through another door into a large covered courtyard which, except for its domed roof and polygonal shape, reminded me of one of the Pompeian houses.

"This," said my companion, "is, as far as I know, the only perfect Roman house in Britain, and the history of its preservation is very interesting. The stone roofing of the courtyard is also curious, resembling as it does more the covering of one of the Roman tombs to be found in St. Helena and Sta Costanza than the usual domestic style of architecture. It was in this very court that centuries ago I first met the girl I love, and have in many forms loved ever since. It was in that room beyond"–he pointed to one of the smaller apartments which could be seen through an open archway–"that a scene took place the effects of which have been felt to the present time."

After taking me over the building, which was in perfect preservation, and showing me the bath, kitchen and various rooms, he drew my attention to the mosaic floor and to various frescoes on the walls. The workmanship was very beautiful, but the scenes depicted were coarse and sensual.

"Now," he said, "that I have shown you one of the scenes of my life, we may as well go up to the room above. This place is cold, and if you wish to hear the story we shall find it more comfortable in our usual place."

As soon as we had returned to the laboratory my companion began his story of the past.

"It is unnecessary for me to give you a full picture of this district during the close of the fourth century. At this time, as you will remember, the Romans had not been recalled, and many of the nobles had settled down at various places in the southern counties, having built for themselves houses more or less after the type then common in Italy. Some of these Roman villas have been discovered in recent years, though none so well preserved as the specimen we have just examined. This house was built by Valerius Marius, a celebrated warrior and huntsman. He selected this spot when the times became more peaceful on account of the abundance of game in the neighbouring forest. The soldiers and slaves under him were for the time organized into an army of beaters, after the

manner of those days. The wild boar and other beasts were thus driven from the forest into netted enclosures and slaughtered by hundreds.

"This man had never married, but he had one child, Viola, by a favourite slave, who, at this time, was a very beautiful girl of about sixteen. He treated her as his own daughter, bringing her up in luxury, and letting her follow her heart's desire, which, considering that she was by nature little better than a lovely savage, was a dangerous experiment. Among her retinue of slaves was a fair Saxon boy, who, on account of his good looks, had been bought for a high price when nine years old to act as a page to the little girl. Like many men engaged in active pursuits, the father allowed these two children to grow up together, without realizing the changed condition which came by years, or that his baby girl was growing into a woman, and her little slave-boy into a youth. The female slaves who ministered to their mistress, while probably conscious of the danger, had no wish to interfere and to rob the girl and themselves of a bright and pleasant companion.

"Thus it came to pass that these two children were left much together, especially during the hunting expeditions, and like two beautiful animals they developed early. The girl, partly owing to her sex and partly to her Southern blood, led the way in this as she did in all other matters. The boy was her slave, and she never for one moment forgot to remind him of his servitude, whether they were at play together, or whether he were attending to the many duties she found for him. And the boy had loved her from the first with a childish devotion; the beautiful little dark-eyed girl had been his queen from the first day when he had been brought, a little naked, fair-haired boy, and given to the maiden in the atrium or hall. As she ran out of the tablinum beyond on hearing her father's voice, his big blue eyes opened wide with astonishment. Was this to be his mistress, this dainty little white-robed goddess? And unbidden he knelt down before her, fully persuaded in his childish ignorance that he was in the presence of some elfish deity. He would then and at any future time have died to save her, and though she often treated him brutally, even making the women slaves beat him unmercifully if he happened to cause her displeasure, no thought of anger ever entered his mind. Was she not his mistress? And why should she not do with him as she desired?

"According to custom, the owner of a slave gave him whatever name seemed most suitable, and the maid, by reason of the colour of the child's hair, called her little servant Aureus. As Viola grew older she was allowed on certain occasions to ride out with Aureus and meet her father at the end of one of the netted enclosures, so as to witness the final slaughter. Here, placed upon a small platform erected on one of the trees, she could watch the wild boar and other animals as they were driven further and further into the ambuscade. She saw

them rushing madly at the netting and being slaughtered by the men who surrounded it with their long boar-spears. But the moment of true excitement came at the end, when with a wild rush the maddened animals, who had so far escaped destruction, burst at last through the only opening possible and rushed into the open plain. Here at least they had some little chance of escape, for though they were unable to return to the forest, they might, if they could avoid the archers' arrows, find at last some distant cover. The footmen had done their work, and at this point the horsemen galloped forth followed by the hounds, who had till now been kept in leash. The plain was soon covered with flying huntsmen and hounds, racing after the maddened fugitives. But exciting as this scene was, Viola soon got tired of being only a spectator, and would often urge her father to allow her to follow the chase on horseback; but he, knowing the danger, had hitherto always refused.

"Now it so happened that among the slave girls was one named Myra, who had recently been bought by Valerius Marius on account of her beauty. She was ambitious, and hated her mistress on account of the high position which she held through her father's love. If, she thought, I could but get rid of this girl I might rule here myself in her place.

"It was not long before she realized how dangerous the intimacy might soon become between Aureus and Viola, and though she had no ill-will to the former, she was quite willing to sacrifice him if only by so doing she could also bring about the destruction of her mistress. To accomplish her ends she decided to worm her way into their affections. As she had seen much of life and no little of vice, she was able to interest the girl with many stories connected with the past. But she did not find it easy to get an opportunity to talk in private with the boy. Viola seldom allowed him to leave her, and was evidently jealous if he showed the least liking for any of the slave girls, more especially for the new beauty. Myra, however, was not to be easily defeated. She saw at once that the boy was as yet a child, and that to accomplish her end speedily it would be necessary for her to awaken some youthful passion in his heart, which should ultimately bring about the ruin of her rival.

"Taking, therefore, an opportunity when for once Viola unaccompanied had gone with her father to visit some neighbouring Roman nobles, she drew the boy aside and asked him to show her the surrounding country.

"'I have,' she said, 'not dared to go beyond the enclosure, fearing the wild beasts, but with you as companion I should not fear.'

"It was against the rules for any of the female slaves to go outside the boundary of the dwelling-place without permission, but Myra was at this time in favour, and no one left behind would have dared to interfere with her actions. She was known to be vindictive, and, having the ear of her master, would have

had little difficulty in revenging an insult.

