Rest and Unrest

Edward Thomas

Rest and Unrest

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

The Roadmender. By MICHAEL FAIRLESS.

The Grey Brethren. By MICHAEL FAIRLESS.

A Modern Mystic's Way. (Dedicated to MICHAEL FAIRLESS.)

Magic Casements. By ARTHUR S. CRIPPS.

Thoughts of Leonardo da Vinci, as recorded in his Note-books. Edited by EDWARD M'CURDY.

The Sea-Charm of Venice. By STOPFORD A. BROOKE.

Longings. By W. DE KAY.

Rest and Unrest

By

Edward Thomas

London
Duckworth & Co.
3 Henrietta Street, W.C.
1910

To

G. I. MacAlister

Contents

"Milking" has appeared in "The Nation," and "At a Cottage Door" in "The Nationalist" (Cardiff), and they are reprinted by permission.

The First of Spring

Alice Lacking had reached an age when already one man had confided in her his admiration for one of her friends scarcely younger than herself, one of those friends who already called her a dear old thing. In comment she allowed herself one of those faintly twitching smiles which seems to most people exquisitely tender, resigned, and sweet. Though but thirty-one years old she was one of the goddesses of twilight, pensive—restful—dim; at least, she gave others rest. She was tall but stooped; her hair was black and noticeable only for its sharp edge against her pale face, which was bony and a little askew; her dark eyes were ardent, and constantly rebelling against the tired expression which her white eyelids tended to give by slipping down. She talked little, but most of all

when younger women and much younger men chanced to speak to her of poetry. A young wife suddenly thoughtful, with one child and a hunting husband who drank, would come to her with Browning's "Parting at Morning"; and Alice would look into her eyes . . . and explain . . . in a comforting way: the young wife would look back and press her child to her breast and give a glance of perhaps melancholy discontent that the unmarried Alice should be so wise and then lastly smile with faint self-approval, as much as to say, "At least, she cannot know everything": and Alice would caress the child. Perhaps she gave such women a faint thirst for revenge, and their way was to remark, during a whole ten years, how extraordinary it was that no man had insisted on marrying her; it was taken for granted she would be fastidious, reluctant.

For a year Alice was seriously ill. She became so much paler and her smile so much more painful in its sweetness that everyone

was sorry, albeit pitiful. She kept more to her bees now and talked less than ever. She walked alone as she had always liked to do. Every week she repeated the same three or four walks several times, often the same twice a day, though laughing at herself and vowing not to do so again. Wet or fine she walked, apparently with indifference, except that her eyes were brightest in rain; both soft and stinging rain made her sing. She looked forward to the spring as to a great certain good, enjoyed all its tortuous approaches and withdrawings, yes, every one, so that the healthy fortunate men and women who went about bluffly complaining that it was too cold or too warm or too windy or too wet had throughout February and March at least one consolation, that they could joke at the expense of Alice who professed to like each separate day and its ways; and after hearing the opinion from one clever man they all agreed that she must be a pessimist at heart, or she could never be so different from them

all, plain fox-hunting or agricultural or do-nothing people, optimists, of course.

Spring really seemed to have come on the twenty-seventh of March as Alice stepped out of the house and saw, though it was only two hours after sunrise, the single yellow crocuses pressed flat by the kisses of the sun, and one broad cluster of the same flowers—that could not open so wide because their petals touched—glowing as brightly as if there, at the foot of the oldest oak, the marriage of sun and earth had been consummated and was now giving birth to a child as glorious as the sun himself and also lowly and meek as earth, the mother. Beyond the edge of the garden was the hollow vale of grey-green grass, and dark woods each slightly lifted up on a gentle hillock, and water shining between, and jackdaws playing half a mile high, so far away that they were no bigger than flies and sometimes invisible, and yet their joy as clear as if it were crying out in her brain. The vale was bounded by

naked, undulating hills and, above them, sunny white haze and, above that, layers of rounded white cloud melting below into the haze and behind into the blue that was almost white.

The grass was not yet green, the woods were still dark, but that could not postpone the spring. The river shone in the vale, the white roads on the opposite hills; but that did not make the spring. She knew it was spring by a grey cart horse that went by straining at a load: three brass bells tinkled and glittered between his ears and three behind his neck; his brow carried a brass crescent and four others hung before his chest; and there were scarlet ribbons about his head. There was spring in the smoke lying in a hundred white vertebræ motionless behind the rapid locomotive in the vale. There was spring in the crowing of a cock, in the silence that followed, in the crunch of distant wheels on the drying road, in the voice of the horse whinnying in his dark

stall, in the childish blue of the sky between the pure white flocks at the zenith. Two girls, Alice's neighbours, dark bold girls, with deep voices, who raced about the countryside, kept poultry and dressed with an untidiness which all ridiculed and envied, rushed by; one said, "We're going to play tennis this afternoon, and let the lawn go hang," and the other, "Come and look at our March chickens": and in them also there was spring. But without these things there was a something in the landscape which made her forget that it had looked haggard yesterday, haggard and drenched, hardly consenting to live; a something in the mist of love faintly enveloping the vale, not to be heard, seen, touched, tasted or even smelt, that told her it was spring; and with this inner certainty she descended the hill from her gate almost without using eyes and ears.

The steep road was disused, dry as a bone, but lumpy and hard, its unbroken flints polished like iron. Alice went down

faster than she wished, and half way down she paused, already hot and fatigued. The weather which filled her with a desire to do more than she had ever done before, left her at the same time as weak as a child and on the edge of inexplicable tears. She went in under the unfenced trees at the side of the road, and sat down upon a trunk that lay mossy among a thousand wide open yellow flowers of celandine. Through the trees she could see the valley again, spread out at the foot of the hill which the road descended. She looked at it without seeing it. She half-closed her eyes to keep out the dazzle of the celandines. Her flesh, her brain, her nature, was sopped in spring like bread in wine. Her shoulders drooped forward, her neck bent, her hands supported themselves on the fallen tree, her legs changed their position slowly as if arranging themselves for sleep. She seemed to be dissolving in the languid air, her mortal flesh quivering as it acknowledged the spiritual things. Two bright

chaffinches fighting and chirrupping as they chased one another swiftly through the air took her breath away. Nothing could have been more intimately and exquisitely pleasant than the first moments as she sat down, if it had not been that something in her mind rebelled, was discontented, tremulous, unhappy, and that not on account of any thought left in it from the remote or immediate past, but only, as far as she knew, because along with the surrender to the deep, rich, calm flood of spring came again an aspiration as in former springs, a desire as deep as her nature, a strong but vague and wordless desire to be something other than she was, to do something other than she was doing or had ever done—an unsatisfied desire, a worship without a skilled priest, nay! without a god even.

The laugh of a woodpecker awakened her; in her mood it was as if the laugh was her own but none the less surprising; she rose and went on down the hill. The trees on

the side away from the valley were dark as if winter hid there yet, but the hazels filled the dark air with yellow and orange catkins as with vibrating dancing flowers. Alice lifted a hand as if to catch one of the loosest and ripest of the catkins, but it hung high and her hand fell again to her side. She started to run, but her limbs were unwilling, and she blushed at the ungainly failure as if she might have been seen. She walked slowly, looking down at the road and shutting out all thought, remaining only just aware that but a feeble crust covered over and kept down the seething in her mind. Before reaching the bottom she again sat down and gazed over the oak tops of a little wood, waiting and not quite unconsciously expecting that covering crust to break, perhaps helping herself to break it. And as she sat motionless the notes of a travelling organ, played in the garden of one of the houses hidden behind the oaks, rose up to her ears. It was a too slowly played tune, heavy to sickness with insincere emotion.

Unembodied, uncontrolled by any passion or personality in the composer or the performer, the notes were floating about the world in a loose haze that might presently fade altogether, or on the other hand take some human shape by entering a human ear. Alice frowned and yet at the same time gave to the music just that shape which it desired in order to live and work its proper enchantment. It entered her spirit and she heard the organ with her ears no longer. The old Italian with one hand in his pocket and the other on the organ handle was playing one tune in the far-off garden, a different one in Alice.

To the sound of that music was painted and sung and spoken a tale beginning when she was eleven.

She saw herself a bright-cheeked girl, even then too thin, her eyes much larger than now, with a mane of heavy curling hair clipped short at her shoulders because it was too heavy. She wore a dress of green and yellow, as green and yellow as a furze bush that is half

flowers. She was sitting curled up in a big arm-chair by an open window. It was June and not yet dawn, and all the house was asleep except the Irish terrier who was barking at her to come out again. But on her knee she had a book; it was open, and she was writing in it; and half of the book was full. She had got up early every morning that summer to write. And what she was writing was poetry—poetry in stanzas of four lines, irregular in length and accent, but rhymed alternately. She was happy. She was not unhappy now, or had not been a moment before; and in the feeling that possessed her while this picture stayed it would be impossible to divide pleasure from sadness, and both were pure and profound. She tried to remember some of the verses. They were about an oak tree. Grown-up people had told her they were not a mere senseless echo of some grown-up poet's emotion or words, as a precocious child's verses often are, but really seemed to shadow

forth the child's impression of the life in the big Briareus tree with its strange silences and strange voices. For an instant she felt herself standing under the tree as a child, but she knew that she dreamed and in an instant, all was gone. The pictures ceased while she remembered simply the bliss which she had in those days not recognised. Then through that solemn haze of emotion many scenes reassembled again — a few people, rooms, gardens, fields, and streets, shadowy and precise, and strange too because all, animate and inanimate, were equally alive—like shapes moving or still, seen through softly drifting rain. Clearest of all was that child that had been herself, a bold, strong, original child—it could not be denied—passing through that large many-coloured world as if she had been the spirit of it all. Words were spoken, little words surviving like poems out of the ruins of a life; actions were performed. Books appeared, distinct passages, the very language often, and then also the pictures

they had called up in that early time. Everything had given way to her in that year and the one that followed. The world was made for her, it was hers. How confidently she went about! what joy, what power! And she carried with her a secret—her personality, her self, what made her the equal of all men and things, even in a sense their superior, since she grasped them and did not feel herself grasped by them, not yet. She and her mother possessed the world. Her golden-haired mother she saw in one attitude always, seated, curved graciously forward, head slightly bowed, but eyes raised and fixed upon nothing of this world, unconscious that the child beside her was watching her through the hair which her fingers were tangling amorously; she also had her secret, a mighty mother she seemed, greatest of all the things that had life on earth, who yet had nothing to do but to love Alice who on her part had nothing to do but to give her occasions for love, for love and

forgiveness. A greater painter than Titian had painted those people and those days. In their veins ran gold of June, and all about them was poured an equal holy light. It was to last and she was to live for ever. She had heard the word, and the meaning, of death, only to resolve that it was not in her destiny: she was even sure that no one with whom she was linked by any close bonds could pass away; upon everything was a seal of everlastingness.

Then a schoolroom, many books, grey books, books that rasped the hand and the soul, that were quite other than that fair world. Several of the years that followed were cut off, she knew not where or how, from those when she wrote poems: she wrote no more. She remembered other children, numbers of them, who were not as those of the earlier time, but as if they had come out of the grey books with which they were linked. She read the books and listened to men and women who explained them and asked her

questions. She forgot continually, but was praised for what she retained, was given prizes and talked about in her own hearing as a clever child. She lost her secret; her mother had taken her own away and died. She still enjoyed many things but not as before; she had a sense of something postponed; the next day or perhaps the next the veil would be lifted that had fallen insiduously, a veil of huge, dim, unintelligible things, of mere greyness, having nothing to do with life but acquiesced in as in a disease, like which it brought its own opiate.

The veil was lifted, but underneath were not the colours of the regretted time; there was pain, weariness, misery, ending in illness from overwork. As she lay in bed she looked back as she was doing now. The weakness, silence, and solitude, the independence of the sick room, seemed about to restore the old time through the tears she wept quietly and long in thinking of the grey shameful years. Her window looked out upon the country

and the spring, upon a shallow river rippling under alders, between meadows that rose gently up from it to the steep wooded hill which closed the view and shut out all of the sky, except a narrow indigo band against the dark trees and the firm snowy bases of the freshest white clouds she had ever seen. The alders had been lately cut to within two feet of the earth and their sharp gashed stems, moistened by rains, were orange; at their feet were primroses so numerous that she could see them as far as where the river wound out of sight. At the edge of the high woods, which were of pine and very dark, she could see shining almost white the breasts of the two missel-thrushes whose songs she heard, and of a wood-pigeon that had been there since dawn. Within the wood there was one bent silvery birch that seemed to her every time she looked at it to be a lost princess just about to run away from that immense dark host of pines. The sun burnished the white clouds, the grass now

green for the first time in the year, the ripples at the curves of the river, and the breasts of the three birds. The missel-thrushes had repeated their wild sweet song over and over since she awoke. There was only one other sound and that was of the bees which she knew must be at the crocuses out of sight under her window. The air was moist, cold, pellucid and so pure that as the bees passed her window she thought she could smell their fragrant burdens. She was happy, or she was going to be very happy; she was expecting something which never appeared, and she thought she wanted someone to be near her. She called out but when someone came she knew there was no one she was willing to have; she sent for a doll she had not seen for three years and fell asleep with it before the missel-thrushes had ceased. That night she was ill again and near death.

Thinking now of the years of crawling convalescence, the arrested development, the slight curvature of the spine, the drooping

eyelid (as if in that narrow room the prostrate child had been through all womanhood), thinking of the isolation, of the childless echoing house where she had rested a long bitter rest, of the little country town's one winding broad street—a flock of sheep pressed in between the high grey houses of melancholy stone, very silent—that passed at either end quite suddenly into the purest country of slow rivers and gradual hills, thinking of things almost of yesterday, Alice became fully awake and conscious of the organ music, and tried to put it away from her, but failed. Several times she dipped her fingers into the wet grass and bathed her eyes. Then she stood up straight, for a moment even on tiptoe, slowly let her head fall back, fully extended her arms with outstretched fingers, and drew in a long breath as if drawing in, with prayer and confidence, all the sweetness and strength of the air, and, afraid of the involuntary sigh of the expiration, began to walk rapidly down the hill.

She did not stop until she came to a cottage at the border of a green. The children had rooted out a bat and ball and some stumps, and with coats off were playing cricket for the first time in the year. She went round to the back of the cottage where a woman of equal massiness and agility was washing clothes in the open air, the hard white linen and the loose froth mimicking the heavy and the lighter clouds in the blue sky.

"Good morning, Mrs Appleyard," said Alice.

"Good morning, miss," replied the cloud-maker.

"What shall I do? play cricket with the boys or help you?"

"Won't you sit down, miss? 'Tis weariful weather. I feel myself as if I could sleep for a week. Still, 'tis beautiful weather, too."

"Yes," said Alice, lost for the moment in following Mrs Appleyard's magnificent energy, presently adding, "How is the baby?"

"Wonderful well. Would you like to go up and see her? And Bessie would be glad to see you."

In one of the two bedrooms in the attached cottage Mrs Appleyard's daughter lay in bed with her third child, new born. The coarse red-faced cowman's wife, now pale and languid, smiled faintly at Alice but let the smile expand into a broad chuckling grimace for the child to whom she turned immediately, excusing herself by saying, "She's a beauty. We are calling her Catherine Elizabeth."

"You're glad to have her, Bessie," said Alice, smiling and taking up the child.

"I should think so, miss. You don't know. Don't you take any notice another time of what a woman says seven or eight months before her baby's born, when she doesn't want another. It's just nature. Still, there are mothers and mothers. Now my sister-in-law at Woodford has just had her fifth and, would you believe it? she's been asking the vicar if he knows anyone that wants a child.

A pretty child, too—why, I'd like it myself, but, Lord, what would Bill say?—all that family's pretty, but this one is a white blackbird, as you might say."

"Really," said Alice, slowly, "wants to give it away . . . or perhaps make a little money out of it. . . . Well, I don't wonder. Times are bad for workers. But does she really?"

"But you would wonder if you was a woman. I beg your pardon, I mean, you know what I mean. But in her it's unnatural. Only three months old, too."

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

"A girl and the best of the bunch."

"What is her name?"

"Rose Elizabeth, after me."

"And it is quite healthy?"

"Yes, bless you, healthy, yes."

"But wouldn't she want it back again, don't you think? Supposing she grew up in a good home now . . ."

"That's just what she wants. She'd make a little lady and no mistake. Some old

couple, good people, gentry perhaps, would be glad of her if they only knew. They have their feelings, same as any of us."

"And is her mother all right, except for this lack of affection?"

"Annie? Strong as a cart horse, a good-looking woman, too, in her way—she's Suffolk bred—but hard, or, well, the fact is she doesn't like Ted."

"Your brother?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

Alice got up and looked out of the window at the lambs, which had been separated by hurdles from their mothers and turned into a great field of swedes, and were nibbling the tops of one and then another of the purple roots for a moment, lazily, and now and then sprawling down in the sun. She turned and asked:

"What does the vicar say, Bessie?"

"Oh, you're thinking of Annie's little Rose? He scolded her."

