CLOUD CASTLE
AND OTHER PAPERS

BY EDWARD THOMAS

LIGHT AND TWILIGHT

REST AND UNREST

ROSE ACRE PAPERS

In "The Roadmender" Series
Fcap. 8vo., 3s. 6d. net each

BY W. H. HUDSON

THE PURPLE LAND

GREEN MANSIONS

A CRYSTAL AGE

EL OMBU

In "The Reader's Library"
Crown 8vo., 5s. net each

BIRDS AND MAN

In "The Crown Library"
Demy 8vo., 7s. 6d. net

A LITTLE BOY LOST

Square crown 8vo., 5s. net
Demy 4to., 21s. net

CLOUD CASTLE
AND OTHER PAPERS
BY EDWARD THOMAS

With a Foreword by W. H. HUDSON

LONDON: DUCKWORTH & CO.
3, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

First Published in 1922

Printed in Great Britain.

FOREWORD

[*A few days before his sudden death, Mr. W. H. Hudson undertook to write an Introduction for this collection of essays by the late Edward Thomas. This fragment was found among his papers after his death, and is now printed as being of interest to the admirers of both these authors.*]

THE writings of Edward Thomas are sufficiently well known to readers of recent literature, and much has been said in appreciation of his work, both prose and verse, by several of the leading critics of the time. As an admirer, I am pleased to find myself in such good company; but as a practically unlettered person this is all I can say on the subject. For me it is only to speak in this Foreword of Edward Thomas, the man, as I knew him, who was my friend and one of the most lovable beings I have ever known. It may be that our friendship was somewhat unusual, as there was a considerable difference in our respective ages, and we were poles apart in the circumstances of our lives. He, an Oxford graduate, and a literary man by profession; I, unschooled and unclassed, born and bred in a semi-barbarous district among the horsemen of the pampas. But there were two or perhaps

three things that drew us together: first, our feeling for nature, and, secondly, for poetry; and as his knowledge of poetic literature was so much profounder than mine, and his judgment so much more mature, I was glad to accept him as my guide in that extensive wilderness. I was not always a perfectly docile pupil, as he was intolerant of inferior verse, while I took a keen interest in the forgotten minor poets of the last century. This was often the subject of our conversation, and I had no objection to it. I think, too, or, rather, I should say I know it, that the chief reason of the bond uniting us was that we were both mystics in some degree. He was shy of exhibiting it, and either disguised it or attributed it to someone he meets and converses with in his rambles, as in "Cloud Castle," the first sketch in this collection of papers which he himself arranged for publication before leaving England. It is more manifest in his poetry, that being the medium through which a man can best reveal his soul. And I take it that all true poets are in some degree mystic, that what we call inspiration in the poet, without which his work can scarcely be poetic, is mysticism.

* * * * *

CONTENTS

[*The papers entitled "Aunt Ann's Cottage" and "Morgan" originally appeared as part of the author's story "The Happy-go-Lucky Morgans." They were subsequently revised by him and marked for inclusion in the present volume.*]

CLOUD CASTLE

I

CLOUD CASTLE

All the life of the summer day became silent after sundown; the earth was dark and very still as with a great thought; the sky was as a pale window through which men and angels looked at one another without a word. The two friends were now silently walking together towards a house in the west, whose walls and lights they now began to expect at any moment in the distance. But instead of the abrupt shaggy hill overshadowing the house, usually a mammoth figure in the sky of evening, they saw a hill many times huger and more precipitous rising halfway up the heavens. It seemed a mountain forest, craggy and so black that in its flanks might have been carved the caverns from which night now emerged so superbly, and to which it would retreat at sunrise and nurse itself against the evening and the next summons. Round upon round it rose

up, nodding but secure, until its summit overhung the rocky base and on this ledge was the likeness of a wall and turret in ruins. Such a castle it might have been as a child draws with its eyes out of nothing, when it reads for the first time of the Castle Perilous or Joyous Gard, set far above the farms and churches and factories of this world, as those knights and ladies are set above the earthly labourers and clerks and policemen and servant maids. And this mount, this mountain forest and overhanging brow, this incredibly romantic ruin upon the shelf of it, were built out of cloud in the violet western sky. In the folds of it, above its trees, and in a niche of the Castle at the crest, the stars came out.