"So Aureus consented, and they wandered out into the forest, following the course of a small stream. At length they came to an opening in the trees where the sun shone pleasantly upon a bank of ferns. Here they sat and rested. At their feet was a deep pool in which the boy had often bathed; and Myra, as she reclined on the bank, dabbled her bare legs in the clear water to wash the dust from them.

"'Do you often come here with your mistress?' she asked. 'You seem always with her.'

"'When we were children,' the boy said, 'we often stole out here in the summer-time to bathe in the cool water. But we do not bathe here now.'

"'Why not?' his companion asked.

"The boy looked up into her face with a comical, innocent expression. 'I do not quite know,' he said. 'She is too old to bathe now, except in the bath; only slave girls bathe out of doors when they are grown up.'

"'So you think it does not matter what we do?' she said.

"'You are different from the others,' he answered. 'You wear a tunic, and not an ordinary dress.'

"'You call this a tunic, do you?' she said, pointing to the thin garment which partially concealed the full sensuous beauty of her limbs. 'This is not much of a robe, this summer thing. I might almost as well be without it.'

"'Do you feel cold?' he asked.

"'Feel me,' she said.

"The boy placed his hand upon her bare neck as she moved closer to him. 'You are quite hot,' he said, 'your skin almost burns me. But how soft and smooth it is! Tell me, why are women so much more beautiful than men?'

"'I don't think they are,' the girl answered. 'You, for instance, are more beautiful than Viola. Look at your arm;' and as she said this she laid her dark hand upon his shoulder. 'How fair you are by the side of any of us! Look at your hair;' and she ran her fingers through the bright soft waves of gold. 'Do you not think that it is more beautiful than our long dark tresses?'

"'No, I do not,' he said. 'Viola's hair is beautiful, and so is yours; far more beautiful than mine.'

"'There you are mistaken,' she said. 'You do not know. Come and look.'

"The two bent forward over the still clear water. It was a pretty picture which they saw reflected; the young boy's fair sun-tanned face surrounded with a bright halo of curls through which the sunlight played. The girl bending over him, her dark tresses, which she had unbound, falling over his shoulders and covering them both as with a cloud; her breast, which hitherto looked brown against the white of her tunic, now by contrast with the deep shade of her hair was reflected back with the brilliancy of ivory.

"'You are beautiful,' was all the boy said.

"'*We* are beautiful,' the girl corrected. 'Do you think,' she continued, 'that I am as lovely as your mistress?'

"'Oh dear, no!' the boy replied, with uncomplimentary frankness. Then, feeling that he had angered her, he went on, 'You see it is different. She is so young, so delicate!' And saying this he looked again into the water, contrasting in his mind the tender budding grace of the maiden with the reflection of developed womanhood before him.

"Myra laughed; but though it was not her desire to win the boy from his devotion to Viola, there was beneath the laughter in her eyes an angry, jealous light.

"'Ah! my pretty infant,' she cried, 'when you are older you will grow wiser. So you love this little mistress of yours, do you?'

"'I worship her!' he said, slightly correcting the verb, and giving it, not only a fuller, but more chastened meaning.

"'What is the difference,' she asked, 'between love and worship?'

"'You tell me,' he said; 'I am not good at explaining, I only feel.'

"They had moved back from the water, and were now once more lying on the soft bank.

"'I don't think you know much about feeling, child,' she answered, 'and as for love, why you're a perfect baby! We begin by worshipping; we go on to loving; and we often end by hating!'

"'Then I don't want to get to loving,' he said, 'I like worshipping best, especially if love leads to hatred; but I don't believe it! I might, perhaps, hate you, Myra, but I never could hate Viola. However, tell me what love is, and I will tell you if I have ever loved.'

"'Have you ever kissed your mistress?' she asked.

"The boy looked surprised. 'The Roman nobles,' he answered, 'do not kiss their slaves.'

"The girl burst out laughing; this idea, from her point of view, was exceedingly comical, but she did not contradict him. 'I will tell you some stories about love,' she said.

"Myra, being a Roman slave girl, and having passed through some considerable experience of what she termed love, it would be unnecessary and unedifying to follow her further. Manners and customs change, and the refinement of thought and language, notwithstanding many an ebb and flow, has enlarged its borders. To describe therefore any such scene as this truthfully, would be not only undesirable, but misleading.

"When Aureus returned to the villa late that evening, though he may not have been intellectually much wiser, he had tasted of the fruit of the tree of

knowledge, and knew more of evil than formerly; but it is doubtful whether he or his teacher had any active consciousness of sin. They were little better than half-educated savages, and their training on the moral side had in one case been neglected, and in the other perverted.

"After Viola's return, she noticed a change in her fair slave. He was as devoted as ever, but less bright and natural in manner. When they were alone together he would sit watching her every movement The sensation of being thus watched made her angry and uncomfortable.

"On one such occasion she turned to him and said crossly, 'I shall sell you. You're getting too old and dull to be any amusement. What has come to you of late? Ah! it never struck me before. You're in love!'

"As she said this, the boy turned scarlet. She had guessed part of the truth, but not that he was in love with her.

"'Yes, I see it now–in love with that hateful slave Myra!' she continued, stamping her foot. 'I ought to have known! They told me that you and she had been out together in my absence. I'll teach her to go interfering with my slaves! I'll let her know who rules here!'

"And the girl, raging with passion, bade Aureus to follow, and hurried back to the villa. Going into one of the inner rooms, she told some of the maidens to fetch Myra, who came reluctantly at her summons. The slight girl, absolute mistress of those around, drew up her haughty little figure, when she saw the beautiful slave enter, and at once demanded by whose authority she had left the enclosure during her absence.

"This was too great a strain on Myra's temper, and relying on the favour shown by her master, she became insolent, even taunting her mistress with her illegitimate birth.

"'Who are you!' she cried, 'to rule over me! Daughter of a slave! Soon shall you be turned from your high position, and be servant of my children. Who made you better than the others, that you dare to give orders to me?'

"For a moment Viola stood speechless with anger, her face contracted with rage; then turning to those round her, she cried–

"'Bind her, the insolent brute! I'll teach her whether I am mistress or not!'

"The slave-girls were nothing loth to see their haughty companion humbled, for they were jealous of her beauty, and of the favour which had hitherto been shown to her. In a moment the wretched girl was seized, the grand tunic of which she had been so proud was taken from her, and her hands and feet tightly bound.

"'Now,' said Viola, 'bring the double-lashed whip.'