"You don't think he has found anyone? I was thinking I knew, I might find, somebody who would be glad, who would consider it . . ."

"Yes, miss?"

"In fact you might mention it in case there is no one already considering it. Or I would write. My friend . . . the person I had in mind . . . I . . ."

Alice stayed a little longer, but hardly spoke, musing and pleased with the indolent pressure of the baby in her arms.

"That baby's all right, miss," said Mrs Appleyard as Alice came out into the yard again, "and Bessie's doing well. She'll be all the better for the rest. Healthy women like her never gets any other rest, and having me close by she'll take a full fortnight."

"And isn't she fond of the little one!"

"Fond! and why ever shouldn't she be, miss. There's naught the matter with our Bessie."

"Yes, but she was telling me about her little niece, Rose Elizabeth."

"Yes."

"She says the parents are willing to let someone adopt the child and . . ."

"So they were. I didn't want to upset Bessie, miss, but little Rose fell off a chair . . ."

"Dead! not dead?"

"No, she hurt herself though. She will live, but they will have to keep her now."

"Oh . . ." sighed Alice in the struggle between the suddenly swollen emotion and the shock and the wish to say something of the expected kind to Mrs Appleyard who went on:

"It's a judgment on them. Why do they want to go putting off the child on somebody they don't know?"

"Yes . . . No . . . It is very sad. A crippled child . . . Most people would not think of taking it, I suppose."

"I should think not, miss."

"But perhaps you would give me your son's address, Mrs Appleyard. I think my friend might still . . . thank you."

She was going away when she picked up an egg-cup full of violets from the window-sill and said:

"Violets! how sweet! I haven't found any this late season. Where did you find them?"

"Mary found them. She always finds the first. You see she is so little that she looks the flowers in their faces almost. She is so fond of them and says she likes their 'pale calm blue,' funny little thing!"

"Good-bye, Mrs Appleyard."

"Good morning, miss."

Never before had the homeward hill seemed so long and steep as when Alice climbed back again, wearied, pulled to pieces, miserable over her new hope, her still newer despair, the scent of violets, and now . . . no! it was impossible . . . a crippled child, and a girl . . . Rose Elizabeth . . . its

brain might have been affected by the fall . . . And yet was it not already in a sense hers?

"I think, Alice," said Colonel Lacking that evening, "you had better have a sea voyage. We will take one together, I think. Yes. This English spring is too much for us when we are no longer young. You're looking a fright."

"It's not the spring, father, it's myself."

"Where shall it be?" he continued, looking at a map of this world.

Sunday Afternoon

"FEAR of punishment," read Mrs Wilkins, in a clear hard percussive tone like that of two flints being struck together: "Fear of punishment has always been the great weapon of the teacher, and will always, of course, retain some place in the conditions of the schoolroom. The subject is so familiar that nothing more need be said of it. The same is true of *Love*, and the instinctive desire to please those whom we love. . . ."

Her voice burst through the ear into the brain as if with an actual physical presence, and the words themselves were apprehended dimly and fitfully like those of a man who guides us amid the whirr and hammer and throb of a factory. She held the book level with her eyes, which were for the most part fixed on the page as if it were a poor living

thing whose life and death were in her power: when for a moment they were removed, it was without a change of expression, to some one of her audience of six who had seemed to betray inattention by a moving foot, a sigh, or a closing of the eyes in search of rest—vain search. Once she stopped and said to one child of the party, her granddaughter:

"Cathie, my pet, move your chair from behind your grandfather's, then you will not be so very near the fire and you will be able to see grandmother."

Here she smiled by the mechanical act of pressing the middles of her thin lips together so as to elongate her mouth and protract the line of it upward into her grey lean cheeks. Then she continued to read with a frown at the book or at fate for having interrupted her, as in a short time happened once more. Her husband laid his huge kind hand silently upon his little grandchild's head, which it almost enclosed like the husk of a hazel nut, and there let it remain.

"Charles," she said in the same tone, laying the book softly but firmly, and as it were cruelly, upon the black silk over her knees, "do you really wish me to go on with this important book or not?"

"Why, yes, my dear," he replied, instinctively smoothing the infant's hair to protect her and to encourage himself.

"Then may I ask you not to interrupt, and not to set Cathie a bad example by apparent inattention?"

"Please go on, my dear," he said, removing the offending hand with a slight sigh of penitence and outward submission, and a twinkle of the unconquerable mind in the gay lifting of the brows over his large brown eyes that knew so well the arts of brotherhood, fatherhood, unclehood, and now for five years, of grandfatherhood.

"Then I will continue," she said, with a rustling gesture of imperfect appeasement, "or rather I will go back to the beginning of

the chapter lest some of us should have forgotten it by this time."

She read again: "Fear of punishment has always been . . . " and complete silence was granted by everyone, and as far as possible by the hollow fire itself, which was now, in sympathy with the subdued audience and respect for its instructor, growing every minute more cold and black. The voice, absolutely monotonous, seemed to build an intricate structure of thin polished steel bars in the air, like a high bridge, but without obvious purpose. Most of the audience were, however, too well used to the sound to observe this effect.

Her husband was a country doctor now retired from his practice, a man, with the profile of an aged Jupiter and straight white hair and beard, who had learned in forty years of marriage to live at the same time two lives, an outer one of many duties and ceremonies for the benefit of his wife, and an inner one into which she had neither the

leisure nor the curiosity to inquire, even if it had once or twice occurred to her that there was such a thing. This afternoon he was chiefly occupied in recalling to his memory Shelley's poem of "Rosalind and Helen."

Three of the unmarried daughters were there. They were women of thirty-three, twenty-nine and twenty-five years of age, who spent nearly the whole of their year as governess, schoolmistress and private secretary, but came home regularly at about Christmas time to worship out of long habit the mother with whom they had no contact at any other time, except by sending half of their salaries for her to invest. They admired their mother's force of character, her power of management, her indifference to the flight of time, and her clear fatigueless voice. Nervous and intelligent they suffered from the voice and the tyranny, but they, like their father, were able to quench their suffering in memories and thoughts of the separate worlds unknown to her. One of them, indeed,

gave a moment or two of real attention to the words that were said, because the book was her present to her mother and she hoped to be able to say a few intelligible words in any discussion that might follow. The faces of all three were lined and thin, their black hair was going grey, and all wore spectacles. They were older than their mother. Their bony painful hands were clasped tightly on their knees; their plain dresses were ruffled over their flat chests, their heads bent. Two at least would never marry now, for their mother's knowledge of men and her exacting standard, reinforced by that voice of steel, had made it impossible for them to give way to their desires, from which this discipline was never removed. When the reader turned her eyes upon them she was reassured by three pairs of spectacles glittering attention.

In the background was another visitor but an unconsidered one, a young artist of small independent means who was supposed to be in love with one of the daughters, no one

knew which. He was tall, dark, slender, mild and obviously uncomfortable, but as he never lost this expression it was unobserved, and he also was well under Mrs Wilkin's control.

The little girl was the child of a daughter who had run away to marry. The maternal discipline was escaped only for a time. Letters, visits, and that omnipotent voice had never cease to besiege the girl after her marriage. She had consented to leave her husband and to come to live with her parents again. There, one Christmas day, in a festive house, while the north-east wind from the sea drove the sand through fast shut windows on to the hair and the sheets, into the food, into the soul, she gave birth to a child who was at once taken over by its grandmother with the words:

"Poor Alice, you see, can know nothing of children any more than she can of men. I know. All will be well."

Mrs Wilkins took up this new interest in her crowded life of visiting the poor, making

jam and marmalade, and sewing for befriended unfortunate women, as eagerly as if it were the only one.

Alice could not look after her baby, but she could cook and give her mother's advice to the neighbouring cottagers' wives. She worked hard and was feverishly content with having Cathie close at hand; she acquiesced with a faint humorous smile in her mother's judgment, "We shall hardly make a little lady of Cathie if she has much of her father's blood." But she crumbled slowly under the strain of her too great self-despair and self-control. One day in the next winter, as she was shutting the oven door on a half shoulder of mutton, a strong thought came into her head. She told the maidservant that she was going to drown the old cat, which she put softly into a basket with some hay and left the house. It was the first day of a thaw: the grey world dripped and reeked and gurgled and the air made the warmest clothing seem to be lined with ice. An hour later the

villagers were hurrying past the house, saying that a woman had drowned herself in the river.

"What a day for her to choose, to be sure!" remarked Mrs Wilkins. "Poor thing! I wonder who it can be. The poverty in the village is dreadful at this time of year, and there is no religion worthy of the name except in my little band. A love affair, perhaps. Why didn't she come to me? That is the pity of life—that we can't give others the full advantage of our experience. Each one wants to start afresh. The young must needs be running off to get experience for themselves, when if they only asked. . . . Look at Alice, for example. She knew nothing about men: how should she? But if she had come to me. . . ."

Then she pursed her lips with a short smile, adding thereto, as a gesture expressing modest approval of her own kindly thought, a nod of singular bird-like prettiness—for her figure and head were of exquisite regularity

and proportion, well-carried and dressed with unvarying grace.

It was Alice that lay in the river, dead, with a satisfied expression. The cat came running home miserable, tiptoe on wetted paws.

Mrs Wilkins' grief at the suicide was tempered and at last quenched in a grave wondering why it should have happened, and she therefore acquiesced in the verdict of "during temporary insanity." "I cannot believe it," she said at the first news, "she dared not." And "I could hardly believe my eyes," she continued to say when describing the scene, which she would do in the same manner as when she recited "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold," or, "Little lamb, who made thee?"

"Now Cathie is ours to make a great success of," said Mrs Wilkins. "That father of hers was at any rate a strong man and she inherits his physique. As for her character, I see she has the very ways of my own

sister, little Bess who died young. She would have been the best of us all, and she was as clever as she was good. She overworked herself, Charles! and died out of her mind, poor thing; and she had a love affair, too; a young man pestered her with his objectionable affections and she was too weak to reject them altogether as we could have wished, and it was too much for her. But Cathie is strong and she will be with me."

For a few years, nevertheless, Cathie was snatched away to live in London with her father in a golden age of health and wilfulness, four years that would be a possession for ever, the richest jewel in a happy life, a crown lying at the bottom of the well of an unhappy one. But her father died and, after being passed from relative to relative, she had now arrived at her grandmother's by the sea.

At first Cathie feared the sea because there were no roads on it, and the moors round

the house also, because there were no pavements on which she could get to avoid the cows. Things were too large. The earth was as large as the sky. But, on the other hand, there were black cattle and windmills on the glittering wide marsh below the house, and there was always a flock of starlings wheeling over the heather close to the door, or perched in a row on the single telegraph wire humming over the line of posts that seemed to come out of the sky — with messages from her father, perhaps, mused the child. Also there was a most ancient man who leaned against a sunny bank, as still as a tree but with a cheerful face that was chiefly eyes and whiskers like some very nice dog, clothes that were more like an animal's coat than any she had ever seen before, and a growl of a voice which somehow she knew to be kind when he said, "Good morning, little miss, a pretty morning, little miss!" She liked walking in the little oak wood on the cliffs

at the edge of the sea, where the dead leaves raced down the steep path as the rats ran after the pied piper of Hamelin, and then suddenly whirled up like butterflies and almost smothered her. On the beach there were many pebbles, and she thought that if she did a little work daily she would be able to finish a house by the time when she would wear spectacles as her aunts did, and there she could invite "Gyp" the dog and "Tansy" the cow and kill anybody else who tried to get in — no! not quite kill them because if they were dead they would be like her father and nobody deserved to be like that. But next day there was not a trace of her pebbles nor any footmarks of the thief, so perhaps it was her father and he was making the house in some better place.

The day after was Sunday and it was sufficiently near Christmas for sweets and nuts to be eaten in the sitting-room after dinner. She curled up in a warm chair and stared at the fire and ate continuously

while the others talked and laughed more than usual, and her grandfather pitched a special sweet now and then into her lap and evidently did not want her to say, "Thank you, dear grandpapa" before she put it into her mouth. One of her aunts played on the piano and Cathie still stared at the fire, warm and drowsy and sniffing the fruit, the wood fire, the scents of the women, and listening to the wind. She saw beautiful rockets rising straight up and spreading out like a palm tree among the stars, just as on the night before her father died. By and by the trees ceased to grow and an enormous bird stood on the earth and touched the sky: it had eyes all along its immense beak and all down its long legs, so that it could see everything as her grandmother had told her God could; so for fear lest the bird should take her last sweet she bolted it and began to cough, whereupon her grandmother said in a voice that came shooting through the music:

"Cathie, my pet, you are disturbing your

aunt and spoiling our pleasure. You must not always be thinking of yourself."

"I was thinking of God, grandmamma," she said, but the music drowned her words. The great bird was gone, and she wished she had not swallowed the sweet because she had meant to give it to "Tansy." She sobbed a little and slept.

She was awakened by her grandmother telling her to sit in another chair and keep quiet while she read aloud. Again she saw the palm trees of fire, and when the golden fruit showered down there was a helter skelter of dead leaves to save themselves from being burnt, and they ran into a house made of pebbles such as she had begun to build on the beach. Now and then she heard the voice of her grandmother who was reading from a book about angels and war, which appeared to be a wicked book, but she understood little except certain familiar words—the word "victor," for example, reminded her of a little boy of that name and

she was all ear for what followed, but in vain.

These thoughts were interrupted by her grandfather saying quietly for the second time that he could not hear, and her grandmother laying down the book and saying: "Charles, I am reading for your pleasure, and I do think it is inconsiderate of you to interrupt . . . I think I will read a little from my own book now, Jenny's present."

Mrs Wilkins took up the other book and read, "Fear of punishment has always been the chief weapon of the teacher . . ." twice over, telling Cathie to sit in another chair farther from the fire.

For some time Cathie thought about nothing, and then again tried to puzzle out who had disturbed her pebbles and fancied the great bird had picked them up in his great beak, and she hoped he would swallow them and choke and be reprimanded by her grandmother. In her new seat she could see the young man, and wished she

could show him her doll which was upstairs.

When the reading was over the young man rose up and looked kindly at her, and said he would go to his room and read.

Cathie looked out of the window at the moor which was now almost dark, and said to everyone:

"Why do those trees look like *that*?"

They smiled but made no reply, Jenny alone remarking, "How sweet children are." Mrs Wilkins was saying that they would now sing some hymns, each one choosing a favourite, when Cathie got up to follow the young man and, seeing the door shut loudly behind him, burst into tears at the thought of him and her doll both out of reach in the winter darkness. So wide opened her eyes and so far fell her mouth, so loud was her crying, that her grandmother was angry as she sat down at the piano and began to turn over the pages of the hymn book. The sound

of the crying brought back the young man, and he offered to take her to his room.

"That is very kind of Mr Cardew," said Mrs Wilkins. "Do you hear, Cathie? But I think, Harry, she ought not to go. It is so bad for her to have her own way."

"Then you shall sit on my knee, Cathie,' said Mr Cardew, in a vaguely protective gentle voice, not without hostility to the ruling power. He sat down and took her on his knee and encircled her as much as possible with his shoulders and both arms. She ceased to cry but not to sob and to twist the world into a tragic agony with the falling corners of her mouth, her huge eyes and lifted eyebrows of surprise.

The first hymn began :

Shepherd Divine, our wants relieve
In this our evil day :
To all Thy tempted followers give
The power to watch and pray.

Long as our fiery trials last,
Long as the cross we bear,
O let our souls on Thee be cast
In never-ceasing prayer. . . .

It was the choice of one of her aunts. Cathie sobbed all through it: her sweet breath rose up to her protector and her convulsive movements shook the hymn book which he absent-mindedly watched, and shook her little head and raven curls so that she could see and think of nothing but her grandmother's icy spectacles and moving lips. At the end of each verse the aunts and grandfather glanced at her furtively. When five hymns had been sung, Cathie still sobbed and shook, and Mrs Wilkins offered to let the child choose the next instead of her.

"Now, Cathie, my pet," she said, using the tone which she had always supposed to be soothing and endearing, "which is your favourite? 'Christ who once amongst us as a child did dwell'?"

Cathie sobbed and made no reply. She was wondering why her grandmother's spectacles looked grim as the trees outside, "like *that.*" Mrs Wilkins continued:

"Shall it be 'All things bright and beautiful,' or, 'Do no sinful action, speak no angry word?' . . . What was father's favourite?"

Cathie did not hear, for the spectacles were still icy and grim.

"Then I will choose for you, dear," concluded Mrs Wilkins, removing the notes of soothing and endearment from her voice; and so they sang:

> Our God of love who reigns above
> Comes down to us below;
> 'Tis sweet to tell He loves so well,
> And 'tis enough to know. . . .

At the end Mrs Wilkins said judicially:

"I think Cathie ought to be very thankful to us all for singing to her when she was a

disobedient child. But she had better go early to bed now. Perhaps she is very tired. . . . Kiss everyone 'Good-night,' Cathie. . . . Good-night, child."

One of her aunts led her away.

"She has her mother's temper," said Mrs Wilkins. "Her mother was just like that. I am afraid we shall have some trouble in bringing her up as we should like, but I do not despair, Charles."