The road gradually ascended, and often in the series of long rises and shorter falls, that vision in the west was for a little way shut out, and more and more the hill of earth and trees for which they were making increased upon the sky. But the castled forest of the mountainous dark cloud was fixed upon their brains and the men began to speak of it, at first in careless admiration mixed with talk of the weather, and then more meaningly. One said that such

notable efforts of Nature were ennobling, that they gave a religious uplifting to his thought, that we could no more do without them than without ceremonies on earth. In the presence of these heavenly ceremonies no mean act or thought was possible, and although the time had long passed away when it was irreligious to do certain things in the sight of the full moon, yet he was sure that such prohibitions were not superstitious but received a sanction that was above reason and acquired knowledge, in his own case and doubtless in others. His own work was the instructing of young men in a craft of which he was a master, and he trusted that his power to respond to these things in a way helped to justify a position which had something of a priestly character for him. He cleared his throat nervously, and with some shame, after so pompous a confession.

"You ask me what I think about it," said the other, "but it is so very definite that I expect you will put it down to my own irresponsible fancy. When I see these things I flush and shiver, as I have done ever since I can remember, at contact with beauty in human beings, or Art, or Nature, or with heroic conduct,

and then forthwith I begin to perform some imaginary act which they inspire: for example, I have just ridden at the end of a long day over endless hills and arrived at nightfall under a granite precipice so steep and huge that it blackened half the sky, and at its edge, high as the moon, was a battlemented and bannered tower. I tethered my horse to an elder that grew out of the cliff, the only tree in that barren land, unlaced my helmet and threw it with my lance among the nettles, and, not without my sword, began to climb. On my way, I passed several nests of falcons on ledges where I stayed for breath, and sometimes the Castle was hidden and so was the moon, and when I could see anything but my own hands and the juts of the granite in my grasp, it was only the swelling round tower and the moon and the banner that now and then blotted out the moon in its fluttering. I reached an eagle's nest, and there I fell asleep, and when I began to climb again the moon was behind me and very low, and all the cliff was bathed in light and I seemed to hang like a carven imp on a sublime cathedral wall among the incense. At last I swung myself to where I could walk on

the turf among the yellow rock-rose flowers of the narrow ledge which no foot had trodden, between the Castle wall and the brink of the precipice. I peered and listened at the windows where the bowmen should have been, but I saw and I heard nothing. I raised my sword to strike against the gate, but without a blow it opened wide and admitted me to a chamber whose far sides were invisible, and whose roof was the star-sown sky, and then along corridors and up staircases and through dark chamber after chamber, with doors ajar, or, obedient to the clamour of my sword, I went eagerly forward, and round about and back upon my steps again and ever upward until I came near to a chamber which I knew contained what I sought, though what that was I knew not as yet. The room was lighted, as I could see beneath its closed door. Unlike the other doors this was latched and small, and as I raised my hand to open it, my fingers knew the smooth latch and my feet the threshold and my nostrils the fragrance and my eyes the fire that burned on the hearth. The setting moon passed through an open casement and lit up a little room, with an old table piano at one side and a table with

a bowl of flowers at the other, and between the two by the fire a boy, standing with his back towards me. I could see only his short black hair, red neck, blue jersey, and brown bare legs, but the poise I knew at once was that of a boy whom I had not seen since I also was ten years old. Thirty years ago, I promised to go with him to rob a kestrel's nest, but the day appointed came and I did not go, I cannot remember why. I never saw him again till now. He seemed to be crying, and I thought that it was because I had disappointed him. And now I understood that it was no use. I was sorry, and at first eager to ease myself with the bitter happiness of telling him so, but I did not move. He would not know me in my absurd developments, my beard, my sword, and all the rest. I hoped that perhaps his tears were sweet by this time, and that he was crying more for luxury than sadness, and I started most silently to go out when he also moved and said, 'You have come at last, let us go.' I did not see his face as he spoke, and before I could turn and look at him—your question, Oliver, took away both the room and the dream. Now I can see the lights of Gordon's

house. I shall ask him if he remembers Llewelyn—that little boy in the jersey. All those years I had forgotten him, but perhaps Gordon knows something about him. I wonder is he alive. Somehow, when I recall him, I cannot believe that he ever grew up; he was strong as a mountain pony and rash. Something—I cannot explain; only I cannot picture the man however much I try, it is as if his had been a face and figure not destined to turn into a man's, that is all. After all, I don't think I will ask either. . . ."