"When Myra heard this order, her pride vanished, and with tears and entreaties she began to cry to her mistress to spare her. But Viola only mocked at

her terror.

"'Ah!' she cried, 'so the slave is beginning to recognize her mistress; and she shall do so with good reason before we let her go!' Then, turning to Aureus, she said, 'Take the whip, and let me see that you use it like a man, or by the gods I will have you lashed and sold in the public slave-market.'

"The boy, though he had often witnessed such scenes before, hesitated; he had never been called upon to hit a woman, and the thought was instinctively repugnant to him. On the other hand, he had never disobeyed his mistress, and her will was his law. He lifted the whip and let it fall gently upon the prostrate woman, who was bound down upon one of the raised stone seats. Then Viola came up to him, and grinding her teeth with anger, she seized his arm.

"'If you do not hit her,' she hissed, 'hit her so that the blood shall flow forth freely, I will kill you both! Brute!' she cried; 'you love her–you dare to love her!'

"Then the boy did as his mistress told him, and a great curse entered into his soul, for the brute nature was awakened, and he knew the delight of cruelty; for the sister fiend of lust, with her horrible fascination, took, for the time, possession of him as he watched the writhing body of his victim. But the young girl Viola stood by more damned than the slave who did her bidding, for a double curse fell upon her soul.

"On a lovely day towards the end of summer, Viola at last obtained her father's consent to ride with the huntsmen, and Aureus, who was a skilful horseman, was told off to be her attendant, and made responsible for her safety.

"It was late in the day before the wild beasts broke cover and the riders galloped over the plain in pursuit. The girl selected for her quarry a hart which had been slightly wounded by one of the archers, and soon she and her companion were urging their horses over the ground. They were both well mounted, but the animals at that date were ill fitted for speed, and there seemed little chance of their overtaking the stag unless his wound exhausted him. The girl, however, was far too excited to consider possibilities, and they soon left the other huntsmen far behind, the sound of the horns growing fainter and fainter.

"At last the hart came to a small wood, and disappeared among the undergrowth.

"'Had we not better return?' the boy asked. 'We shall find it no easy matter to follow him further.'

"But the girl had no mind to give up the chase. A few hounds had followed them, and she put them upon the track and began forcing her horse through the dense thicket. They had not far to go before once more the open country could be seen through the willow-stems, and after wading a small stream they came in sight of the stag who had just been driven from his place of concealment. The hounds, now also emerging from the stream, gave tongue joyfully at view of their

prey.

"Once more the chase commenced. Forgetting time and place in the wild excitement, the two continued their solitary run accompanied by three slow but keen-scented hounds. Scrambling up the steep hills and wading the many streams which came in their path, they at last discovered their quarry, who had taken refuge in a deep pool. The boy and girl dismounted and rested for a moment to recover their breath.

"In the mean time the hounds plunged into the water; but powerful though they were on land, resembling as they did in appearance a cross between the modern bloodhound and boarhound, they were no match in the water against their horned antagonist. Aureus knew that, dangerous as was the undertaking to one not fully experienced, it would be necessary for him to go to their assistance. Placing, therefore, his knife between his teeth, and throwing off his garment, he plunged into the water and swam out to the spot where the unequal contest was raging. Waiting for a suitable moment when the attention of the stag was engaged, he approached it cautiously from behind, and taking the dagger from between his teeth, stabbed it to the heart.

"The girl, who was standing on the bank breathless with excitement, now that she saw the stag was dead, gave a cry of delight, and called to Aureus to push the body in front of him to the side of the pool so that she might help him to drag it from the water. She then called the reluctant hounds to her, and watched impatiently the accomplishment of the youth's difficult task.

"At length between them they managed to get the body on dry land, and at once set to work, after the manner of the time with which they were so familiar, to break up the body; the girl blowing her horn, and the boy presenting her with the head and antlers. Nor did they forget to reward the faithful hounds.

"They were reminded by the greed of these their followers that they also were hungry, and having lighted a fire–for no huntsman ever went forth without providing materials for this contingency–they were soon busy cooking some of the choicest morsels on slips of wood over hot charcoal. Then, like two young savages, they feasted, drinking from a neighbouring stream.

"It was now growing dusk, and if they hoped to return that night there was no time to spare. At first by following the marks of their horses' feet they had little difficulty in retracing their steps, but coming to a wide stretch of heath they lost the track, and while endeavouring in vain to find it, darkness settled down. As they were far from any landmark known to them, and were, moreover, shut in by the surrounding hills, they at last gave up the attempt in despair, and decided to make the best of the circumstances and spend the night in some sheltered spot.

"Having come to a suitable place they tied up their horses and crept together into a small hollow which was carpeted with bracken and roofed by sand-

stone rock. It was a mild night, but Viola, thinly clad as she was, felt the cold reaction which follows violent exercise, and nestled up closer and closer to her companion, who was far too accustomed to exposure to feel the least chilled by the night air. After a few moments of silence, the girl, raising herself a little, bent over and kissed the boy's lips.

"'There,' she said, 'that is a reward for your having been brave and killed the stag!'

"But the boy trembled at her touch; it was the first time she had ever kissed him; it was the kindling of a new and fatal change in their relationship: childhood had gone!"

"As may be imagined, Myra's bitterness against her mistress was strengthened rather than lessened by the cruel punishment. She made bitter complaint to her master, but without success; as, though he was vexed at what he considered an excessive punishment, he made it a point in no way to interfere with his daughter in matters of this kind. He knew too well that a divided rule would mean continued complaints; and, moreover, he thought his fair slave had lately been getting somewhat out of hand, and that a little check was desirable. So he only laughed, telling her that she must learn to be an obedient girl, and do what her mistress told her.

"But Myra's day of revenge was nearer than she expected, and she soon began to suspect the altered relationship between Viola and Aureus. She was therefore content to wait her time, and during this interval she feigned the most abject meekness and fawning servility to her young tyrant, avoiding at the same time all intercourse with the boy.

"Marius had been absent when these two returned home the morning after the hunt. It was usual in these days to continue the chase of fugitives as long as any chance of capture remained. Moreover, there was much work to be done in collecting the slain. Owing to this their absence caused no comment, the servants at the villa fancying that Viola had been with her father, while he was under the impression that the girl had returned with her prize on the evening of the previous day.