"No, my dear," said Mr Wilkins, not convinced that by graduating grandmother a woman became wise.

"No, she makes me feel young again," continued his musing hopeful spouse, "and I will bring her up as if she were one of my own."

Cathie sobbed upstairs, and that evening it was as if the sea, and the wind on the moor and in the keyholes, were sobbing with her, until at last she slept. The wind ceased and all the house was still. About midnight she woke again to see through her window

the small bright moon flying up through snowy clouds over the sea. It seemed to her that it was the very same moon she used to see at her father's house, and she smiled and slept happily.

Mothers and Sons

YEARS ago, continued my bald fellow-passenger, lifting his fez, I used to think that I had discovered youth. I went about repeating such phrases as: "The respect due to age is a ceremony carried out to weariness. The respect due to youth is as great and is never paid." I used to pretend to show that the respect paid to old men arose from the eloquence of the dying "old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster," and I collected the dying speeches of old men to confute my many enemies. Along with this, and by some mysterious process harmonised with it, was a great sentiment for the old things, for almost everything old in the ways of life. The new things around did not please me: I was in my own opinion born long after or before my time. For some years I conducted

my attack with that cruel scorn of which ardent youth, bearing no flowers without thorns, is particularly capable. But gradually, in the wilderness I created about me, I lost sight of these sublime truths, except that I continued to consider blasphemous the world's way of not accepting the young until they show that they are as harmless as the old.

It was when I was still young, not yet thirty I should say, that I stumbled from my lofty position, in a village or small town in Wales.

I had been there many times before, but never shall I forget that one visit. In order to spend a long day there with my friend the poet I had started on foot some hours before sunrise. It was the beginning of winter. The night was cold and clear and blue, lit by a few stars and a moon so bright that it appeared to throb in the sky. My road climbed to the top of many a hill simply because some farmer who, I suppose, sometimes stooped to the valleys, chose to live

there with his cows and sheep. In those days they still used to kill a cow once a year and the tallow made candles to light them to the milking in the winter mornings, the lambing at midnight, the reading of the Bible and "The Sleeping Bard" in the evenings; and every two years the farmer had a few yards of grey fleecy cloth for a suit made at the mill below from the wool of his own sheep. Probably there had been a dwelling of some kind on those hill-tops ever since the earth rose out of the waters.

The night was still and I was going to say silent, in spite of the fact that little rivers never ceased to roar and foam below me in the ravines of the forest through which I passed. This unchanging sound comforted the ear more than silence ever can.

They had been felling much timber, and it lay about on the steep slopes under the moon, more like the crude shapes of chaos out of which trees and men might some day be made. But for the most part I saw nothing

and thought of nothing. I was well and warm and pleased by the ring of my shoes upon the rocks of the wild roadways. I was living that deep, beneficent, unconscious life which is what after all we remember with most satisfaction and learn, often too late, to label happiness when the pleasures have all fallen away.

It was the dawn that recalled me to myself. I was making for the east, and in the south-east the sky, as quiet as my mind, had brought forth a scene of clouds so harmonious with my unconscious life that at first I looked upon it rather as if it had been some noble dream blessedly given to me than something which all men might see ; and I was astonished as perhaps a poet is when he has wrought something lovelier than he knew out of a long silent strife.

The sky before me, almost up to the zenith and almost down to the rigid but tumultuous line of hills, dark and far off, was lightly covered with a cold marbling of bossy white

clouds slightly stained by the blue behind them. Just below this and just above the hills in the south-east the clouds ceased, and there the blue had given way to a luminous silver, very soft and cold. Slowly this silver changed to a green of a saintly paleness, majestic and innocent, and the lower surfaces of the clouds above were more and more tawnily fired, while the snow of those nearest the zenith hardly flushed.

In the little white farms there were lights stirring and a clink of pans and clatter of hoofs, and many of the loops of the river beneath had begun to gleam among the still gloomy woods, but the farms and the river were infinitely small compared with the great spaces of the valleys and the dark mountains beyond and the lightening sky, and their sounds reached the ear but not the spirit, and for some time it had seemed that the brooks were hushed.

And now the green of the lower sky was crossed by long flat clouds of the colour of

dark sand newly wetted by the tide, but warm, and in a little while these clouds had arranged themselves by imperceptible craft into the likeness of an immense tract of unpeopled country into which a green sea ran far, in many a bay and estuary without a sail. The clouds above had become more closely packed, so that their prominences made almost uninterrupted mountain ranges of fire.

I know not how to explain it, but I felt I was seeing this immense country and sea before me inverted by some imperfection of sight, that I was seeing only a reflection in calm water, that it was a perhaps not unalterable weakness that prevented me from seeing the thing itself. Thinking of a remedy, by a sudden impulse I threw myself down in the bracken and heather by the road the better to enter into that kingdom of the dawn. I thus shut out from my sight everything but the open sea of pale and now gleaming green, and its long inlets into the

land of tawny coast and fiery hills, and the mountain ridges of the earth which were dissolved to a thin vapour under the increasing light. At first I had no doubt that I was right. That kingdom became mine in an oblivious ecstasy, just as the hills and the fallen trees and the rivers in the woods under the moon had been mine before the dawn. I was wafted upon that sea to the untrodden shore and among the hills where not even wings might travel, and there I heard the symphony which the stars and the mountains of earth and the hearts of men and the songs of rivers and birds make together in immortal ears, but make, alas! only once or twice for mortals. I closed my eyes and the scene remained.

And then, whether in an actual dream of sleep I do not know, I found myself thinking that I would take away with me the music I heard and would be happy always and show other men the way that looked so clear. But I began to struggle against falling through

an abyss at some supreme command. I was aware of anger and dismay. I believed myself accused of being a spy and a contrabandist in that land which now veils of smoke were concealing from my eyes. I awoke, crying aloud that I would not have at all what I could not possess for ever, but no answer came. When I sat up I saw that the earth was below me and the sky above, as on an ordinary day. Half of the sun was crimson above a peak which his fire appeared to burn right through, and from horizon to horizon the grey clouds were consuming themselves in crimson and in gold, except where a valley opened wide apart in the east and showed a giant company of chimneys, black and sinister, plumed with smoke as black. The earth itself was pleasant to see, especially where the moss was golden in the soft light of the old oak woods, but to my eyes it looked invalid, pathetic, and bereaved, as if that glory in the sky had been taken away from it or were indeed the reflection of

something now withdrawn into the hollows of the hills. I therefore walked rapidly on towards the village dominated by those chimneys, my destination.

It stands at the meeting of three rivers, and the streets look up the crooked valleys where those rivers leap down among oaks and birches and alders, now deep enough for the otter and now only a cascade and salmon leap. Just outside the village the combined waters form an estuary, a broad and steady flood, sliding with solemnity between the level marshes at the feet of lesser hills. At my first visit fifteen years before I swam gently down the ebbing tide and saw on one side a belt of marsh divided by a road and a thin chain of cottages from higher ground, here ploughland, there craggy pasture, or a scramble of oaks over a precipice, or the gorse-grown refuse of a deserted mine whose chimneys the ivy had bewitched: on the other side, the ancient church of the parish, standing alone, four white walls and a grey

roof amidst a grave-yard encircled by white stones; then a high round barrow covered with little old oak trees; more marsh, and a mile farther on a white farm called after the name of the castle ruins at its gate; and, where the marshland narrowed, a hill of grey crags and purple bracken almost at the water's edge; more hills and coombes contributing rivulets, until the estuary wound out of sight between round brown hills to the rocks and the sea. Then I got out and ran back, as anyone could then, three miles over the close green turf, scattering the sheep and the cattle from my nakedness.

A few years earlier still the parish had consisted of three or four farms, three mills (one among the oaks of each valley), the church, a venerable chapel in a wood, and a few cottages buried away—all but their smoke and their linen shining on the gorse—in brambly chasms reached by lanes that were streams for half the year. Now only one mill was left, the cottages were empty

and dislocated and long lost among the brambles.

As I entered the village I began to lose my way. In the old days the village was clustered about the streams and every road led down and across them. Their sound and glitter could not be avoided. Salmon big enough to make legends were taken from under the bridges at night, almost in the streets, and their heads, as likely as not, impaled upon the railings before the policeman's house. Nor had the huge boulders been moved from the banks. But now the streets went this way and that, according to the whim or craft of those who had land to sell, and when I came to running water it was confined between straight banks and lined with houses on both sides, in order that the inhabitants might more easily throw their filth in as well as draw out their drink. The water looked colder and blacker, the corpse of its old self, all savour of the mountains departed. The boulders were

gone; so, too, the stepping-stones. The children could no longer walk half the way to school in water. One of the rivers was now increased by waste from the chemical works, and the water was of mingled yellow and red that suggested the fat and the lean of carcases in a butcher's shop when "the time draws near the birth of Christ." No salmon would face such a flood, but one girl, I was informed, had lately chosen the deep pool where the poison entered to drown herself. She was alone in this choice. Other suicides preferred more luxurious deaths. A young farmer had hanged himself in his barn and was not found until days later when his hair and beard had grown all over his face. Nobody had anything against him—save debts—but he was morose and discontented with everything. And so he died. It was considered an unlucky death because coal was shortly afterwards found under his land. Not long before, an innkeeper had killed himself with fox-poison because

he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost.

The streets were oily black and deeply rutted. Houses built twenty years before looked old, so dark were they and so simple compared with the new fashion which loved painted woodwork, stained glass, large balls of stone on the pillars of the gateways. Some roads led only to the railway and you crossed as you pleased. Others ended in factory yards among rusty strips of tin-like scimitars and creases, in heaps, among yellow pools, where bright, pale work-girls were going to and fro with black-faced men among engines, truckloads of the rusty tin, wreckage of machinery thrown down carelessly. Another passed alongside an ever-steaming pool where gold-fish swam among pallid reeds in water that never froze.

In the centre of the village stood its principal public house that far outshone the church, the chapels and the new school, with its cut glass and its many lights in the

windows of three storeys; opposite stood two others, close together, small and homely, no longer rural though they belonged to the rural days of the village, but squalid from urban usage.

Luckily I met a youth who could show me the way and explain the changes. He told me that my friend, the poet, would not be in until midday, and I decided to look round and see the old church, the fulling mill, the otter's holt as well as the new things.

My companion knew the price of the houses that were being built. He marvelled at "the amount of money in the place." In half the roads trenches were being dug for the drainage, which ran at present wherever it found a slope: tired and dirty men just released from their work stood outside their gates and ate bacon and pickles while they watched the digging. The new drains, "the pride of the village," were to run into the estuary just past the meeting of

the waters. At a corner there was an Italian ice-cream vendor, hands in pockets, by his yellow hand-cart. Over all whirled the smoke of the seven chimneys in tawny or white or black clouds. Engines panted and roared, and in black caves at the roadside half-naked men moved in front of white-hot fires and their boots squelched with sweat as they walked.

Backwards and forwards went the workers to and from their work, swift, thin men, gossiping young women, children saluting those who were lately their schoolfellows. Cattle passed through and sometimes lost their way among the planks and bricks of half-built houses or the refuse of the factories.

The streets ran in all directions, and new gardens bordered on the moss and whinberry of the bounding hills. And as there were straggling lines of houses running far out and up into the pasture and plough-land and waste, so there were still open

spaces among the streets where cows or horses or pigs fed until the land was taken up, while some pieces were unfenced and trodden into mire or used for nothing or for the deposit of rubbish. One such little place was where "the murder" took place. In the darkness, but close to the flare of a fried-fish stall, two young married men had battered the head of an older man against a stone until he was dead. When they were waiting on the platform for the train that was to take them to the gaol, they smoked cigarettes and joked with the crowd. "When I was in the coalpit," said the lad, "I knew one of them. He used to make three or four of us get into an old truck with him, and he stood up while we ran at him, heads down like bulls. He liked it. We couldn't hurt him. It's lucky he's gone so soon, for he might have done more harm. But you should see his whippets, regular beauties. He was fond of them, too, yes."

Thence a footpath led us out through the fields towards the old church, a beautiful sloping walk that followed for some way the windings of the chief river and its rustling drab reeds. "There's nice the old church looks," said my companion; for it was bright white amidst the green marsh turf, and the grey estuary flowed close under the churchyard walls to the bracken-coloured hills and the white clouds over the sea. Just there the sewage was to go out, and the lad laughed at the discomfiture of the cocklers down there on the coast whose trade would now be gone. In the churchyard a few new graves had been made under the sycamores, and all the occupants were over eighty, at which the lad observed: "'Twas time for them to die, yes," and smiled because it seemed absurd in this brand-new hurrying world to live so long. The old grave-stones leaned all ways, and some were prone; few kept their legends readable. We peeped inside the church: it was white and cool as a dairy, undis-

turbed by the violation of the river nymphs yonder.

We ascended the gentle hill beyond the church, once a favourite walk on summer evenings, to see the sun set over the mountains. A large field had been recently enclosed as a cemetery on the brow, and already it was sprinkled with white stones and plumy sable trees. "It will come nice in a year or two," said my companion. We looked down at the estuary, and he showed me with delight where the new railway bridge was to be carried across it in order to save London passengers three minutes in a five hours' journey. I like to see a train going swift and low above a broad water against a background of hills, but I thought it would spoil the old view. He on the contrary was so lost in awe at the cost of the short cut that he had no thought of lesser things.

We returned by the fulling mill. There the stream was as bright as ever and full of

dash and foam. The little house was cleanly thatched and whitewashed, the wall round it also was white, and the apple-tree beside it was bushy with mistletoe. Brass and steel and lustre ware shone in the firelight within. There were wall-flowers as ever at the gate, a handful only, but perpetual. Picture postcards of the house were to be bought in the village, I was told: everyone bought them to send away to friends as *Souvenirs of D.*

As we walked a stuck pig began to scream, and continued to do so while we travelled half a mile: "It takes a long time dying," remarked the lad who was careless of the marriage bells that accompanied the unwavering scream.

Before entering among the streets again I turned to see once more in the moist sunshine the church and the sycamores and wall, the tumulus and its oaks on one side, the river winding bright and bowing its reeds, the estuary, the mountains beyond, the white

cloud mountains in the blue that spoke clearly of the invisible sea below.

As I walked past the shops, neither urban nor rustic, entirely new and as glaring as possible, but awkward, without traditions and without originality, I was full of magnificent regrets. I ought to have had a mantle of tragic hue to swathe myself in mysterious and haughty woe and to flutter ineffable things in the wind, as I trod the streets that were desolate for me.

It was now time to make for the poet's house. This was one of the oldest houses, about thirty years old,—his age. It was a stone building of displeasing proportions, meant to be one of a row but standing alone,—unlike the native style,—with iron railings in front on the precipitous road. The vegetable garden behind fell down to the least of the three rivers, which as yet was almost undefiled because it flowed for the greater part of its course through a deep and narrow and very steep-sided coombe whose rocks and spindly

but dense oaks and underwood of bramble and hazel were impassable.

Inside, the house was divided strictly into two, the poet's half and the other half. The poet's half consisted above all of the largest room in the house. The walls were hidden by books and portraits of poets and bards. Its floors were almost as densely overgrown as the coombe, with oak armchairs whose richness of decorative carving equalled their discomfort. These were prizes won at Eisteddfodau by the successful poem on some religious subject or subject which could be treated religiously. The poet had written more poems than there were chairs; for he was well-read in English and classical literatures and had a boldness of imagery which the judges, ministers of various sects, sometimes declared in marginal notes to be affected. In spite of anti-macassars on the chairs, in spite of thousands of books which generations of critics had approved (for the most part complete sets in uniform and unworn bind-

ings), in spite of the poet's ever boyish face, his rough black hair and clothes that had just scrambled up the river bed from stone to stone and root to root of alder and oak, and the deep melodious voice that turned prose into epic poetry as he read it, in spite of ferns in the fireplace, the room was cold with a moral and spiritual chill.

I was glad of the voice which summoned us into the next room, the long flagged kitchen, a little dark, but lit as by lightning from the great fire whose flames were repeated by lustre-ware and brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece, a hundred brightly coloured jugs upon the black dresser, a long polished gun hanging from the rafters, and the glass which protected the pictures of many celebrities and the sheets of memorial verses for dead members of the family. There, I remember, I had read the *Mabinogion* long before. . . . Mrs Morgan, the bard's mother, greeted me as usual in Welsh and then laughed in broken English at the fact that I

seemed to know less Welsh than ever, though I still knew the Welsh names for King Arthur's sword, spear and shield. "But I am glad to see you, dear Mr Philips."

She was a tall yellow-haired woman with a family of children ranging from forty to ten years of age. Her decided stoop seemed the product rather of her humility of mind than of decay, for her activity was endless and never overtaxed. She had large bony restless hands contrasting humorously with the decent black of her dress. She talked caressingly in Welsh to the silent beautiful daughter who helped her in the work of the house.