"Viola was now often allowed to join the hunting parties, and she and her boy lover were thrown more than ever together. It was a happy time for both of them, living as they did only for the pleasure of the moment, and disregarding all thought of the future. They were too young and reckless either to know or consider the consequences of their present folly. But nature moves in her own way, following her own laws, whether her children regard them or not. She has her own ends to fulfil, and is utterly callous of conventional restrictions; to her

there is neither king nor slave, neither queen nor serving-maid, but only male and female, and she treats all alike, without respect of persons or regard to social convenience. It is her children's fault, not hers, if things turn out disastrously; if men make restrictions for themselves which have no part in her plan of action and impose laws which interfere with her wider and more impartial scheme.

"The winter came and went, and many of the same spring flowers which now make our lanes so beautiful at this time of the year, carpeted the open glades of the forest, and bordered the pure untainted streams. The delicate lacework of drooping ferns was reflected in the still pools, then stocked with fish as yet unacquainted with guile; the May-fly required no second inspection, but might be devoured recklessly without fear of fatal results, while the wriggling worm which strayed too near the bank, and turned over gently into the water, had not the chances of escape which he now enjoys. No committee of taste would then lie round to study his movements for fear that a dangerous hook might be concealed somewhere in his body.

"It was on a lovely evening shortly after the cuckoo's note had become once more a familiar sound, that Viola and Aureus, returning from a ramble in the wood, were met a few yards from the enclosure by Marius. As the girl glanced up at her father, she was suddenly overwhelmed with terror. She had seen anger often on his face before, but never when he had looked at her, and never such deep anger as this. What was the meaning of it?

"With a haughty word he dismissed the slave, and telling his daughter to follow, went on toward the forest. For some time the silence was only broken by the sound of their footsteps, and the sweet singing of the birds. At last the man stopped, and turning round, looked fixedly at his daughter for a moment. Then, with a deep-drawn sob, half of anger and half of pain, he cried–

"'So it is true! This which they have told me, and which I might have seen with my own eyes. My daughter, whom I have loved and honoured, has demeaned herself even to the level of a slave–has become one of the vile! You know your fate–the fate of the wanton. Even though I have loved you, this past love shall not save you. Were you not my own child I would even now sell you in the slave-market, that you might follow the vile calling you have chosen. As it is, you shall die!'

"When Viola heard this she fell upon her knees before her father, and with tears implored him to spare her life. Then, in her terror, a thought crossed her mind. She might yet save herself by a lie. To hide her guilt she knew would be impossible, but she might throw all the blame upon another, and so save herself.

"Between sobs and lamentations she said–'Even though you kill me, yet am I innocent of evil. How could I know, who am but a child, of the wickedness of men? I went out to hunt in the forest, and the stag led me far from home,

and when we slew it the darkness of night was falling, and there was none near save the slave whom you gave me as a servant. And behold, when we strove to return home, we could not find our way; and as we wandered helpless into the thick places of the forest, night came on.' Then Viola, having thrown all the blame upon Aureus, finished her story in these words–'Knowing not the harm that would follow, I hid this thing in my heart; and though he, my destroyer, has since been hateful to me, yet dared I not show it lest the evil which had happened might be suspected by any.'

"Then the father, willing if possible to save his child, was moved by her words and tears, though still unconvinced of her innocence. And he said–

"'I will prove and see if these things be even as you say.'

"So they returned together to the house, and he led his daughter into an inner room, and commanded his servants to bring Aureus bound before him. Then having dismissed the slaves, he repeated to the boy the story which his daughter had told; and when he had done this, he said–

"'If this be true, then shalt thou be crucified in the sight of all the people; but if thou canst prove that this was no act of violence, I will sell thee as a slave, and the girl shall die!'

"The boy looked upon the pleading and terrified face of the one he loved, and lifting up his head, swore by the gods, saying–

"'It is true even as thy daughter has said. I, and only I, am to blame.'

"Then the father turned to the girl and said–'And you hate him even as you said?'

"And she, simulating anger, answered–'I hate him–I hate him!'

"But Marius, still doubting, replied, so that he might try her further–'Thou shalt this night then have thy revenge, even before the sun shall set.'

"Then he ordered that a cross of wood should be made ready. When it was prepared and laid upon the ground, he commanded his daughter to come, and the boy was brought forth and laid upon the cross. But when one of the servants was about to take a nail and with the heavy hammer drive it into the boy's hand, Marius stayed him, saying–

"'She, who has thus been wronged, shall with her own hand take vengeance.' Then he said to the girl who was standing by his side–'Go!' And in a low voice he whispered, 'Then shall I know the truth!'

"And Viola, though faint with terror and anguish, dare not hesitate, for she knew that her refusal would be treated as a sign of guilt. So with trembling hands she nailed the lover who died to save her to the cross, and his blood stained her fingers and the white robe she wore.

"Then, even as the sun was setting, they lifted the cross on high, and the glow of the evening light fell softly upon the boy's head.

"When Viola went to her room that night, she could not sleep. The thought of her lover still suffering the tortures of his slow death was too horrible. She could no longer bear the anguish of remorse and self-contempt.

"'Better,' she cried, 'had I died ten thousand times than live this awful life!'

"She began to picture all the happy hours that they had spent together; she thought of the love which the boy had always shown her. It was impossible that she should remain any longer in her room. Whatever the risk she ran, whatever pain it might bring, she must see her lover again and ask him to forgive her. Was it too late? Was his suffering over? She took up a short dagger, and moving softly, stole out of the house.

"There was a moon, but fortunately at the moment it was covered by clouds, and she passed into the open beyond the enclosure safely. In the gloom she could see the cross standing out against the hills beyond; and even as she looked the clouds passed by, and the moon shone brightly, showing clearly the boy's drooping head and strained arms. Was he dead? She hurried on until she came to the foot of the cross. The boy slightly moved at the sound of her footstep, and turning his head looked down at her.

"'Aureus!' she cried, 'Aureus! forgive me–forgive me!'

"The boy tried to speak, but for a moment he could not. Then with a great effort he whispered, 'Viola, I love you! I shall always love you!' And as he said the last word his head fell forward; his pain was over.

"But the girl, when she realized that he was dead, having kissed the poor wounded feet, knelt down before his lifeless body; then, baring her breast, she drove the dagger into her heart."