The table was set for two: such was the inevitable custom. The poet and I sat down, and as we did so, his mother set a steaming joint at a side table and carved it rapidly while she stood and talked, the daughter at the same time bringing two blue dishes of leeks and baked potatoes to the white cloth and returning, without an interval, for two

plates from the oven; these her mother covered with meat, and they were immediately laid before us. Then mother and daughter stood, both silent now, at either side of the fire while we ate and languidly talked.

The girl was black-haired, straight, and well-proportioned, her cheeks rosy, her full-dark lips eloquently curved, her eyes large and brown like a child's, and her whole face beaming with profound brightness, simplicity, holiness. She might have been twenty-five years old, and was one of those infinitely tender, self-sacrificing girls in whom children at once salute the spiritual motherhood, who are learned in all mother's ways, can play and nurse and manage, and yet, unconsciously detecting some weakness in the awful opposite sex, are destined never to be mothers in the flesh. Love and fear melt their eyes to a softness that is very wonderful and govern their silent ways; love is the stronger, but the fear though it is often forgotten is never destroyed.

When these two women saw that our plates were nearly empty they came forward, one to each of us, and helped us to more or took away our plates; and so long as I am ignorant of what it is to be waited on by angels I cannot forget this meal. They uttered no word while we talked of Virgil and Alexander Smith and the taxation of land-values, but tut! I was sick of such talk as I was of my host's apple-green tie. As I got up from the table I felt something between shame and the pride of the convalescent in his tyrant bed. We returned to the study.

Well, we talked, I know, but I have forgotten what. The poet recited some of his own verses, and we complained together in raptures of regret about the growth of the village, and as we were doing so his mother entered, but would not sit.

"I hear," said I, anxious to speak to her, "that they are going to open a new coal mine up by the Great Crag and the otter's holt. It used to be a favourite place of yours,

Mrs Morgan, and mine too; there was not a nicer place in the country when the nuts were ripe and the harvest ending."

"'Tis beautiful, truly," she said gravely; "I hope the mine will give many men work; there are many needing it, Mr Phillips."

"But they will spoil the beautiful angle of the river there. Think of it—*your* river, *your* crag—no more nuts, all the royal fern buried in coal dust."

"Mother isn't a poet, are you, mother?" said my host.

"No, Willy," said she, "and if I were I couldn't tell you the things I have seen and thought about by the Great Crag. I am sorry the fern will have to go, but, dear me, the poor of us must have shoes and bread and a pasty now and then, Mr Phillips, and the rich must have their carriages and money to buy the poetry books, Willy."

"You've a hard spot in your heart, mother."

"Yes, and I daresay I need it, my son. When a woman begins to work at six years old like me and a man at five like your father, they must get a bit hard if they are to keep on, and there's many are all hard and small blame to them. Yes, sure, I think the world of these soft ladies, but I can't set myself up against them; I haven't had their privileges. Oh, I look for wonderful things from you young ones that have had your way made easy. It will be a kind good world I am sure, though I'm not grumbling at what we're living in. We old ones didn't exactly look to be happy in this world except on New Year's Eve and the like, and yet it came about that we were happy, too, beyond our deserts, I daresay. I have seen changes in my time, and wages have gone up and food gone down, and glad I was when the loaf came cheap and we could afford to fat three pigs and sell one, but, bless you, it isn't by wages and food that we are made happy. They were good things, and I hope they will

stay and wages be higher and food as good as it is cheap, but there's something else, though what it is I'm not going to try to say; that's for the poets, Willy."

She went out to get tea ready and to leave us to our loftiness.

After tea—apple pasties, you know, home-made bread, little flat currant cakes, all Mrs Morgan's baking—I had to choose between staying indoors and talking about books and going to see the Owens, Mrs Morgan's cousins. She liked to show round a visitor from London, and she could wear her best bonnet with violets in it and gossip freely. It was the beginning of the cooling of my friendship with Morgan when I chose to go with his mother: he saw that my love of poetry was only skin-deep. But what was the good? The mother was worth twenty of him though she had only one high-backed chair without arms were she never so tired. I never saw a sweeter and nobler acceptance of life. She welcomed the new without forgetting the old

and gave both their due because she felt—she would never have *said* it, for she would have considered such high thinking arrogant—that the new and the old, the institutions, the reforms, the shops, the drainage system, were the froth made by the deep tides of men's inexpressible perverse desires. On Sunday she was a Methodist, but hers was a real Catholicism. She saw good even in the new drains, and as we crossed the bridge over their little river she said:

"When the drain pipes are laid, I shan't have to let the slops run into Willy's river. He, good lad, doesn't know—how should he? he doesn't see such things—he doesn't know they run in now. I told him he musn't drink the water there, that is all. But soon he will be able to. He is fond of the little river, he calls it Castaly or something, and says it is a poet's river. It runs from the little lake by where I was born—the pretty lake! have you been there in your long walks? Willy never went so far and he declares it

runs from Mount Hel—Helicon. He is a true poet, I think, Mr Phillips. But the new poets are different. There was old Mr Jenkins, now, when he was a young preacher and poet his sweetheart died, and when they had let the coffin down into the grave he jumped in after it—lay down upon it and never said a word, and when they took him out, it was thought he would not be long for this world. . . ."

The Owens' house stood opposite a waste field where the neighbours threw broken crockery, and a donkey grazed round the broken shell of a factory lately deserted. In ruins these mean buildings took on some venerableness in my sight.

Mrs Owen knew less English than Mrs Morgan. She greeted me so warmly that I was abashed to think I brought nothing but myself.

"How are you, Mr Phillips? No more Welsh, I see, and I've forgotten my English."

Here the children who spoke both languages laughed with good-humoured contempt.

"How are the children and Mrs Phillips? . . . How many children is it now?"

"Still two," I said.

"Two!" she replied with a smile, and wiped the dough from her fingers in her apron: she spoke in genial irony.

"You forget that Mr Philipps is a very wise young man, Sarah," said Mrs Morgan, chidingly.

"He will be wiser," snapped Mrs Owen, "when he has had ten children and seen five of them go away, and some not come back. As for two, two is toys."

I wish I could paint that tin-plater's house —not the outside which was horrible, and designed by Mr Owen himself, though I noticed that two pairs of martins had blessed its stucco with their nests in the past summer. Inside there were two large rooms, cold and stark and full of the best furniture, huge

chests of drawers for Sunday clothes, family Bibles, photographs in gaudy frames, linoleum like painted ice. They were the chapels sacred to the family's respectability, and I could not understand the rites and ceremonies and sacrifices thereof. The third room had a perennial broad fire, summer and winter, for baking, cooking, and drying clothes, Everything shone with use, and aloft in Mr Owen's tobacco smoke piped the canary who seemed to wish for nothing better. The door opened into a little wash-house, where they kept the flour and the enormous sides of the last-killed pig lay white in saltpetre and brine. Bacon hung from the rafters of the kitchen itself, a whole side, a whole ham, and a long thin strip that had just supplied the frying pan which Mrs Owen was holding.

"This frying pan has fried forty pigs," she remarked, holding back her head from the hissing rashers while she turned them.

When she was not at the fire she was opening the oven to take out an apple pasty, or getting on with the spreading of the table for the meal, or sorting the clothes that overflowed two baskets of the largest size, or buttering a slice of bread to silence the youngest girl, or telling Tommy not to play football in the room while visitors were there, or preparing the supper of bread and bacon and soup which Tommy was to take for his eldest brother to eat at his night's work, or wiping her grandchildren's noses as they flocked in to get some bread and bacon fat and stare at the stranger who knew no Welsh: or she was sighing with a smile at her weakness and lack of two pairs of hands while she rested those she had upon her hips for a moment only, and talking all the time, asking questions, giving orders, describing her visit to London which she detests ("dear me, Mr Phillips, however can you live in it? There isn't a loaf of bread fit to eat to be bought there and scarcely a woman with

sense to make her own, and you daren't keep a pig, nor yet breathe for fear of swallowing what doesn't belong to you and you don't want") or singing in a wild contralto the most melancholy and most splendid of the Welsh hymns. She weighed nearly twenty stone, but she never sat down.

Her husband, a pale man whose work you might think (if you hadn't seen him gardening, or taking his children ten miles away into the mountains with a present of seed potatoes for a cousin) had worn out everything in him but his good nature and love of a pipe of shag. The words of his conversation came from a daily paper, but he had the peace which passes understanding, and for wisdom he could depend on his wife. Neither she in her strength nor he in his sensibility had ever struck one of their children. He was whittling an oak stick, but he stopped to take me up the garden where he showed me by lantern light his tomato plants in a green-house of his own

making, and then stirred out the vast pig for me to admire. He seemed to regard the pig as a kind of brother who sacrificed himself for the good of others almost willingly out of consideration for the expensive food which had fattened him; and until the day of the knife he was treated as a brother seldom is.

On the wall of the kitchen there were a few pictures, of Spurgeon, of Gladstone, of the Crucifixion, and a portrait of the eldest child, born out of wedlock and dead long ago, a pretty maid, Olwen Angharad. Six of the children were in the room, two of them married sons, pale, overworked but handsome, cheerful men who had dropped in to ask questions about London, to tell their father the weight of the pigs they were fattening and ask after his, and to exchange banter with their inexhaustible mother—their wives were not like that, but just pretty slips of women beginning to bear children and not baking their own bread, either.

After their mother they admired most their eldest sister, aged eighteen. She worked at the tin-works all day and had done so for four years and was now as busy as her mother by the fire and at the table, talking little except with her eyes which flashed a variety of speeches between the look of command to her youngest brother and sister and the look of comprehension or expectancy to her mother. She had reached the perfect height of woman, which height I had never been sure of until I saw her. Her hair was of the nearest yellow to gold that is compatible with great physical energy and strength. I cannot explain how it was bound up in such a way as to boast of its luxuriance and yet leave the delicate even shape of her head unspoiled. Her face was rather long than short, her nose of good size and straight, her lips inclining to be full, kind and strong also, her grey eyes burning with splendour, her eyebrows darker than her hair and curved like two wings of a falcon, her ears—but

such an inventory is absurd. Her face, whether in repose or radiant, expressed health, courage, kindliness, intelligence, with superb unconscious pride. She could bandy words with any man, and there were not wanting men to tell her—with a calculating eye for the effect of their words—that she had reached physical perfection; yet she was not wanton, nor bashful nor vain. No Roman woman could have excelled her in power and dignity, no barbarian in exuberant strength. She had grace but no graces, beauty but no beauties. She ruled—even her mother; but she did not know it. So much loved was she that her youngest sister was heard praying that her lover would die, lest he should take her away from home.

Her three younger sisters showed what she had been: the one of seventeen was still too hesitating and slender in her grace; the next, of fifteen, was too impudent, though for the moment she was quiet and sleeping

away her weariness on the horse-hair sofa under the canary's cage; the youngest, aged thirteen, was still too much of a powerful animal.

Her youngest brother was fourteen, almost his eldest sister's equal in height, brawnily made, unwieldy, fierce except at home where at most he was lazily, laughingly truculent, more often grumbling amiably over some task.

They were all but pure Welsh, one grandmother being from Cornwall. The girls were fair, the boys black-haired.

Admirable as they were apart they made an indescribable harmony together. Sometimes all talked at once, the youngest boy's deep brawl almost overpowering the rest. Sometimes one told a tale and all attended. Sometimes the talk travelled mysteriously from one to another, and to and fro and crosswise, as if some outside power had descended invisibly in their midst and were making a melody out of their lips and eyes,

a melody which, I think, never ceased in their hearts. Nearly always they smiled and if the gravity of the talk seemed about to extinguish this smile there was one pair of eyes or lips at least sparkling or rippling with the profound joy which no plummet of sorrow sounded. Nor was this talk mild gossip undertaken unconsciously to meet the fact that they were all of one family and in the presence of the father and the mother. For it was fearless. The father spoke his thoughts and the boy his, and there was nothing which anyone of them would have said or secretly laughed at with companions which they would not say before all.

There was noise and stir unceasing, but no haste, no care.

"What a flower bed it is, to be sure," whispered Mrs Morgan to Mrs Owen as we concluded the skirmish of a crowded meal of new loaves, seaweed "bread," bacon, apple pasty, and plentiful thin tea.

"Ah, you are a poet's mother, Mrs Morgan," she replied.

They gossiped in low tones.

"How is poor Mrs Howell's son that lost his arm in the works by you?"

"Getting on well. He has two nurses in the hospital and they are very kind. But you know these women: he wants his mother."

"Poor boy. He was playing when it happened, wasn't he?"

"Yes. They say it was his own fault, as if that made it any better for him or the manager who will prove negligence, of course. It won't stop the boys playing, and my husband wasn't playing when he met his death. Never mind. They are going to set him up in a fried fish shop, a good idea."

While these two gossiped the eldest boy sang "Morfa Rhuddlan" and "Hob y deri dando" the most mournful and the merriest of the old Welsh songs.

I was a little sad at times. I was disturbed, as Mrs Morgan could not be, at all this gaiety in the heart of the village darkness, partly because I was unable to see why it should exist, and as foolishly sure that there would never be an end to the darkness unless it eclipsed this gaiety in a revolution of some kind—impious thought and unpardonable if it had not been vain. That gaiety cannot be quenched.

I stayed that night with the poet, begging to be allowed to sit in the kitchen, where his mother left us with a parting look of reverence for those who would be talking about books while she lay awake thinking of her daughter in a London shop where she had never been, her son in the far west, her husband dead.

Next morning she took me by a long way round to the station. I remember I was wearing a coat which I had had made for me five years before with three pockets in it especially to hold copies

of the poems of Shelley, of Sophocles, of Catullus; even then I bulged with the books, but carried them out of superstition, not for use.

We passed the estuary, and she pointed out the long barrow on one side and the tumulus on the other. The men in the old time had a bridge from one to the other, she had heard. We emerged from the last clustered cottages of the village on to a road high above Castaly. There were the goldfinches!—as many as ever in the rough pasture above the copse: she knew them. Didn't I think the copse the same, and the foaming river in the heart of it? One by one she named the bright farms on the side of the Great Crag opposite. White cloud rack was decamping from the red bracken and yellow larch on its flanks, and from the gaunt grey humps and cairns of its summit. The bracken was redder, the larch yellower, than ever, as if all had been the work of the spirits of the mist. The curlew's cry and

chuckle were more wildly sweet. Our feet deep in the red mud of the road, we saw, fresher than ever, the gleaming wavering last hazel leaves and the stems of the oaks and hazels.

"And that is pretty too, isn't it?" asked Mrs Morgan, pointing to the seven black chimneys grouped just as I had seen them in the dawn of the day before. "I can't walk farther than this nowadays, but I like to come here and look first at Great Crag and then at the village, then at Great Crag and then at the village again, and I don't turn any more but go straight down hill and home. You must go that way, too, to catch your train. Leave me, I will go slow and you must hurry. Good-bye, Mr Phillips. Come again and bring your books and stay a long time, and you shan't be disturbed."

If I go again, I shall not trouble to take my books. But I shan't go. She has left the village. Her son tore himself away

with infinite tears of rhyme for the river, and she silently. He got work elsewhere, and she of course must follow with her daughter, to bake the bread by which poets live.

At a Cottage Door

THE cottage was built upon the rock which just there protruded from the earth; and which was the rock and which the rough stone of the walls could not easily be told, so rude was the structure and so neatly was it whitened from the low eaves down to the soil. The threshold was whitened, so also were the stones of the path, the low wall in front, and several huge fragments here and there both within and without the gate. These white stones served instead of flowers. Other ornaments outside there were not, except stonecrop on the garden wall and at the sides of the threshold flagstone, a tall solitary spire of yellow mullein growing out of the top of the garden wall, and on the thatch itself a young elder tree against the white chimney stump, and an archipelago of

darkest green moss which was about to become a solid continent and to obliterate the straw. Thatch and moss beetled over the walls which were pierced by two small windows of diamond panes. The chief light, when the door between these windows was shut, came from the fire-place which, with its iron and brasswork and the door of the brick oven adjacent, nearly filled one side of the living room. But the door was nearly always open, revealing most of the dark cave within, its red flameless fire, its bright knobs and bars of iron and brass, and the polished odds and ends of copper and brass on the mantelpiece or hanging on the wall—candlesticks, snuffers, horse-trappings, a gill measure, part of an old pair of scales, a small shell from a Boer battlefield.

The cottage must have been built before the road was made, or the roadmakers had omitted to notice it; for it lay back a hundred yards from the high hedge on top of a wall, through which a stile led over a rough

meadow, between almost solid hillocks of brambles and clusters of royal fern under alder trees, to the white wall, the white stones, the cabbage plot and the white house itself. To a passing child it appeared that the cottage had originally been built in the heart of a stony wood; gradually the larger number of the trees had been cut down, thus exposing the cottage to someone on the road who had then been inspired to cut through the hedge and its wall, to cross the field, to drive out the savage or fairy inhabitants, and to take possession of it. In the field there were still great butts of oak visible, and on the further side of the house, showing above the chimney, were three dead trees close together raising a few shortened, stripped, and rigid pale arms to the sky and to deities who had long ago deserted them, the house and the surrounding land of small fields as rough as a windy sea, stone walls, hedges of aspen, oak and ash, rocky rises clothed lightly in oaks of snaky and slender growth, and beyond and

above, on all sides but one, hills so covered with loose silvern crags among their bracken and birch that they resembled enormous cairns—where perhaps those deities had been buried under loads sufficient to keep them dungeoned away from any chance of meddling with a changed world.