"Soon after this Marius left the country, being summoned with several of the Romans to Italy. But the story of these two being handed down, the villa was looked upon as haunted by their dead spirits, and avoided as a place accursed.

"Some time later, owing to the misfortune which attended a Saxon tribe that had settled in this part, orders were given that the 'House of the Great Curse,' as it was then called, should be domed over and covered with sand, so that the evil spirits might be confined within. In a few years the grass grew on the little hillock, and long before the Norman Conquest all history connected with the place had perished."

"And that," I said, "is the ending of the story. It is a very sad one."

"It is rather," he answered; "the first chapter of what may be called our intellectual history, is usually sad. The fight between the spirit and beast nature must naturally bring about much evil; the animal is in one sense far less repulsive than the savage, as the former lacks the ingenuity with which the latter is able

to enforce his brutal desires. From that day to the present time my spirit and the spirit of this girl have been more or less interwoven together through many lives and under various names. Both our natures have developed; though owing in a large measure to the incident just related, her growth has been retarded; had it not been for this, our spirits would probably have been united long before this, and have passed to a higher and nobler life together. But we shall not now have long to wait," he continued; "and I shall at last be freed from these marks."

As he said this he held his hands palm upward for me to look at, and in the centre of each was a small faint red spot.

"Those marks," he said, "I have always borne. They are one of the strange signs of the power with which the spirit, under certain circumstances, affects the body, and their having endured for so long a time shows how deeply this experience affected in some way the formation of my character."

"Tell me," I said, "where Vera is now. Is she still alive?"

"Next time we meet," he answered, "if all be well, I will show you the girl as she is now–the girl whom you have heard of as Viola and Vera–the girl whom I love!"

"She can hardly be a girl now," I said.

"Wait," he replied, "and see."

CHAPTER XVII

As Sydney was away from home, some weeks passed before I again had an opportunity of seeing him. On hearing of his return I immediately walked to his house and found him sitting in the garden.

"I am glad that you have come," he said, "as this is the last day I shall spend here, and there is much still to tell before we part."

"Go!" I exclaimed; "you do not intend to leave altogether?"

"Yes," he replied; "and it will be many years before you will see me again, so we must make the best of the short time that still remains. You will stay the night?"

I assented. The news of his coming departure was a greater blow than I could have believed possible. Having lived for long alone, and become so self-concentrated, it had not occurred to me I could suffer such pain at parting from any one. When we are young we experience these acute sensations; but time

makes us callous, and after all, our friendship had lasted so short a time.

"You are sorry," he said. "We have become friends–a rare thing to happen in later life–and we shall miss each other. But it is better so. Some day you will understand why we lose our idols. It is not good for man to be alone; but it is still worse for one nature to rest all its interest upon another. The ivy clinging to the oak destroys the life of its supporter, and sooner or later they fall together."

For some time we strolled up and down, talking of friendship. There was one thing noticeable in Sydney which distinguished him from most men. Superficial observers would have called him egotistical, because if he thought a thing true he said so, without consideration for any of the forms of false modesty which are mistaken for meekness. If he liked a person he spoke to him just as he felt; and when better acquainted with a subject than those with whom he was conversing, he said so openly. If he felt that he was stronger or wiser than his friend, he lacked the affectation of professing to disbelieve it. Yet, instead of feeling that this assumption was an impertinence, I liked him the better for it; it was so naturally done, so free from the very suspicion of conceit.

"You and I," he seemed to say, "understand each other. We both know enough to be conscious of our own littleness and our own ignorance. We will not place ourselves in the ridiculous position of students in precedence. The gap between the wisest man and the fool is too narrow for partition. It is hardly worth while for earthworms to wrangle over shades of complexion, or men over shades of intelligence. Let us rather get to business, and make the best of our opportunity for improvement."

But this manner of his was offensive to many. There are minds so small that they are incapable of understanding a meekness that takes no account of distinction in littleness.

After dinner, Sydney abruptly turned a conversation upon the growth of spiritual life, in which I was much interested, and told me a short story about one of the little children who had been rescued by Agnes, and taken to Somerville.

I had no idea at the time how important a link in his history lay hidden in this pathetic tale.

"I promised," he said, "that when next we met, you should see Vera as she is, and to-night you shall do so, but first of all I will give you an account of a scene that happened six years ago. You remember the home for orphan children that Vera and Agnes started. For a few years it continued under their joint care, but then, owing to a reason which I will explain later, the entire charge was thrown upon Agnes, and the home has been for the last seven years, and is now, under her sole management. Six years ago I went to see her, and told her of a case which seemed in every way worthy of relief. A young woman, who had been left a widow a few months previously, was dying. She had one child, a little

girl about eighteen months old; this child would soon be totally unprovided for, as, though the mother had been well brought up, and was of gentle birth, her own and her husband's relations were dead. Anxiety on her baby's account was adding greatly to the poor woman's suffering. You may fancy that Agnes required no urging in such a case, and she went with me at once on this errand of mercy. We found the mother and her child in a small badly-furnished room in one of the poorest parts of Manchester. Since her husband's death she had done a little dressmaking, and so kept her child and herself from starvation. Notwithstanding the ravages of disease, she was still a beautiful woman; and as she told Agnes her story, the mystery of sorrow bravely borne, and apparently meaningless as far as this life was concerned, affected her listener deeply. Her parents had died when she was about seventeen; they had been fairly well off, having made a small fortune in Australia; her father, however, during the closing years of his life had speculated rashly, and when he died a few months after his wife, the estate had to be wound up in bankruptcy. His only daughter Ellen managed after some little difficulty to get a situation as nursery-governess to the children of a wealthy Australian, who was about to sail with his family for England. Ellen lived with these people for three years, and, from what she said, her life must have been far from happy. Those who have recently risen from an inferior social position are as a rule the most overbearing to any one whom they consider their subordinate; the value of wealth is so impressed upon them that they can hardly realize that the governess in their pay is their social equal, or may be, as in this case, their superior. The torment that such persons inflict on a young, and sensitive nature is indescribable. It is often bad enough to be ruled over by those we respect, but to be slighted, or still worse patronized, by those whose instincts and habits revolt us is torture. Such was this girl's life, until she met by accident her future husband; he was a young journalist, who through hard work and ability had made his way into a position which brought him in a precarious £300 a year. On the prospect of this doubtful income they married, and the first two years of their lives were passed happily. But soon after the birth of their child, Harry Stanford broke down in health. He had worked too hard. Then the bitter struggle began: piece by piece the furniture had to be sold to buy food, and when he died his wife found herself once more penniless, and debarred now from any chance of earning a living as she had formerly done, by reason of her new tie. Still, as long as her strength lasted she had struggled bravely against poverty and misfortune.

"'It is not,' she said, looking up at Agnes' face, 'that I fear to die. It would be so sweet to lie down and rest–to know that all trouble and pain were over, and that I could go to my husband! But he has left me this little one, the baby he loved so dearly and was so proud of. What will become of her when I go to him? What will he say–our child–our child! With no one to love or care for her–it is

terrible!'

"And the poor woman broke into a paroxysm of weeping.

"'I cannot die,' she sobbed, 'I cannot! Oh God! I see her growing up without love–people are cruel to her, and day by day, as she gets older, she will miss more the care of a mother's watchfulness. If anything should happen–if she should sink down through despair into the depth of sin and misery! I cannot leave her!'

"'Do not distress yourself, dear,' Agnes said; 'I will try and take your place when you are gone–will try to be a mother to your little one. Give her to me–let me take her in my arms.' She took the little one from its mother, and the child came not unwillingly. 'There, you see,' she continued, 'the child trusts me–will you?'

"When the mother heard and understood, the drawn look of anxious pain passed from her face, and a radiant light of rest and peace took its place.

"'Do you mean it?' she cried. 'Will you indeed take charge of my love, my baby, when I am gone? Oh! you don't know, you cannot imagine what joy you have given me! Trust you! Yes, indeed, no one can look into your eyes and see you touch the child and not know that you can love; and you are sure to love her, the darling! But how can I thank you–it is too good to be true.'

"Though the child was getting near the age when children so often develop shyness, she nestled up and clung to Agnes as though she recognized her touch. The little thing looked up into the sweet face bending over her, and seemed to find there something familiar. It put its baby hands to her cheeks and stroked them, then crowed and laughed with pleasure.

"To those who knew the mystery which connected Agnes with this child there was something strangely pathetic in the unconscious recognition, the half-forgotten association. The strange part lay chiefly in this, that the child was more conscious than the woman. The child remembered–the woman only felt at her heart a throb of reawakened love. And the mother who watched saw not the mysterious chain which bound these two together, yet she saw what was enough for her, love in the one and contentment in the other, and she lay back and rested with a heart full of such deep peace as she had never hoped again to know. I saw her fold her hands, and knew that she was half praying, half speaking to her husband. Even as she prayed his presence was beside her, and I then felt certain that the end was near.

"'Agnes,' I said, 'give back the child to its mother, that for one moment the three may be united.'

"She looked at me in surprise, wondering what I could mean, then placed the little one in its mother's arms; and the child, conscious, as children often are, of the spirit world around them, felt the dual presence, and lifting up its tiny hands gave a little cry of joy. But the cry broke the delicate thread which till now

had held the mother bound to earth, and her spirit was free. Then a strange thing happened, for as the two spirits were drawn together they became aware of the mystery which connected me with the child they had loved, and an indescribable joy entered their souls and passed to my own like some strain of joyful melody.

"The little child was taken by Agnes, after her mother's funeral, to Somerville. And now, if you wish to do so, we will go and see Vera."

We went together into the library, and there, sitting by the fire with a picture-book on her lap, was a little girl about seven. She sprang up as soon as she saw Sydney, and rushing up to him threw her arms around his neck. She was the most beautiful child I have ever seen; her skin had the delicate purity of perfect health; her features were more finely modelled than those which we generally see in children, but it was the deep loveliness of her large dark-blue eyes which gave the chief attraction. Her expression, and the firm outline of the lower part of her face, showed determination, faithfulness, and a deep capacity for love and devotion.

"Come, Vera," Sydney said, "I want to introduce you to a friend," and he led her to me.

She lifted up her face to be kissed, and I bent over her and touched her soft waving curls with my lips. What did it all mean? Could this be Vera's child, or some one named after her? There was a likeness to the face of the beautiful girl I had seen in my visions, but the child was not only far more lovely, her expression showed greater purity, refinement, and nobility. During the short time she sat with us I was particularly struck with her devotion to Sydney; she seemed ever trying to anticipate some want of his so as to fulfil it.

When at last he said, "You must go now, dear, and get to bed, as we shall have a long day's travelling to-morrow," she came and climbed on to his knee, and resting her head on his shoulder, said–

"Is it not lovely to think that we are going now to be together? It is good of you to take me; I hope I shall not be much trouble."

"I don't think so, dear," he answered; "you might perhaps have been a trouble once, but now it is different."

"Yes," she said, "I'm nearly grown up, am I not?"

He kissed her, and as she tripped off he said to me, laughing, "Well, what do you think of my nearly grown-up companion?"

"She is a sweet child," I said. "How did she come to be called Vera? And when are you going to introduce me to Lady Vancome?"

"So you don't even yet understand," he said, "the mystery? Listen while I explain. When Vera Vancome had lived with the children whom she had gathered round her for three years, her whole nature became changed. The new interest, the new love which grew up in her heart for the motherless little ones drove out

of her nature the desire for self-gratification which heretofore had been her curse; yet habit is so strong, moulding as it does the brain and warping the will, that as long as the body lives, any tendency to an evil that has once been encouraged will continue, though perhaps with weakened force; and until the spirit is set free by death from these self-made bonds; love, which should be a spontaneous pleasure, is still at times marred by effort, and loses thereby much of its usefulness and beauty. When this is the case it becomes necessary for the soul's final perfection on earth that it should be born again into the body of a little child, which takes the form of the ennobled spirit. Thenceforth it is free from the tendency to evil which the influence of past years had engraved on its former body and mind. In other words, when a soul outgrows its body, it is time to cast off the old shell and take one more in conformity with a higher development. This may seem a strange thing to you, but it is a common experience of daily life, and accounts both for the inequality of human nature and also for the reason why we find but a small proportion of men or women seemingly fitted for a high state of spiritual life. We see many in the various transition stages, but few who have reached a final growth; the sixth form, as it were, of our earthly school, when the scholars are ready to go forth into a wider universe of action and experience.