In the cottage lived a mother and son. She was very little and very old. Her hair was still dark brown, her eyes almost as dark, her skin not quite so dark as her eyes, a nut-brown woman, lean, sweet, and wholesome-looking as a nut. She might often be seen sitting and looking to the south-west when a gap in the hills framed a vision of mountain peaks twenty miles beyond; and always she smiled a little. A passer-by might have thought that she never did anything but sit inside or outside the open door unless he had noticed the whiteness of the stones and the polish on the metal in the room where she had for fifty years collected things that could be polished. Few ever saw Catherine Anne

at work save her son, and he not often, for he was away early and home late. He left her entirely alone, visited of none unless on days when the smart tradesman strode up the path, deposited her weekly packages on the table while he commented on the weather, and then replacing his pencil behind his ear bade her "Good Afternoon" in English. It was one of the few English remarks to which she could reply in English. Her only other English words were "beautiful" and "excursion train." For though some of the brown in her face was a gift of tropic suns in the days when she sailed with her husband on his ship, she had learned nothing but Welsh. The old man, so she called him though dead these forty years, had been against her learning English. A God-knowing and God-fearing Methodist, he had seen in that tongue the avenue through which his beautiful young wife might receive the knowledge of good and evil. After his death at sea she had of her own accord refused all contact with the thing,

and now when it was all around her she never moved from the house. Her son knew it, but at home he spoke the native idiom, and when she heard him she seemed to be once more in her father's house, or in the orchard where little red apples overhung the rocky brook at the mountain foot. There it was that she gained, no one knows how, the nourishment from mother earth that gave her the deep contentment expressed in her health and her smile, in the shining metal, and in her patience—which was not endurance or torpor—patience of an order that seemed to be all but extinct in the world. Memory and hope were at balance in the brain that looked out of her brown eyes, and the present moment, often dull-seeming or even unkind, did not exist for her. Those eyes never closed while she sat by her door, and it might be conjectured that as she gazed east and north and west she saw more than the white stones and yellow stonecrop, the alders and royal fern, the hedge following the road, the

lean oak trees among the rocks, the farther hills and their curlews and cairns, the sky, and now and then the uttermost mountains, which were all that an observer could see. If the casual observer waited more than a few moments in summer he might see that she was never quite alone. The air between her and the hills was the playground of several pairs of black swifts, wheeling and leaping round and up and down and straight forward, so that the bluest sky was never blank or the brightest grass without a shadow. Out of these birds two often screamed down precipitously to the white cottage and disappeared in their nests under the thatch above her head. Catherine Anne smiled a little more at these sudden stormy visits, and there were times when it seemed certain that she received others, though neither visible nor audible.

Some thought that she believed the swifts to be some kind of spirits, and one who was very wise said that if Catherine Anne Jones

had been cleverer she might have been a wicked woman.

All the other swifts lived in the church. These had singled out her roof. They always returned to her; they had been there, ever since she came, every summer, singling that little place out of the whole earth and sky. She saw them high and swift and wild in the blue, and then she felt the flutter of their wings as they arrived at the eaves, and heard their soft talk together in the darkness. On summer evenings she saw them ascend into the heavens and not return, as blessed spirits might do; only on the morrow they were back again. They were always young, always equally dashing and joyous. It was whispered that she believed them to be the souls of her two children that died as babes, and they had come to her soon after the loss. "They were too young to know what to do in Heaven," she was reported to have said, "and so they were allowed to play about in Wales all the summer. But at night they have to

return to see if they are wanted. Blessed birds. I daresay all birds are good if we only knew. I suppose I am too old to be one, but if it were lawful I should like nothing better than to live like them, passing the time until Judgment Day. What a lot of people there will be there to be sure —there were over three hundred in my native place when I was a girl, and I don't think there is one alive but me. I think some ought to be birds. Birds take up so little room, and they could not do any mischief if they wanted to. Now, if only the town people were all to be turned into birds. Lord, such a fright I had two years ago last February. I was sitting here, it being fine, to see the sun rise, and up from the town came a swarm of wings as many as there are leaves in yonder wood, small dark birds all close together and making a whistling noise, and I thought to myself, It has happened after all; they have changed all the people into blessed birds. No, I was

not afraid about my son, for, thought I, now he will not be able to drink anything but cold water, and perhaps he will come to live in the church. I was glad. I thought of taking a walk down there just to see how the place looked, when along came the Insurance man—He isn't a bird, I thought to myself—and says: 'Are you looking at the starlings, mam?' 'No,' says I, and I was vexed. Dear me, all those birds was a beautiful sight, and such a nice noise they made between them as if they were glad to be going away from that place. It is a funny thing about birds, how different they are. Mrs Williams said to me once when she was courting, 'Why, Mrs Jones there are several kinds of birds.' Several! There are as many different kinds as there are men, and that is saying a lot, and remember I have sailed over the ocean five years and went ashore in all the ports of this mortal world. They are like people, only they don't seem to do any harm. Nice things! I used to think they

must be very good not to be jealous of us having all the houses and food and things, but if people only knew they would be jealous of the birds. They are all different, or else how could He know when any one of the sparrows falls to the ground. They don't know what it is to be idle or too busy, nor the difference between work and play. There are not any rich and poor, and they respect one another. They are not all tangled up and darkened with a number of things. Then look how few of them die —did you ever see a dead bird? — except men shoot them. The reason is, they are good enough for Heaven as they are, so up they go like the dew when we are not looking."

It was not entirely due to the position of her front door that she always looked north or east or west, and chiefly west. From the back door her son's feet had worn a path which could be seen winding south over several fields until it was lost, by the next

cottage, in another road, also going south, towards "that place."

She considered herself on the edge of the town, but still distinctly out of it. The next cottage, where the footpath joined the road, was in the town, so she thought; yet there was no outward sign of it unless that its low walls were not as clean, nor its brass so plentiful and so bright, and that its door, facing south, was often shut, and always when the wind was from that quarter.

From Catherine Anne's back door could be seen the roof and part of the wall of this cottage, another exactly like it a little beyond, then a cluster, including one not of whitened native stone, but of red brick and black mortar. All these were on the road. On either side of it, southward, there was a farm or two, white, but with sheds of corrugated iron that rattled under the mist drops from the ash trees embracing the group. From these farmyards the geese strutted across wet meadows

in a line as if setting out on a long voyage. Beyond, the rough land sank, hiding all but the smoke of yet more houses in a hollow, and rose again to an unbroken line of slate roofs and dirty white walls, cutting into the bases of snowy cloud mountains whose look told that underneath them was the sea. Similar houses in irregular lines and groups, were dotted on the treeless fields to the east and west of this main line. These were the first houses of the town and they were not a mile from the cottage. Beyond them the land fell away but rose again after several lesser rises and falls into great hills whose tops commanded the sea to the south and east and, on the clearer Sundays of the year, the same mountains as Catherine Anne's front door. These concealed rises and falls, and the slopes of the great hills, were the town.

From the brink, where that unbroken line of roofs notched the white clouds with its chimneys, the whole town could be seen.

Over this brink fell the southward road and with it lesser roads which soon branched and multiplied into the mass of the town which choked the valleys as if it had slid down the hills in avalanches. The hills formed almost a circle, broken only by a gap on either side letting in the river from the mountains and out to the sea. Thus the town sprawled over the sides of a rudely carven bowl with deeply scalloped edges and with a bottom flat nowhere save at the narrow strip around the stream. The summits of these hills were clear of houses, and great expanses of their sides, though obviously conquered by the town, were still virgin and green and strewn with great stones.

Two of the hills on one side, that farthest from the stream, were not marked by a single street. Of these one, the highest of all, was clothed in grass from foot to ridge except on a broad lap which it made halfway up, and on that there was a house standing at the

edge of a field sometimes golden with corn, and divided from it by a clump of black firs. The house was huge, both tall and wide, grey and square, with many windows towards the sea lighted only at sunset and that by the last beams in which a score of them blazed together. No road was seen climbing the steep slope to the house or leaving it for the ridge above. Some poet or haughty extravagant prince must have built it there inaccessibly with windows for the great town, the sea, the mountains. It was sombre and menacing. It was empty. It scorned the town. In its turn the town had left it up there to perish like an eagle upon a mountain ledge, shot by the hunter, but out of his reach. The neighbour hill was not so high, but it was bare not only of houses but of grass and corn and every green thing, and its only trees stood near the summit, leafless and birdless, stark and pale as if newly disinterred from an ancient grave. They were being slowly buried by the brown and fatal refuse—scarred

deeply by rains and by ever new cataracts of the same substance—which covered and largely composed this hill. Out of its summit stuck a chimney and round it the black figures of men came and went against the sky. At the foot were other chimneys, gigantic and black, and below them black buildings whose windows glowed night and day with fire such as the old house had for a few moments at sunset. The smoke mingled with white rain, and mist wreathed wildly about the brown and the green hill.

Through the river's entry below these chimneys might be seen other hills that sent down tributaries to its waters, green hills with ravines of oaks and one or two white farms, and far beyond these, more like the dream of a dreamer than rock and peat, the abode of raven, buzzard and badger, of freedom and health—the mountains of the source of the river.

The stream itself, in the midst of the town,

was a black and at times a yellow serpent in a cage of steep iron-bound banks, watched by furnace, store-house, and factory. It was allowed a mock liberty only to stray into other cages of steep-sided wharves. The blackened labourer stood on the edge and spat at it where it writhed deep below. A careless child or a desperate man was engulfed by it on some night of fire and blackness, but it remained sullen and regarded not the trivial offering. The embrace with the sea was licensed, bridled, sternly watched by tall cranes, a hundred ships, and the long bleached spine of a breakwater where sea-faring men, idlers, and fluttering girls walked up and down.

The courses of the avalanches from the opposite hills were marked by white, dirty white, grey, and all but black, belts of houses broadening out to the mass in the valley. At the broad brow of the hills, in sight of the sea and of violet hills across the sea, a few farm-houses and their outbuildings still

shone, while others mouldered grey and aghast and without tenants. Some of their fields were still left between the streets, but their barbed wire and patched hedgerows and walls imprisoned only an old horse or two, a temporary flock of sheep or of lean American steers on their way to the slaughter-house and the tables of the town ; and even where there were no houses straight lines of streets were waiting to be built along. Across this tainted and condemned grass, even between the houses, trotted narrow brooklets over stony beds to their sepulchres in the town sewers. The houses on the upper slopes were like Catherine Anne's, though most were slated, not thatched. Fowls stalked or scuttered round about and through the open doors. The gardens were walled with once whitened stones and contained a few twisted apple trees. Old women of a former age stood on the doorsteps or moved busily in scanty undress, bareheaded. Old men pottered

about, or leaned on their spades to talk or look out to sea or at the pigs. The smell of baking bread was blown from the doors. Their furniture, their Bible and theological works, were old. The curs were descended from sheep dogs that once herded the mountain flocks on these slopes. The road was still a watercourse, and the unnecessary tradesman could hardly ascend if he wished, except on foot. There was always a robin in the roadway, a wagtail in the glittering streamlet, often a rook on the square stone chimney, looking down at the town as if his ancestors had told him that it was new and might disappear any night—but as he saw that nothing was likely to happen immediately he turned his head, hopped into the air, and flew away over the hilltop.

The streets beginning on the hill-ridge ended in the thickest of the town, in a medley of steep criss-cross streets interrupted here and there by black squares of workshops with ever-burning furnaces and ever-smoking

chimneys. Here every inch of the soil was covered with bricks, stones, cement, asphalte, iron-work, granite blocks. Not a tree or blade of grass was allowed to appear anywhere but in the graveyards, and even there the earth was plated almost entirely with tombstones. They were afraid of leaving any space unguarded lest Nature should show a regret, a curse or a warning. The river was unsightly, but must be tolerated alternately with insult and respect. But even here there was not an end of the "country." Through many open doors could be seen furniture like Catherine Anne's, and old women of her period. Thousands passed them many times a day, but they were built in days when everyone knew everyone else, and so the doors were still left open while the baking and the washing were done. The drunkard stumbled out of the crowd into the warm and rustic seclusion of his home. The child rushed out from the cradle he was tending and was swept along by the pro-

cession to meals or work. Women stood at doorways and talked, while one went on with her knitting or suckled her babe. A half-naked child wriggled through the crowd carrying tins of dough, for if they could not bake, at least they would knead and leaven their bread, at home. Many of the children were bare-legged and headed, dirty, hungry, and quick. Out of one or other of the houses would come a bent woman, wrinkled and foul, holding a shawl over her head, looking as if she had spent a thousand years in the cellar, crushed down in rigid, idle suffering like a toad embedded in an oak root. Such creatures, chiefly women, were not uncommon. They were small, grey-skinned, with clotted grey hair; they had scarred faces, had lost an eye and most of their teeth; they wore soiled print or black dresses, bedraggled like the plumage of a dead bird in the mud and in colour approaching the foul dust of the pavement and the garbage of the gutter. In appearance they

were genuine autochthons. This earth of flagstone, asphalte, granite, brick, iron, and ashes, might have protruded such a monstrous birth on a night of frost, to prove that it was not yet barren in its age and ignominy. One such crone crawling out into the light, unclean, dull and yet surprised, had a look as if she had just been exhumed; she might have been buried alive in the foundation of the town for luck, and had now emerged to see what had been done. They were seen outside the taverns with their hands hidden under the remains of aprons, or were questing in the dustbins for food or unbroken glass; often they carried babies in whose shapeless faces was hidden the power to excel their grandmothers. When they were drunk in an alley a crowd of labourers and shopkeepers gathered to watch their waving arms and poisonous faces and hear their blazing curses screeched against some unlucky man. "There will be murder," said one. "It is a shame that such things are allowed," said

another. None dared to enter the mouth of the alley. The crowd recognised that a different species, a chance-begotten, misdelivered, and curse-nourished spawn of humanity was living side by side with them, farther removed than slaves or domestic animals. It was sometimes proposed that if the streets were kept cleaner and the sewage improved this race might vanish, as if in fact it ate filth and lived in the drains. No one dared to interfere. Presently a woman rushed after the man into a house, and the door was slammed with a sound not of wood but of flesh and bone.

Such were not numerous; the majority were genuine villagers, but the minority was representative and it alone truly belonged to the place. They were villagers with a difference. One face expressed nothing but the abstraction caused by solitude in the midst of myriads. The next smiled with the intimacy of home or inn. Few had yet quite

realised that they were living not at the edge of a field but in the bowels of a town, though most days it was impossible to hang clothes out to dry in the flagged or asphalted or trodden mud yards, since the air was so foul that it was worth while buying the head of a sheep fed in the neighbourhood for the sake of the copper in its teeth. Every house beheld chimneys and furnaces from one window, from another the masts of the docks or the sea and its little sails or the brown and the green hill side by side, over the ploughed sea of slate roofs. On pleasant days the smell of the sea, modified by the docks, mingled with the acrid smell and taste of smoke from the smelting of copper or the burning of carcases for manure; but at night either smell was drowned in that of fried fish. Every other house had a large window to expose fruit, vegetables, groceries, meat, "herbal remedies," and above all fried fish, for sale. Every corner house was a tavern, its windows foul with breath and

steam within and mud, rain, and fine ashes without. The houses were small, so that tavern and church and school were conspicuously islanded among the low roofs.

But, towards the river, away from the avalanches of buildings, the houses were high and supported on plate glass windows of immense size. The streets curved and doubled after a pattern created centuries ago by the neighbourhood of a castle whose Norman masonry was still hiding in fragments behind or within some of the shops. Inns and shops were old but with glittering new faces of glass, stone, ornamented tiles, and vast gold letters. The wires of telegraph, telephone, and electric light ran amongst and over antique stone and timber work. Every inch was obviously designed or converted to serve an immediate purpose; there was no largeness, no waste, nothing haphazard, no detail forgotten through the pursuit of some ideal; all was haste, grim and yet

slatternly. Here and there an old house had been pulled down, and its place hidden by a temporary wooden fence, stuck over with advertisements in black, white, crimson, and blue, of drugs, infant foods, political meetings, auction sales, corsets, men's clothes, theatres—these last showing beauteous dishevelled adulteresses and heroic gentlemen in white shirts threatening them with revolvers—men in diving costume fighting for a bag of jewels at the bottom of the sea. Everywhere the ideal implicit was that of a London suburb. The shop walker came nearest to achieving this ideal: suave and superb in dress, manner, and speech, in all but salary, he had been metamorphosed from the son of a farmer, who spoke no English, into an effigy that put to shame the Pall Mall clubman, though he cost the nation incomparably less. Pity that he had so poor a world to shine in, and that his imitators resembled him no more than they did the figures exhibited in the tailor's advertisements,

figures created merely to hold a cigarette between the lips and a whippy cane in the fingers. His clients included women bent on dressing extravagantly or even with aristocratic sumptuous modesty, at a low price; young men with white faces, riding breeches, cigarettes, and jaunty manners; sober farmers who had tired of wearing the same old homespun so thick that they shiver without it; wives who have come to town to sell butter and eggs; sailors who have just found a ship, sailors who have just been paid off, sailors who have called first at "The Talbot Arms"; dark-eyed, clear-complexioned girls swaddled in blouses of red and black chequered flannel, blue and white flannel skirts, variegated or black and red flannel shawls, but, for all their natural and artificial plumpness, gay and continually chattering in musical voices as they move quickly about carrying well-scoured buckets of white wood on head or hips—women resembling wood-pigeons in their plumpness and quickness.