"And thus it came about in Vera's case. Her body, weakened by continual work and the constant fight against her lower nature, was thereby made sensitive to the first attack of illness. A child, who had lately come to the home, developed diphtheria. The disease spread quickly among the other children; it was therefore necessary to isolate them, and Vera, much against Agnes' wish, determined to act as their nurse. While doing so she caught the disease. It was a pathetic sight to see her, even after she had taken the complaint, struggling to minister to the little ones around. She absolutely refused to be separated from them, notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of the nurse and the express orders of the doctor.

"One night while the nurse was sleeping, a little child who was very ill, began crying in its delirium and calling Vera by name; until nearly unconscious herself, she got up, and tottering over to the child, began stroking its head, and trying to calm its fears. The little one soon ceased its rambling and fell into a quiet sleep, but Vera still knelt by its side; she had lost consciousness of all around her.

"The nurse was roused some hours later by the crying of one of the children, and to her horror she found Lady Vancome still kneeling by the side of one of the cots. She touched her, but she did not move. The time had come–her new body awaited her.

"At the same hour a child was born. Into the more perfect body, free now from the evil tendency of a misspent past, her spirit entered."

"And the child?" I said.

"Is the baby Agnes rescued; is the little girl you have just seen. This is

the divine order of life. Moved into the home which Vera founded, under the protection of Agnes whom she loved, she learned the first lesson of her new life. Thus, often do our deeds of mercy return to us again. We cast our bread upon the waters, and find it after many days. And thus, alas! do we also curse ourselves by acts of selfishness, reaping in future years the harvest of pain which we so thoughtlessly scattered in the past."

"Does Vera remember any of her previous life?" I asked.

"Not as you call remembrance," he answered, "though shadows flit across her mind at times."

"You have not told her about it, then?"

"No, it would not be wise; she is going with me now to Aphar, where she will become in time one of the priestesses. As soon as her spirit can leave the body, she will begin to learn the mystery of the past, and it will not be very many years, I expect, before we shall both leave this earth and go into the higher world which lies beyond and around us."

"Shall you never return here?" I asked.

"When the time comes for us to leave we will come to you before we go, but not till then."

"What will become of your house while you are away?"

"Before to-morrow night you will know."

The next morning I said good-bye to Sydney and Vera. As they drove away in the bright sunlight the child looked the personification of joy, but when my friend turned round to wave a last adieu, I knew that he was sorry: sorry because with the sensitiveness of his nature he knew my pain, and felt that I should be very lonely when he had gone.

That evening while sitting in my study I noticed a brilliant light as though some large building was on fire. I hastened out; there could be no mistake, this light proceeded from the direction of Sydney's house: before I arrived on the scene, there was a slight explosion, and flames were suddenly tossed high into the air. When I reached the building it was a ruin; only a few walls now stood to mark the spot where so many treasures had been gathered together.

CONCLUSION

For ten years I neither saw nor heard anything of Sydney or Vera, but this did not

surprise me. I knew that they were both at Aphar, and that the girl was learning the mysteries of spiritual power which should in time enable her to gain at least some of the knowledge which the man, who had loved and watched over her so long, possessed. I was also confident that some day I should see them again before their spirits were united and passed away from earth.

My confidence was justified.

I was sitting alone one evening when Sydney entered the room. He was much changed. His hair was quite white, his face more calm, more noble than when we parted; but his expression told of such perfect happiness and contentment that even to look at him brought a feeling of peace.

"I have come at last, you see," he said, as he shook me warmly by the hand.

I told him how delighted I was, and that I had looked forward for years to this meeting. "But where," I continued, "is Vera? Did you not bring her after all?"

"Oh yes," he replied.

Even as he spoke the door opened, and the girl stood before us. I had been prepared for a good deal; I remembered the child, and felt quite certain that as she grew up she would be very beautiful; but I had never conceived it possible that any human form could be so lovely as the one that now stood before me.

The girl was clothed in a loose flowing robe of dazzling white, which was fastened at the breast by a brooch in which shone a luminous transparent stone similar to the one which Sydney had described as worn at Aphar by the high priestess; but notwithstanding the test of such a contrast, her complexion looked more pure, more ethereal than it is possible to conceive in any setting. It seemed as though alabaster had been faintly tinted with the pearly shade of the most delicate rose-leaf. As she came forward each movement told of perfectly developed bodily strength and graceful power, while the clear brightness of her deep blue eyes and the warm colour of her lips showed how health alone can give the true finish without which the most perfect beauty is marred, or for the time partially lost. Yet with all her charm of attraction she seemed as unconscious of the effect produced by her as though she were still a little child. She came up to me with both her hands held out, and taking one of mine into each of hers, looked up with a bright smile into my face.

"Perhaps you think," she said, "that I have forgotten you; but if so you are mistaken. It is ten years ago, and I was only seven then, but Alan has taken care to keep my memory fresh, and sometimes he has let me see you."

"But why," I said, "should you want to see me? You cannot possibly care about such an old selfish being."

"Of course I care," she answered; "are you not his friend? And whom he cares for, I care for; whom he loves, I love."

As she said this she looked at Sydney, and I saw for the first time the ex-

pression of true, pure, and perfect love.

We had talked for some time on various subjects, when Vera turned to me and said–

"You already know much of my past, a knowledge which has only recently been revealed to me. But there is much still that you do not know because he who told you was the man who loved me. Nor is it necessary for me to bring before you further scenes of humiliation, when I wandered blindly in the path of disorder and pain, ever refusing the guiding light of love held out to me. But," she continued, getting up and kneeling beside Sydney, "before we go, before we enter into the glorious life of joy, to the threshold of which my love at length has guided me, I should like to give you some idea of my feeling toward the man who has thus through pain and trial, with no return save the basest ingratitude, ever been faithful to one so unworthy of his devotion."

As she said this she looked up into the face of her lover, and drawing him down to her, kissed him on the lips.

For a moment she seemed to forget my presence as she turned to Sydney, and cried, "My beloved, who through the dark valley has been beside me; who with the unselfishness of divine compassion has forgiven cruelty and unfaithfulness, thinking not of the worthlessness of the one beloved but only feeling her weakness; whatsoever I am is thine, without thee there can be no joy, no perfect completion, no future life, no eternal glory!"