All were buying what was very cheap, or very showy, or very new, or very much like something else, or much praised as a really good thing. Cattle and their drovers looked in at the gorgeous windows and spread over the streets where a dozen knots of old acquaintances were meeting for the first time since last market day. Young working men in black whose faces had clearly been of another colour recently but were now very white by contrast with dark eyes and black moustaches and hair, walked up and down the pavements doing nothing in a determined fashion and smoking,—men who might easily have been changed into starlings in an age of miracles. In nearly all, in men and women—except in the squalid hooded hags who crawled by, or the work girls beside them carrying younger sisters or bastards in shawls—the pallor, stiffness, and haste of the town were modified by country ways, a rolling walk as if on solitary roads, country gestures and speech and quiet eyes. Young and old of all classes

mingled on an equality. There was no inharmonious element, it was a village crowd, and all were united by the fact that they had been peasant born and that they were now slaves to the town. They were fascinated by the charm of the town, which is, that it is there easy to fill the whole of life with a rapidly changing round of duties and necessities, where shops and all things are so convenient that life, as Catherine Anne had surmised, is swallowed up by its conveniences.

At one end of the glassy street the opposing cliffs of the house walls framed a portion of the brown burning mountain and white clouds standing above it; at the other end, under a railway arch, was a maze of gulls swaying between the steady masts of ships.

In and out of the crowd, relentless but polite, and turning round corners, passing one another, climbing this way and that the hills of the town, went the electric trams.

They were polished, compact, efficient, without limbs. Like the machinery in the factories they must be of the best material and kept bright and oiled. They were tended like idols and altars with hate and fear that resembled love in its extremity. Men and women might be maimed, deformed, decrepit, pale, starved, rotten, but the wheels, the brakes, the brass-work, the advertisements, and the glass windows must be continually inspected and without spot.

Two girls of seventeen or eighteen, fair-haired—just so tall that one who cared would have said, Even so tall ought women to be—straight, quick, and graceful as mountain sheep, walked down a bye street beside the tram. They wore newly washed gay cheap gowns. Their heads were bare and their yellow hair drew down the sunlight. Their clear, rosy, small-featured faces were fresh and full of a boyish confidence—like boys among a crowd who are all companions. Their full, parted lips wavered and disclosed

perfect teeth as they smiled and talked. The exquisite balance of their heads might have been called arrogant if it had not been careless and unaffected by the admiration, curiosity, and scorn of the crowd. Sometimes they held one another's hands as if unconsciously fearful of the town. It was easy to imagine these two changed into such birds of the sea-shore as terns, bright of wing and foot, for ever flitting in the sun and spray with merriment, speed and grace, and without care. They belonged to some wandering family encamped for a fair near by. A chauffeur rubbed the metal of his lamp till it flashed. There was no one to take care of these two. Instead, the town surged high above and around them to destroy them if it could, to force them to suckle gnomes at their delicate breasts.

Beyond these restless streets rose other hills away from the docks into unpolluted sea air. The town spread up on to the sides of these—first long rows of new clean houses of

one pattern and few shops; above them long terraces of houses of many forms, with gardens, shrubberies, oak trees; and still higher isolated large houses hidden by foliage, where parties played croquet and the solitary lounged with a book among flowering bushes and looked at the sea. The windy crest was free, and the half-made road ended in a deep overgrown track, now half a wood, down which the men of the mountains used to descend to the river and the ships and the sea. The oaks here were but young, yet they were stony and twisted and gaunt with the sap of other trees, stony and twisted and gaunt, that were descended from those through which the ancient men had their first glimpse of the river mouth, the small ships and the fires of their adversaries, before they plunged downward silently. Now between those twisted stems the eyes looked one way over the town to the white walls of Catherine Anne's cottage, the woods, the lesser hills, the great mountains so far away

and pure that the breast heaved an involuntary sigh; the other way, in the gathering darkness, at a pale half moon of sea bounded just below by a curve of lamps low down as far as the docks, and then by the cloudy forms of hills with lights like stars upon their sides.

But at night the town irresistibly confined the gaze. It was a pit glittering with distinct small lights and glowing with the orange and scarlet furnaces that seemed to have eaten large squares out of the streets. Beyond, based in fire, the brown hill and the green hill rose indistinguishably dark into the midst of the stars. The pit was sounding with clanking and humming noises that recorded the activity of a demon, not of men, for not a whisper was heard of footsteps, voices, blows, caresses, of the love, anger, fear, anxiety, thought, argument, confusion, of men and women. It was impossible to remember that down there slept or waked those thousands of dark men, the mixed

multitude, the buxom cocklewomen like wood pigeons, those two fair ones like terns. The demon was humanity, a demon not born of woman, whose right hand knows not the deed of its left hand, though every nerve in its frame is a twitching soul. It knows not and recks not what it is making, as it squats there upon the earth. It feeds upon itself day and night, loading an immeasurable craw and looking up with small eyes on the sun and stars as senselessly as they look down upon it. It is cruel in ignorance, it is pitiful, and it forgets. It is hideous and beautiful. It would be noble but it must be vile. It is winged but cannot rise, so many are the claws that grapple into the earth. It is old but it is as a babe. But at this hour of night the pity and the vileness, the power and the beauty of it were under a veil. It crouched motionless, its bright eyes looked up, and the stars looked back, neither understanding, nor any longer questioning. It sang and knew not what it sang. Down there in the glimmer-

ing darkness, the demon sang, and through the obscurity of the song pierced the burden —that, with the river by which it is seated, and the mountain standing by, and the sea knocking without, and the ceiling of stars, it had a common birth; that their seeming strife is but the rude play of giant children nursed together and destined to one end; that the grass is waiting to grow upon it as upon the hills and the wreckage of fallen stars, and fire waiting to consume the grass, and the fire to burn itself out; and that in the meantime life is an inspiration of matter and must sing and must also make themes for songs. So that it resembled nothing so much as the old woman sitting at her cottage door and looking at the coming and going of the swifts from the eaves to heaven and from heaven back again, in a mystery.

Milking

THE end of April was sappy, careless, and profuse. One day it was all eagerness and energy and gave no rest to the wind and the sun, on the earth or in the waters or in the clouds of the sky, and the songs of the birds were a mad medley. Another day it was indolent: a soft grey sky without form covered all; there was no wind; the birds were still; the lusty, buxom spring, a pretty and merry slut, with her sleeves and skirts tucked up and her hair down over her eyes and shoulders, had fallen asleep in the midst of her toil and nothing could waken her but a thunderstorm in the night. The next day she was simply at play with showers and sunlight, sunlight and showers, at play with sky and earth as if they were but coloured silks and now she fluttered the

white and blue and green together and then, wearying of that, held up the grey and the grey-white and the green, and lastly mingled all together inextricably. For the most part she preferred not to let either go quite out of sight; when the heavy rain fell on the rustling wood it was out of a sky serene, lustrous, and mild; and when the light was steady and the rain tripping away from it upon myriad feet down among the leaves to the earth, still the shadows of the rain clouds stole over the hills like smoke. There was a gamesome spirit abroad. It was seen in the amorous conflict of rain and sun, and heard in the cry of the titmouse along the hedge: "Fitchy! fitchy!"

Rain or not, always far away in the south there was a cluster of white peaks apparently belonging to a land that knew neither our sun nor our rain. Rain or sunshine or both made little difference to the shed at the cross roads. It was shadowy and old under a roof that was patched and

hollowed like the sail of a ship. The door was open, but on either side the piles of dung were high and long and allowed the sun to enter the shed only for half an hour each day. And now in that half-hour the farmer Weekes was going to milk the last of his seven cows. Until now he had known of the afternoon only that the wind whined in the roof and that the rain dripped through on to his back at intervals. When the sun at last stepped in between the banks of dung he could see that it was a forward spring. For his eye travelled up between the green walls of the road to the hills four miles away, and there the beech trees were almost in perfect leaf and in their dense ranks resembled a flock of sheep with golden fleeces descending the slope. Yet it wanted a week before May-day. The grass was good, and already the cows were clean and bright after their winter in the yard; and, having looked at his hands alongside the white and strawberry hide of the cow, he got up and

wiped them on a wisp of grass beside the door. He stood there a moment—a tall, crooked man, with ever-sparkling eyes in a nubbly and bony head, worn down by sun and toil and calamity to nothing but a stone, hollowed and grey, to which his short black hair clung like moss; in his starved fields you might have found a weathered flint of the same shape, and have said that it was much like a man's head. He stretched himself, and then turned and called the cow by her name in a voice so deep and powerful that it was as if the whole shed and not a man's chest had uttered it.

He sat down again to milk and to think, with his face turned to the sun. He was thinking of the farmhouse under those woods on the hill, where he used to go courting twenty years ago, and of the girl, the only daughter of that house, who was now his wife. He had driven over there one day in his father's cart to see about some pigs. The old man had given him supper, honey

and bread and butter, cold apple dumplings with cheese, and cowslip wine. It was a wonderful quiet house, very dark under tall beeches, with a quality in the dark still air as if it were under water, but very clean and bright with china and brass and the white tablecloth and the old man's white beard and glittering blue eyes. He knew that the old man was failing to make both ends meet, but there was no sign of it, and he spoke with a cheerful gravity, and there was a look about house and man as if they were apart from the world, and not subject to such accidents as failure of crops, cattle disease, and the like. They had done their business, and at the end of a long silence he was thinking of rising to go, when Emily, the daughter, came in without noticing him, kissed her father, and said, "Father, there is a white bird in the old apple tree of the rickyard singing ike a blackbird. Yet 'tis as white as milk."

"Well, we will all come and see," said the

old man, and then she saw that a stranger was there, and with a blush she retreated and opened the door. As she was shutting it she turned round out of curiosity, thus revealing her own face to the stranger, but seeing nothing of his which was in shadow. In a minute or two they went out into the rickyard where the cart was waiting. Emily was patting the horse's neck, but with her face towards the old apple-tree where a white blackbird was singing from the topmost branch. "You will not let them shoot it, father, will you?" she said. The white bird and its song, the girl's fair hair, and rosy face very serious, the unbent old man soon to die, the sombre smouldering old tiles and brick wall of the house, and the high black woods behind, were remembered now. Soon afterwards he had returned to the house, and again and again, avowedly to see Emily. In the late summer they used to walk out after the haymaking was all over, while the nightjar sang and the woods were dark and

discreet and the sky above them as pale green as a new-mown field. They went in amongst the untrodden bracken together. He could recall the smell of the crushed fronds where they sat, the light of the near planet between the fox-gloves gushing from the violet sky, and the kisses that were as sweet as the honeysuckle overhanging them, and, unlike that, could be tasted again and again without cloying.

And now the cold whine of the wind in the roof and the drop of the rain, and Emily was lying at home, sick, with a dead newborn child in the next room, and a child that he was glad was dead, yes! that even she would not be crying after if she knew what a monstrous mistaken thing had come into the world with their help. Weekes looked at that old farmhouse and the rickyard, the crushed bracken bower, as if to search among these things engraved by joy upon his brain for the devilish magic that had brought about this wretchedness. He looked at her remembered

face, scanning it for something to explain this thing, looked closely and fiercely at the face that was turned back towards him in her father's doorway so that he loved her from that day. What? Why? But neither in the young girl nor in the worn woman could he see what he sought. He thought of their labours, of the six children she had borne and reared, of her rough hands and wrenched voice, of the smearing out of all her prettiness except her hair. He turned it over and over, ruminating, undisturbed by the spurting of the milk into the pail, the trickle of the shower, or the sight of the hills and the clouds over the hills. Yet he did not take his eyes off these hills, nor change the look given to them by his pain and questioning—questioning he knew not what now—the whole order of things, perhaps, from which the terror had sprung unexpected. Having naught for his brain to grip and hold, but only the dead ghastly child lying still, and repeating the question, and round about

it the moving world of men and Nature, enormous and endless and careless, each effort was weaker than the last and sorrow brought its narcotic stupidity. It was some time after he had drawn her last milk that the cow licked his face impatiently. He kicked away the stool and began singing a verse of a ribald song which he did not know he had remembered—

Poor Sally's face is plain
But Sally's heart is kind—

And it was so singing that, without wishing it, he returned the question to the teeming womb and grave of the earth, to be swallowed up in the vast profusion of life and death, while the merry maid waved to and fro the coloured silks of the sunshine and of the rain, and the titmouse crept through the hedge, crying, waggishly, "Fitchy! fitchy!"

The Fountain

It was a month when the sun was as a lion in the sky . . . I was walking along the beach under a vertical sandcliff that shut out all the land except a fringe of heather over the edge. A fish could have breathed as well as I in the heat. There was no escape. The cliff could not be climbed and it extended as it seemed endlessly before and behind. The sea itself simmered in the heat as it touched the burning sand. There was not a bird, or a sail, or a cloud to be seen. I could not think or give up trying to think. The solitude was unbearable. There was no rest for body or mind. Sometimes I walked quickly to make an end, sometimes slowly in the hope that it would be less wearisome. As always happens when you reach an end which you have desired only because the

approach is tedious, it was no better when I came at last to the place where the cliffs gave way to a level marsh. I meant to fling myself down among the gorse between the cliff and the marsh when I saw a girl. It was as if a fountain had leaped out of the sand.

She was standing not ten yards away with her face towards me but looking at the sea. She was dark, not tall, and slender, her eyes blue and cold and still. Her brow was like a half moon under her brown hair and was of a most pellucid purity and utterly serene. The blue of her dress was very cool against the yellow of the gorse. She might have been eighteen, not more. Her hair was wet and fell down over her breast and beyond her waist in two long plaits. She had seaweed in both her hands and it hung down to the ground motionless, like dripping bronze.

I thought at once of a fountain in a desert. The purple heather and yellow gorse

were mistily and drowsily coloured and fragrant, and their fragrance and colour mingled and made one effect with the murmur of bees. My path lay within a yard of her, and I walked slowly up to her and past her, bathed in the freshness of her spirit. She moved a step or two forward that the interruption might be over more quickly.

My heart was beating fast, but not with hope. She was in another world from mine. I felt that there was no possible means of contact with that form and the life which it expressed.

Then I thought that if I were a sculptor I should be able to imprison something of that life in a bronze figure lying at full length but raised on its elbows so that the outline of the young breasts should not be lost, its chin upon the linked palms of both hands, presiding over the birth of a river at a spring of sombre diamond among the mountains. If a brook might attain in a human form the

embodiment of its purity, coldness, light, power, and desire to be ever moving, of its mysterious transformations in clouds of heaven and in caves under the rocks, it would be in such a form as hers. The gravity, the dark simplicity, above all the exquisite combination of wildness and meekness in the girl would be worthy of the most sacred fountain, whether emerging among moss and crags and the shadows of crags or among sunlit grass. Surely, I thought, a lymph of crystal ran in her veins. It was the darkness of a hidden spring that chilled her pellucid brow. The radiance of her eyes, her face, her whole form, was of the dawn, which I dreamed that she was one of the few left to worship—Yes! She had listened to the nightingales when the dew and the hawthorn flower and the young grass were yet dark; and the thrill of their songs had entered her eyes and lips without one passionate or confusing thought.

I fancied that I could see the way of her

life. She was meek at home and in the company of others, as a large-eyed animal is meek but without surrender, or as a fairy bride was meek who consented in the old days to live with a mortal husband until he should have struck her three times, when she would forsake him and return with all the flocks and herds of her dowry to her father's palace below the lake in the hills. Only, this maid would not, like the fairy bride, laugh at a funeral, cry at a wedding; she would do all things in order, obeying in matters of the house and social life the father and mother and brothers and sisters who understood how such things should be, because it was for these that they lived. She would bound away in answer to a summons, especially if it sent her out into the air at night or in the very early morning, when she could see the stars sailing over broad blue fiords among the white clouds, or the moon like a silver fish now and then showing its side in the turbulence. And

once away from these friends for whom she would easily wear away her life she was as if they were not. She plunged deep into the oblivion of other loves, as now when she looked out to sea.

I thought of her discovering one by one with serious joy the strange responses made to her heart by the earth and to the earth by her heart: how, for example, she would listen to the nightjar churring on the bough above a house where all were asleep; or watch the owl gliding over the graves softly, beneficently; or, at first fearfully, then wild with delight, follow the fox that yelled his love and hate over the winter hills at night when all that remained of the world of day was the faint light here and there in the valley which one leaf could extinguish. She tasted unfamiliar leaves and fruit, buried her face in bracken or flowers or foliage for their scent, ran and leaped and lay in far places where the sun, the clouds, the stars, the rivers, the sea, the endless wind, were her company.

Her whiteness, though it was not the same and was contrasted with her dark hair and flushing cheek, called to my mind the beauty of white on an October morning, the white of mushrooms in the short turf, of the horse-chestnuts' newly cloven husks, of the fresh walnuts opened and eaten where they fell, of the nearly full moon alone in the huge blue sky an hour after dawn. As a boy it was of such a being that I used to think—though my imagination was not energetic enough to body it forth quite clearly—when I felt, in loneliest places among the woods or clouds, that my foot-falls had scared something shy, beautiful, and divine. And more than so, she was akin to the spirit abroad on many days that had awed or harassed me with loveliness—to the spirit on the dewy clovers, in the last star that hung like a bird of light scattering gold and silver from her wings in the cold blue and gloomy rose of the dawn; to the spirit in mountain or forest waters, in many unstained rivers, in all places where

Nature had stung me with a sense of her own pure force, pure and without pity. . . .

These were the fancies of the moment. She was in sight for less than a minute as I went up from the sea over the moor, and when I turned in one of its hollows she had disappeared and I saw nothing but sea and sky, which were as one.

The Maiden's Wood

At the upper end of a long beechen coombe that narrowed and wound and rose as it penetrated the hills, was a high ledge that looked southward down the coombe to a broad plain, an opposite range of bare and smooth hills, to other isolated hills seen above the lowest parts of the range, and, on a clear day, when the brain was tranquil and the eye at its full power, the sea beyond. This ledge was a few acres in extent, full of hollows and mounds and given up to beech, oak, and wild cherry, and it was protected from the north by a steep bank rising behind to the highest point on the hills. It was untouched by roads. The great highway that rose from the plain to the high land by a gradual ascent along the winding edge of the valley turned abruptly away from it. Once upon a time,

indeed, a track had been worn from this highway to a gravel pit under the steep bank; but the pit was overgrown with bushes and fern, and, as the way led nowhere beyond, it had long been disused. The land all round was poor and mostly wild. The few inhabitants went where they liked; and the footpaths were trodden so rarely that they were slender as hare-paths and hardly distinguishable from them, and none seemed to lead to the ledge, which I discovered by following the uneven track—where the branches did not turn me aside among the trees—in search of orchises. Once there I saw that it was traversed by many faint unreasonable paths leading into one another, which from a little distance could not be seen, for the foliage of dog's mercury, everywhere of equal height, gloomy and cool and tinged with a lemon hue, almost closed over the narrow grassless ribbons of brown earth and dead leaves, though once the feet rather than the eye had revealed them they were easily

followed. If they had any centre of radiation it was an impenetrable thicket of brier and hazel all overlaced by the cordage of honeysuckle and traveller's joy, in the midst of which there were a few moss-covered rotten posts, all but one lying prone; and these, hardly different from the many dead and mossy stems of trees already decayed, did not arouse my curiosity. One only of the paths was broad enough not to be mistakable. It ran along the brink of the ledge and appeared to have been artificially banked up. It was from here that the view was most perfect to the sea, or, on days less clear, to the long range and to the low plain, or merely to the wooded coombe where all the mists of the world seemed to be born and to return time after time like the sea. Once the ledge was left behind by only a few yards the view was gone, and nothing seen but the surface of the woods on the slopes below and the clouds on the blue over the topmost trees.

But the little wood was as a mountain kingdom apart, not merely on account of what could be seen from it and from it alone. It was divided from the woods of the coombe sides by earth walls, still high and once hedge-grown, like ancient fortifications; from the high lands behind by the precipitous bank; from the treeless trough of the coombe by the all but impassable steepness at the beginning of its descent. It was the home of the sun. East, south, and west, the sun never forgot it, and the twisted lean trees, many of them dead, did nothing to keep it out. So used was it to the sun just here, the great bee was careless of the heavy spring rain as he went feeling from white bloom to bloom of the dead-nettle.

The path at the brink was cut off short by the earth walls at either end. I thought that the whole ledge had been forgotten: the estates on these miles of half-precipitous wooded declivities were very large, and entirely neglected, the fallen trees lying

where they fell because they were inaccessible; and there were no gamekeepers—what then could these two or three acres matter, even supposing that they were duly distinguished from the surrounding country on the maps locked up half a century ago by a lawyer? There were long days of every season when I believed it my own, or what was better even than possession, I felt entirely free there and alone and without responsibility. I used to wander idly and without asking who the owner was, for I concluded that it had an owner in the sense that my occupation could be disputed if it were avowed. Day and night I used to go. In all those enormous woods there were only two sounds by day—the sudden laughs of the green woodpecker and the oceanic music of the wind which, even when it slept, seemed to dream there aloud. There was one other sound, but it was not often heard simply because it was always there, the noise of a streamlet running down among the woods;

seldom did I notice it except in still cold nights when the huge forest hills were black and the sky starless and grey, and then the harsh sound was unceasing and ghostly, as of a river running in the sky. Once when the trees were all white under silent snow one heron came up the long empty coombe, grey and lean and slow and like a solitary ship entering the keelless foam between the untrodden shores of some mighty estuary long ago; and he also was silent. But on that ledge between the forest and the high open land no bird was afraid to come, and whether that long kingdom of green leaves was roaring or silent I could always hear a bird singing among these trees or stirring the dead leaf. The stillest days of Spring, when the leaves could yet be numbered, were best savoured here where the enormous silence of the world was threaded by rivulets of song. By night there was the hoot and the shriek and the soft chuckling of the owls. Many a windy, cold night, dripping and black, I climbed up there

and heard the owl crying his loudest and clearest into the echoing coombe, a strong happy voice when all other life but that in my own breast seemed to have passed away into the wind and rain.

Now and then I tried to picture the man or woman who had been there last. Whose were those footpaths? or were these ribbons of earth, always bare among the green, not footpaths at all, but to be explained some other way?

I had been there a score of times without making anything like a full survey and inventory of my kingdom. It was becoming part of me, a kingdom rather of the spirit than of the earth, and I was content to see what I had seen on my first visit. In the neighbouring woods I had sought for orchises but after finding half a dozen kinds here at that time I had not looked for more. The other flowers were the usual flowers of the woods, the minute green moschatel, the stars of stitchwort and later woodruff, the bluebell

and a few more, such as I was glad to greet for the twentieth time with more familiarity than ceremony. But one day I not only learnt that the wood was not my own, but that there was a further mystery. At the first moment the other visitor seemed to be its possessor, so much at home was she and so strange did I suddenly feel. It was a woman, how much past middle age I could not guess. Her hair was flaxen, her face as much weathered as it was possible to be without ceasing to be pink and fresh, her thin mouth at once childlike and shrewd, her eyes of a sparkling grey so that in each of them seemed always to be a drop of quicksilver sliding. She was short and plump and had a kind of briskness that I imagined to mean a nature of the utmost independence and unworldliness. She came towards me gathering flowers which she put into a basket on one arm. She looked at me with those intensely brilliant eyes that certainly saw me as I had never been seen before and saw in

me something of which I was unaware; she curtsied and went on picking flowers. I was just about to step off the narrow path so as not to disturb her, when, still bending and without looking at me, she hopped aside and I passed by. Indeed I should not have spoken to this extraordinary human being, in spite of her rarity and fascination, if it had not been for the flowers which I caught sight of under her face. Though I am not a botanist I see most of the flowers in my path and I know the names of most; but I recognized none of these. They were bells and cups and stars clustered or single, in spires and bunches, that I had never seen growing wild before.

"There are many here in this wood," she said in answer to my questions. "Yes, only here."

"Can you tell me their names?" I asked.

"No. They have never been christened that I know of," she replied.

Seeing some orchises among them I said:

"But you know these?"

"Yes, they are fly-hawkins and butterflies' nests," she said, perverting the names of the fly-orchis and bird's nest and butterfly orchises. She smiled, I did not know why; but it was a smile as fitting to her as her childlike mouth and complexion, her quicksilver eye, her briskness, and her hop to one side. I asked her the name of the wood. "The Maiden's Wood,"—she said, "It has always been called the Maiden's Wood. . . . I do not know the meaning of the name." And she went on picking flowers. I now saw that these unfamiliar kinds were to be found everywhere in the little wood.

Twice again I saw her in the wood, and I liked to see her alone and undisturbed, at ease and at home there like a bird questing among the dead leaves when it has no fears of being observed.

Now that I saw the wood was not un-

known I did not hesitate to ask questions at the nearest inn, several miles away, in the hope of learning more. I asked a young labourer. Yes, it had always been the Maiden's Wood. Old Mrs Malkin knew all about it, he said, for she went everywhere for flowers, and she got the curious ones in the Maiden's Wood, so they say—for he had never been there himself. I next asked an old man. He gave it the same name. There was a story, he said, but he did not belong to these parts, and he did not rightly remember it — something about a great lady, he believed, who had a garden there, hundreds of years ago it must have been. I asked him had there been a house there. No, no house; she did not live there; in fact he thought she was a ghost, though he had not seen it, or a fairy, or something.

Another old man said it was a queen had owned the place, he did not rightly know which queen, but she had stayed

at the big manor house, now a farm, with the ancient wall round its orchard, which was the nearest building to the Maiden's Wood.

The farmer was a young man with a fine chestnut horse and a polished trap that was always rushing here and there on its bright yellow wheels. I hardly expected him to be able to tell me more. But I caught him out of his trap one day, having come to look at the wool in a barn where there was a boastful shearer who cut the flesh every minute in his effort to show himself the swiftest of his craft in the county, when he was being watched. The farmer was a practical man of few words, but he said that his father would be glad to have a talk, so he took me upstairs, backward and forward, as it seemed to me, the whole length and breadth and height of the big house that looked as if it had grown by some natural process of conglomeration, room by room; and at the top, in a corner no one could have suspected from the

outside, he showed me in to the old man. He was sitting in a high-backed chair, as stiff and as rugged as a tree, a huge grey-bearded man, as still as a tree too, for he could not rise to show his pleasure, which he did, however, by very soon setting out to talk very slowly in a voice that seemed to echo in his head before it left his lips, but without noticing any of my interruptions.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "when it was first called the Maiden's Wood, but I knew the Maiden. This was her room when she came to stay at the farm when I was a boy. The estate belonged to her and two brothers, this long bit from here up to the brow and that little bit you were speaking of as well, the Maiden's Wood. She was the Maiden. Some call it the Maiden's Garden. But her real garden was out there"—and looking out I saw a long wide border, under a fruit wall, full of flowers such as I had noticed in the wood—"and it was her fancy to take the

seeds out there into the wood and sow them there. She did it all herself. Many's the time, when they were ploughing up to the edge of the steep bank there, that they could see her down below in the wood as they were turning the horses round to begin another furrow. She used to walk up and down, up and down, and round and back again, rain or shine, no matter. She never had anyone with her there, and never would let anyone else go in except when we built the arbour for her in the middle of the wood: you have seen the posts of it, I dare say, but the thatch has gone long ago. Are the roses there now? I suppose not—oh, dear me, no, what am I thinking of? They would not last, pretty lady's roses they were with long Jerusalem names. She was pretty herself, too—not what everyone would like, you know, and some of them saw nothing in her, but like one of these ladies in pictures. She always wore the same kind of dress; like a maybush she looked in it, and one of the men

seeing her and not knowing who it was took her for a blessed ghost. I was about eighteen then, and she was not any older. No. I liked to see her down there. But she wasn't our sort. Queer, something wrong or funny about her, and a well-born lady, too. The young have not any business to be like that. I never saw her speak to anyone. She always came here alone to stay. She used to talk to herself a lot, and it sounded as if she was saying poetry and lots of outlandish words out of books. She would have a book with her and hold it in her hand hanging down, as she walked back and forth. I laughed to myself about her many a time, I did. I and my brother helped to put up the arbour. It was her idea. What did a young thing want to be playing about by herself in the wood like that, I should like to know? It was the time of the Crimean war. She didn't care. I remember one day I was just turning the plough at the top by that bank above the Maiden's Wood when Jacob Stout went by

galloping on the hard road a good mile away. He saw me and the team and he stopped his mare, and shouted 'Victory,' so that the horses pricked up their ears, wondering what was up, and off he went again. Now it so happened that Miss West was walking down below at the time, and having nobody to talk to after I had told the horses all about it and promised them an extra sieve of oats to eat Her Majesty's health with, I shouted 'Victory' myself, pretty loud. She stops dead, looks up at me, and says: 'John!' So I scrambles down, and there was she standing like a queen, and she gives me a crown. 'That's for the good news, John;' but I would sooner not have had it if only she had spared me the look she gave when she said, 'But I don't like to be disturbed, John.' I was feeling proud, too, and my view halloo used to be a good one, I promise you. You might have thought she was at her prayers, or courting. She might have been in love with somebody that had not the

sense to love her back again—she was a beauty, dear me! such waste of time it was for her to be walking there all alone and looking for the sea, if you please. 'A clear morning, John,' she used to say some days, 'I ought to be able to see the sea this morning.' Funny thing. There was she with health and strength, riches and good looks, everything mortal wants, and not unhappy either, walking up and down among those trees just as if she was on a ship. She made those paths, every one of them, in her idleness. The only thing she ever *did* was to sow seeds there. She used to go out into the garden there after a warm day at harvest time and fill her pockets with seeds from her fancy plants, and then she would scatter them in the wood. It looked pretty for a time, but there are only a few left for Jenny Malkin by this time, I doubt. It was not one year only—you might have understood that. These young ladies with nothing to do must have their whimsies. But one

two, three, four, five—the year I was married —yes! five years she was there, and all the spring and summer, half the autumn too, and Christmas time. What can you make of it? And then she did not come any more. The estate had to be sold. The brother went abroad. We missed her, too. She was kind and sensible in her talk; and then her looks did you good, ay! a bonny face. I never set eyes on her again. It was just after this we opened the gravel pit, and many a joke the men had about the arbour. The children found it out when they got a bit venturesome, and they pulled it about sadly. But after they began to work about the farm they never went more, not till my eldest went courting there, and then it was a rare sort of a lovers' nest for them all in a smother of weeds and climbers and roses, and the flowers there still; and when Mary came in wearing the pretty things I used to fall awondering what might have happened to Miss West that planted them.

That must have been how it came to be called the Maiden's Wood, I should say. Albert and his sweetheart used to call it that, I recollect, and that is what we always call it."

Snow and Sand

THE wind has as many voices as men have moods, and more. It can whimper like a child hiding alone. It can rave as if it was one of the gods of the early men, running wild in the night over a diminished world. It can whisper love and hate and satiety. It will breathe of doubt, apprehension, trepidation. Now it seems the youngest thing between earth and heaven, new made and fresh as bubbles on the brook. And now again it is an old wind. Hundreds of times it is an old wind, so old, that it has forgotten everything except that it is old and that all other things among which it wanders are young and have changed and will change; and it mumbles fitfully that what is young now will in a moment be old, and that to be old is nothing, nothing; and then in one

breath it scatters the last handful of the dead tree's dust and flutters the first leaf of spring. While it covers up in sand the castle ruins that stood, like the two last teeth of an old hound, on a hillock above the sea, it thinks it was but yesterday that it unloosed the hair of the princess looking from the new-built tower of that castle towards the west. She sighs with fulness of beauty but ceases not to watch from the high window. The wind powders her hands and dulls her eyes with sea sand. She droops her eyelids yet looks still to the west. But now her eyes are fast shut and it is only her soul that can see through the milky blue lids of her blind eyes. The sand is hissing about her hair, but she cannot hear it; it is poured into the room like water. For the wind has filled itself with sand as but a little while before it filled itself with the gold of sunset and the scent of the rose; and the heavy billows of sand are drowning the sea-birds. The princess cannot hear the wrath of the sea any more than if she had

eyes she could see it, through the sand storm, baying at the foot of the tower. She cannot feel the sand rising above her waist. She cannot cry out or fly; she has no desire or motion. There is not one left in the castle to cry out to her or to come to her door; for some have broken forth to die in the sea, and some have drunk the sand and have died like her amid the mist and hiss of the floating and whirling dunes. The tower plunges through the solid air into the black sea and buries the corpse of the betrothed. The wind blows her dust into my face as it shakes the drab grass on the last stones of the tower. It is an old wind. A minute ago it had forgotten such a little thing as the tempest of sand and sea, the overthrow of the tower, the maiden's death, and her black hair spread out by the slow wave. But now it has remembered as it whirls the sand and the crossing flakes of snow together, above the ruins of the tower, the drab grasses, the homeless dunes. There is nothing else to do but to remember here.