But Sydney stopped her. "Dearest," he said, "it is enough. The past is gone; through the weakness that once you had, came that strength which has been our salvation. Through selfishness has come self-renunciation; through sorrow, more exceeding joy; through doubt and perplexity, eternal hope and trust. If your growth has been dependent upon me, so has my growth on you; each soul acting and reacting on the other from without. And still shall it ever be, save that in future the influence shall be internal, not external, and the darkness shall have passed away."

For a few moments there was silence; then Vera turned to me and said, "Would that you too could know this great joy."

"I have not lived to deserve it," I replied, "yet it gives me the greatest happiness to see you here."

"Deserved it," she replied, "and how do I deserve it? When first the truth became known to me in vision after vision of my past, I thought I should have died of shame and sorrow. Before that I believed that I was more or less worthy of Alan's love, but then it seemed impossible."

She buried her face in her hands.

"Hush!" Sydney said. "Let us speak of brighter things. No spirit can look upon the past without wonder and shame. Let us thank God that when its lessons

are over, these things shall be wiped out and all things become new."

"Should you mind," I said, addressing Vera, "letting me know something of your life since we last met?"

"There is not much," she replied, "that I may tell, but I will do my best. After leaving you we travelled together, seeing many places of interest on the way; for you must remember that it was impossible for me to quit the body, and Alan would not leave me. At length we came to the plateau of which you have already heard, and I was admitted through the secret passage to the enclosure. On arriving there I was taken alone into the beautiful temple and dedicated to the service of the Almighty Father. For eight years I lived with the priestess, who educated me in the knowledge which comes to us through the spiritual sense. But beside what she taught me I saw Alan often and learned many things from him. These times were the most delightful, for though always happy, a new strange joy filled my heart whenever I was brought into his presence. I felt somehow that I belonged to him, and when he left there was a void which nothing else could fill.

"Time passed very quickly, there was so much to do. I was trained to perfect my body as well as my spirit, and to bring every faculty into obedience to my will. At last I was admitted as priestess to the temple, and then for the first time my spirit was allowed to go free, and to commune with the other spirits which surround us. But though increasing day by day in power, I knew as yet nothing of the past. For some time I was not allowed to go forth alone, but one day it was decided that I should have no companion, but go whither I would and learn whatsoever I desired. And I desired greatly to know of my past, and what was the mysterious bond which bound me to the man I love. Then was my history revealed. And it came to pass that after the visions, so great was my humiliation, so fearful did it seem to go back and face one who had thus loved me and whom I had so grievously wronged, that my soul, dreading to return to the body, waited: still longing for the sight of the beloved, while ashamed to meet him. Then a spirit, more beautiful than any I had yet seen, came near to me, and its thought passed to me in this wise:

"'Dost thou not know, frail spirit, who hath been permitted to visit the unseen world even though thy body is still on earth, that if thou tarriest here much longer, the earthly form will perish, and it will be impossible for thee to finish thy work on earth save in some future state?'

"And I answered, 'It is even so, yet dare I not return and meet one who has been deeply wronged by me in the past.'

"Then the spirit spoke again. 'Yet he whom thou hast wronged hath borne with thee all these many years, and hath not grown weary of his love. Why shouldest thou fear even now when the past is over? Wouldest thou then de-

sire once more to be born again and bring to him even this further pain? Hath he not waited long for thee in patience, and wilt thou at the moment of fulfilment cause him the needless suffering of hope delayed? Forget thyself, child of earth, and think only of the sorrow that such an action would cause. What is thy humiliation? Tarry not, but walk bravely in the path of duty.'

"Then seeing that selfishness was still holding me back, I came in haste to the temple. It was night, and I knew that days had passed by since my spirit had left its body entranced. Might it not even now be too late to return? I looked down. The light of the moon fell softly through the trellis-work of the arches. A delicate strain of music passed with me as I moved, but from below only the soft plash of the fountain disturbed the silence of earth. I saw the body my spirit had so long forsaken still reclining upon the cushions which had been laid over the mosaic floor. Was I too late? Had the trance stage passed on to death?

"Kneeling over my prostrate form I could distinguish the figure of a man, and knew that my lover still watched and waited. Otherwise the temple was deserted. Then I heard Alan speak.

"'Vera, come back! Would that it were possible for my spirit to come to yours, but it may not be. Can you not trust me? Can you doubt my love? Oh! before it is too late, return! Must we again be parted even when it seemed that the time had at last arrived for our eternal union?'

"In a moment I had regained my bodily form. I rose, dazed by my long trance, and fell upon my knees before my lover who now stood over me, his face radiant with joy.

"'Forgive me,' I cried, 'forgive me!'"

Vera paused, and Sydney turned to me with a smile.

"Rather a difficult request, was it not?"

I looked at the exquisite face of the girl before me and said, "Sydney, mysterious though it seems, God's wondrous wisdom must have been manifested to you at such a moment."

"'Yes," he replied, "if man never passed through darkness into light, through sin into holiness, God could never love us as he does, could never feel the joy with which such a prayer must fill his soul."

After talking for some little time longer we passed to the other room. Vera had promised to sing to me before they went. She sung the following song; the music, the strange unearthly beauty of her voice, are beyond my words to describe. I listened with closed eyes; earth, for the moment, seemed to slip away from me, and the gates of heaven to be thrown open.

When Love's fair flower uncloses,
And Pain has lost her hold,

When Grief for once reposes,
And Joy's bright wings unfold,
Listen! Listen! as you pass along!
Sweetly, yet how softly, Hope breathes forth her song!
No longer drowned by tumult,
Her never silent voice
Shall whisper on for ever,
"Rejoice! and still rejoice!"

She sings to children sleeping;
She lies on Love's light breath,
Faith weaves her words with weeping,
To form the song of death.
Listen! Listen! you will hear her say,
"Joy shall last for ever, Grief must pass away."
The lost still linger near you,
Oh! lift with them your voice,
To swell our joyful chorus,
"Rejoice! and still rejoice!"

And as our souls grow nearer
Souls in the world above,
Ever the song grows clearer,
Till life is lost in love!
Waken! Listen! Still the same glad strain!
Deeper now and fuller! swells the glad refrain!
Till with the host of Heaven,
We also raise our voice,
And hear earth's distant echo,
"Rejoice! and still rejoice!"

For a few moments after the song was finished I sat overpowered with a feeling of indescribable peace. When I looked up the room was empty, my friends had gone.

THE END

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