Snow and Sand

It is a sea of solid waves, of sand hills that behold the mountains, the sea and the sky, and of sand valleys that behold only the sand hills and the sky. Some of the hills are stony grey or brown with dead bracken, some of the valleys yellow-green with moss and with moss-like turf, or grey with the sprawling roots and the flaked leaves of little willows. But most are bare of all but the corpse tresses of yellow grass, and the wind carves ceaselessly and erases its carving, and in small hollows bows the pointed stem of the grass and guides it so as to draw a circle upon the sand. Many skeletons of birds lie on the sand, but there is not a bird in the air, no sound but the shifting of the grains as the wind broods. There is nothing but change, unresting, monotonous change. The wind is counting the sands and going over memories which are as the sands. One hill is like the next and all the valleys are the same except one, wider and more level than the rest. It is paved with blue rippled water and on the

water are myriads of pale birds that are sending up myriads to whirl and cry in the wind. The rushy margin is strewn with delicate bones and feathers among the snowflakes. The pale multitude rises and circles and descends and rises again to and from the solitary water. They are the souls of them who have loved nothing overmuch, who have lived on one another's breath and have floated hither and thither about another's business. They must keep together. They are drawn to the waste pool among the dunes as in life they were drawn to nothing, and a footstep drives them away, to return inevitably again. They desire only not to be alone. I recognise many, and not one of them is strange. They never change. As they are to-day so they were when the maiden's tower was overwhelmed, and will be so long as there is water in the pool and safety and solitude around. Old men and young men and maidens, generation after generation, are indistinguishable in their grey and white plumage and wandering cries.

They suffer a contentment that is not happiness. Their pale wings all together are beautiful. If they were not haunted by the living they might even be happy also, and float upon the water until they were weary, and then upon the wind until the water once more seemed better than the wind.

A few of them are still drifting overhead like larger snowflakes as I dip into the next valley, but in the next I am alone again among the sandhills, listening to the two gentle dissolving murmurs of the gliding sand and the kissing flakes, sounds that are taking possession of all things as of me, so that in all the drowsy world there seems nothing but the formless mazy snowfall and the vague changing dunes; and then, crossing a stream that flows among alders, in the fields between the dunes and the mountains, I find that I am upon a footpath hidden before but now revealed by the light snow lying close and pure white on the short grass or bare earth of its winding course. The

water is full of yellow reeds, the catkins on the dark alders are blood red, the fields are very green, and the life in their longer grass has all but melted the snow. Already the light is fading from grass and reed and tree, and from the robin who, a moment ago, swelled an orange breast as he sang in the alder. He sings no longer but flits from the tree to the low stone wall of a garden that follows several loops of the stream. Between the water and the wall creeps the path, and on this path the robin suddenly appears, visible not in his flight but at the moment when he flutters before alighting. When he stands still I can hardly see him, and his black eye and hard ejaculated chirp emerge out of the dark air. But he seldom stands still. He flits ahead a few steps, or to one side, or to the wall, and from there to a branch, and back again, very suddenly and unexpectedly. He is more like the embodiment of a thought than a bird—coming thus out of darkness, announcing himself and dis-

appearing again—a thought that is out of control and is living its own life, moving to some end which you cannot foresee though you may dread. Now I have eyes and ears only for this brown, shadowy, uncertainly moving thought that is one moment so still, another flickering, like a flame or a dead leaf. I watch for his movements, yet each one startles me. He enters a garden—the gate has rotted from its hinge—and I follow up a straight weedy path between thickets that were once vegetable plots; flowers of snow hang on the skeleton plants. Five stone steps lead up to a narrow door in a porch, with a window above it. On either side there are three windows one above the other in the old white wall, and on one side the dairy and sheds adjoin the house. The roof is thatched, and the porch and room above it have a roof of their own. A low stone chimney rises above the thatch at either end. It is certain that I have seen or known the house before this twilight.

House and garden are haunted. They are haunted by something quiet and small—by the robin and his gusty flight—by my thought—haunted by myself. I am the ghost in that snowy garden path outside the house, and my thought wanders helplessly about and around it like the white birds over the pool.

The house has never been unfamiliar to me. Since childhood it has been as clearly in my mind's eye—the seven windows, the door and the five steps, the garden on either side of the straight path up to the porch—as any house which my eyes have seen and my feet entered. Seven windows, seven eyeless sockets where there had been eyes.

A little time ago, ninety years, when the birds were flying up and down over the dunes, a bridegroom and bride had come home to that dark door on an evening of February. Ninety years ago the robin ceased singing and flickered about the path, and up the path towards the newly painted white

house with bridegroom and bride. Ninety years ago a thought haunted them as now I am haunting the silent house; it may have been the same thought. The difference between the living and the dead is little at such times; there may be no real difference. My uncontrolled thought, born without any wish of mine, is chirping and flitting there on the path, or is gathered up into the twilight gusts in which sea-birds are wailing. At the top of the steps a man pauses, a tall pale man, black-haired, copper-bearded, dressed as a farmer should be who has just been married and has ridden home with his bride; he turns and looks over the dunes and then to the mountains above the curve of the bay, with a look as of one to whom the scene is familiar and yet foreign; that he was not born between the mountains and the dunes, and has not spent his childhood there, is clear from his uncomprehending and restless eyes. The small fair-haired woman at his side, well wrapped against the snow, looks

so happy and at ease, while taking the same brief slow glance, that it may easily be known she is not so blessed by her marriage but that she is glad of a further blessing from this native coast. The wheeling birds complete her sense of the beauty of the day and the hour, the mountains, the dunes, and the sea, while they carry her husband's thought away, so that for a moment he is lost, lingering after she has passed into the house and not seeing the robin on the step below, my ghost in the path. Having looked long, too long, he follows his bride through the dark door. No light appears, and when he has gone I can no longer see the robin, and I hear only the shivering of the seedless dead stalks in the garden. My thought has gone in after those two. I stare at the windows behind which it has followed them. The door is closed. My thought is pleading with them, troubling them, as the robin, so restless and quick and then suddenly still, troubled me. It is troubling them, this little thought of

the unborn, of one who is to come after them when they are in their graves. Can they in that solitary house foresee anything from the wheeling of the birds, the mazy fall of the snow, the rustling grass, the flickering flight and talk of the robin at the gate? A window is lit up and I see them seated together—he with bowed head watching her hands, which he is holding in his own over his knees; she looking straight out towards where I stand. She is silent while he speaks. He is reminding her that the farm is now his for ever, that they are not now any more just two persons content with one another, but two in the perhaps endless chain of destiny. He foresees the day when the land will be improved and a new house built to take the place of the old farm-stead that belongs to the old times, the old ways now passing; he is almost ashamed to bring her to the old place, but he will give up wandering now, he will be able to save, and their children will be better off than they are

now, and their children's children. . . . He is talking to himself a moment. Then he says he half wishes he had taken her to his own land. He can never be quite at peace with all these barren sands at the edge of the land, and all those useless birds roving about the sand and the sky. Hark! They will not end their clamour. He takes down his gun from over the fire and goes out, and stepping swiftly over the dunes reaches the pool and fires into the multitude. They scream as if the firmament had a myriad voices and all of misery. They wheel about him as if they would lift him up in their anguished rush. The air is of wings. And in the house she hides her eyes from nothing, and waits. She smiles at his return. He drops a white bird into her lap and she smiles no more; nor yet does she reproach him, though she will not look at him, while she tells him the tradition among her father's people—that those birds are the spirits of the men and women who were buried in the

sand hundreds of years ago. She says that she can think of nothing sweeter than to hover as a spirit over the pool near where she was born, and where perhaps her children will be keeping sheep and ploughing the good land and cutting fern from the mountain and gathering whinberries, for ever. She takes up the bird in her two hands, setting free her wrists from his, and says that some day, who knows, she will be like that and so will her children and children's children, flying and floating about their native land and ocean. She wipes the crimson from the white breast with her handkerchief. But he says that he will never be one of the long-winged homeless creatures that threaten to alarm their embrace, but rather a robin that likes men and the houses of men—'Do not sigh, my wild, beautiful, white bird.' Is that the robin still loitering outside the window, he wonders. He rises and presses his face against the pane and sees me not. He is troubled by the white wings in his mistress' lap and the calling of

its companions. He draws the curtains close over the window and shuts out all that he can of the haunting night, the soft-fingered snow, and me, and whatever in that altogether white world might prey upon those two even in their sleep.

The Queen of the Waste Lands

It was the end of May and some hours before noon, and above the dark green wet earth was a dome of many greys descending at almost every point to the horizon. It no longer rained, and the sun which had poured into the intervals of the showers seemed to be taking counsel with the rain in the south-east, and they had not yet resolved which of the two should next dance upon the grass, and there was a hope that they would come both together and blend their dancing with their indistinguishable laughter. And as I lay and looked at fold beyond fold of high land so remote that I had never seen it before, high land airier than cloud, I was disturbed but not awakened when suddenly a heavier gust of the light wind shook all rain from the trees at the wood margin, and

out of it, or out of the wind, or out of the raindrops, floated a woman's form, apparelled in violet and grey as of blossoms half-hid in dew. She looked towards me with eyes of the same doubtful grey and violet under golden hair, and she was a queen; though she wore no crown and was unattended, I knew that she was a queen.

The wind did not die away but rose and spoke with a voice that I had heard in a desolate palace and on a coast inaccessible either from land or sea but audible from both continually. At first I could do nothing but hear. My eyes forgot the meadow and the far land and even that strange queen. But just as when a man, half sleeping and half waking all night, hears all night the tumult of wind and rain and sea, the noises of the rain and the wind fretted against a background of the noise of waves, and he cannot recall the silence that used to be, and slowly he makes a scene out of the sounds and sees as with the eyes of a flitting bird the forms of

the shore, the still crags, and the black waves beating themselves to whiteness and leaping up from mountainous bulk into thin foam: so out of this wind from the east, out of this raving and over-arching forest of sound, grew a waste of grey land, of seas and islands, of seas encompassed with many rocks, of islands in the midst of shipless seas, of clouds travelling to and fro and round about but never away, and full of the wild peace of rain falling for ever upon rock and upon water. The wind also was never anywhere silent in this land. The wind going up and down made a cry of mourning, of a woman among sepulchres; and sometimes it was the cry of a young high queen, most strong and defiant, and sometimes of an ancient so old and so often smitten that she has forgotten everything but her sorrow, which is her single joy as she wanders from memorial to memorial. And many were the memorials. For it was a land of sepulchres and of dwellings empty but fuller of death even than the

graves, and of a more bitter desolation because they hungered after the living or the dead, while the graves at least had their own portion.

The shores, the peaks of the mountains, the valleys, and the ledges between the peaks and the valleys, were strewn with graves, very placid in the eternal rain. And when the wind storming down from the mountains drove away the mist it disclosed yet other graves, domed cairns high against the waste sky, little forgotten heaves and ripples in the turf, and under trees shivering ceaselessly at the borders of tarns, and above precipices and gulfs whose depth sinking away into night was clearly proclaimed by the sound of the wind imprisoned there for an age, coiling and coiling without hope of escape. Island after island lifted such mountains into the sky and opened such abysses into the dark. On others the forest had grown wide and had covered the earth from the edges of the winding estuaries up to the clouds and above

them, and here the dead trees were as the living for multitude. As I watched the white and the grey birds sailing over the rivers and the skicy tracts of forest, under the precipices and round the buttresses of the unapproachable coast, and as I heard them wailing in their flight, it seemed to me that their voices, always forlorn, were more forlorn than ever, and that the reason was that for ages they had not seen men, the men who had tormented them or lived apart from them and yet had loved them and changed them with their love nevertheless. Yes, the lovers and the poets and the mothers and the captains in those graves had deprived them of something, and the birds bewailed it, and the showers falling upon their ashes were bitterer than the tears of mourners who, for all their moan, are alive and have hope.

But if all the islands were alike in their sepulchres, their forests, their rain and wind and voices of birds, each was unlike the

rest. The sepulchres were the same, but the houses that had no dead were different. At first the rain had submerged most of these houses out of my sight, mingled as they were with trees and rocks and confused with them by great age and the naturalness which comes of it. Yet some hillsides that seemed one forest were half the ruins of a city. The waterfalls raving into barren gorges bedewed the moss and ivy of a hamlet or solitary house. Where I had seen a moment ago only the crag that was an eagle's watch-tower stood a castle upon a hill. The cliff that was never left silent by the falcons or their quarry was pierced by windows from which girls once looked out and listened for the singing of lovers returning to their pleasure palaces. The beacon rock over the sea, circled by white gulls, was once a farmhouse, with massy chimneys, with barns and stalls of ponderous stone. And each island had its own peaceful high halls, white and many-windowed, its homely farm or clustering

village, its huge vaunt of castellated declivities, its sea sand littered by domes, pillars, and pinnacles among the dark weed and pale foam. Of these things only the winds and I were left to make inventory, to spell out the epitaph, to tell over the solemnity, the shame, the pride, the tenderness, the universal calamity. Wherever my vision swept were forsaken habitations, cities, villages, solitary courts—and always seen through the mist, or the rods of the rain, so that they appeared to be under water—in the fastnesses of those islands and on the shores of those seas round about, between rock spires oozing with rain or salt foam, or deep among the everlasting drip and hiss of forests upon the mountains, or along hillsides seamed with uncounted cataracts that swayed in the wind. Grass spread over the pavement of chamber and courtyard like a prayer that had been answered, or the creeper climbed and nodded heavily in place of the smoke of hearth and oven; and the brightness of the flowers was such that the

stones and timbers seemed to cry out. In others, no spider, not even the web of the dead spider, had been spared by the rain and wind. In some, a hearth was known only by the nettles possessing it, and porch and tower only by the triumph of brier and ivy and convolvulus over and around.

It was at the furthest and one of the least of the islands that I looked with most care. It had been severed by earthquake or by a thousand storms from a much larger island close by. On the side nearest to that it rose sheer away from the white waves that gnashed and gnawed between the two. But on the other side it descended with a gradual staircase of lesser precipices, their brinks overhung by clouds of golden and of white flowers, down to the sea. Each ledge between one stair and the next was of smooth sward and almost level, and on most there was a cluster of rustling trees, half emerald and half silver in the windy rain. Upon that ledge which was midway between

the cloudy summit of the island and the grey and foam-laced sea, stood a house, clearly visible through a parting among the trees. It was not a large house; it was of a size sufficient for stateliness, and not too great to be possessed utterly and loved until death by a small group of children, of growing men and women and an old man. It had little windows high up for meditation and amplest prospect, ranges of great windows for music, feast, and dance, and below these again a portico divided by tall columns where the spirit of home mingled with and in some degree gave way to the spirit of the broad sky, the sea, and the wind that was lord of both. In and out of the portico and the great and the lesser windows, swallows were flying busily. In the trees at one side a cuckoo called and called to an echo somewhere among the walls. Then it was that I knew of a sudden, and not before, that behind all those windows there was not one to listen to the calling of the bird

and its echo, no heart to rejoice with it or to learn from it the unfathomableness of a grief. There was not one left. The cuckoo had come, and they had gone away. The rain and the wind, and not a lover's or mourner's ear, swallowed up the sweet cry.

As I sighed with listening to the bird that grey queen came near to me and asked :

"Why do you sigh ?"

And I answered :

"Because of that house and the cuckoo singing in the rain."

I now looked steadily at her and saw that she was beautiful. As the beauty of the red stag belongs to the moorland of the mountains, so hers belonged to the waste land of islands and seas : the very colour of her eyes and of her cloudy dress seemed to have been born of that land just as the seaweed is born of the sea. She spoke again, saying :

"But this is a fair land, so fair that sun and rain are contending for it."

"You speak of one land," I answered, "while I am thinking of another, a waste of grey land, of seas and islands, of seas encompassed with many rocks, of islands in the midst of shipless seas, and lastly one little island and that fair house where the cuckoo is singing in the rain among the trees."

"That," she said with pity in her voice, "is my land."

"And who," I asked, not looking at her but at the islands, "and who are you that seem to be a queen?"

"As you say, so it is. I am a queen."

"And your realm?"

"Is the Waste Lands, and the seas that keep them."

"Queen of the Waste Lands," said I, "where is your realm? How may it be reached and . . . "

"It is everywhere. You are in the midst of it. This is but one of its provinces."

"But the land where I now am is an imagination of my heart," said I, not to be

deceived, "and I am its king. You speak, holding something back. Where is your capital?"

"The capital of my realm is now here and now there among these islands. It is in your heart this day. Many times it has been in a poet's heart, but there is no heart where it has not been, either in sleep or in solitude, for a little while."

Very sweet was her voice, and as the plover's voice utters the nature of the marsh so hers uttered that of the Waste Lands, of the islands, their graves and desolate walls, and of the seas. I loved her, and thinking that she also might love me, I spoke again, saying:

"Since you have made your palace, O Queen, in this empty heart, make me, I beseech you, one of your company that I may serve you and dwell in your realm for ever and be, under you, one of the lords of the Waste Lands."

"You ask," she said, pitifully, "what is

impossible, as others have done before you, and will again. For I dwell alone and have no company among the living. Yet a little while and you shall have your will, though you cannot know it when the day comes. Farewell."

The word sundered me from her and from her realm, and left me discontented with the meadow and its green grass and golden flowers, and the white sheep under the wood, with May and its fulness, with life itself that had the Waste Lands among its many kingdoms.

PRINTED BY
TURNBULL AND SPEARS,
EDINBURGH