(1912.)

AUNT ANN'S COTTAGE

II

AUNT ANN'S COTTAGE

Two of us were walking together and talking nearly all the time, just as things occurred to our minds which were at rest in beautiful weather.

"Since we passed that white house behind the cedars," I laughed, "we have wandered from Gwithavon, the pure British name of a river in Essex, to a fishmonger's advertisement in the Battersea Park Road. Such are the operations of the majestic intellect. What do you think? Do you suppose the cavemen were very different, except that they can seldom have troubled about philology and would probably have eaten their philologers, and they did without fishmongers because fish were caught to eat and not to sell?"

"Well?" said Jones. "I daresay what we have in common with the cavemen is what most helps us to go on living except in so far

as we are fishmongers and philologers. Scratch a philologer and you will find a sort of caveman."

"Yes: but isn't it a little disconcerting to think that two men who have been to one of our ancient universities should zigzag in this fashion? I think that to prove our self-respect we ought to go soberly back on our footsteps and see what sort of a pattern we made while we were in charge of the cavemen's god."

"All right; but let it be simply for fun. It is a game I am very well used to. When we were children, my brother and I used to be sent to chapel to represent our parents who got up too late. After dinner we were put into a room to write down the main points of the sermon. My young brother who was destined, as you now know, to be an atheist and a statistician, could do this perfectly well, and I could copy from him by right of primogeniture. For I, on the other hand, never heard more than a sentence at a time, and for that matter if I go to a public meeting nowadays to please a lady I never hear more than that. The difference is that now I am bored and impatient with myself and the lady for putting me into a foolish position, whereas nothing was more

delightful than the half hour during which my brother listened to the sermon and I went wool-gathering. . . . I don't know who the original wool-gatherers were, but I always think they must have been uncommercial men whose task it was to wander over the mountains and be beforehand with the nesting birds, gathering from rock and thorn the locks of wool left by the sheep, a task that must take them into many a wild new place without overburdening them with wool or profit or applause at the end of the day. . . . While my brother was writing out the skeleton sermon, I used to wander backward over the windings of my chapel wool-gathering and of course strike out again here and there to right or left after more wool and more thorn and rock.

" The preacher was a mild, tall man, with a mane of curling black hair, clean shaven, long white face, thin exquisitely formed lips, and a rich voice that murmured in a quiet musing manner that enchanted me so much that I was soon in a state of half dream. The light was dim as with gold dust. It was warm. The people around were soporific, too: I imagined them to be asleep and I alone awake, and my

first steps had something of the thrill one feels in stealing out of a silent house at dawn. I listened to the preacher's voice and fixed my half-closed eyes on the ash-tree just outside one of the windows on the south side. As a rule the text alone was a sufficient portal to my wanderings. Alas! of all of them I can recall only one, and that because at the end of the sermon the preacher was seized with a fit of sneezing and I felt a slight pang because I finished my ramble at this painful moment. It was not at all an extraordinary wool-gathering, though.

"The text was the three verses in the first chapter of Genesis that describe the work of creation on the fifth day. In that musing way, as if he were oblivious of all but his ideas, which made me really fond of him, the preacher murmured: 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.'

"That was enough. For me it was all the sermon. I saw at once a coast of red crags and a black sea that was white far below me where the waves got lost in the long corridors between the crags. The moon, newly formed to rule

the night, stood full and large and white at the top of the arch of the sky that was black as the sea and without a cloud. And out of the waters were rising by twos and threes, but sometimes in multitudes like a cloud, the birds who were to fly in the open firmament of heaven. Sea birds with long white wings spread wide emerged singly out of the black, and paused on the surface and let their wings rise up like the sides of a lyre and then skimming low this way and that rose up in circles at last and screamed around the moon. Several had only risen a little way when they fell back into the sea and vanished, and these I supposed were destined to be deprived by the divine purpose of their wings and to become fish. Eagles as red as the encircling crags came up also, but they were always solitary and they ascended as upon a whirlwind in one or two long spirals, and blackening the moon for a moment they disappeared. The little birds that sing were usually born in cloudlets, white and yellow and dappled and blue, and, after hovering uncertainly at no great height, made for the crags, where they perched above the white foam and twittered in concert or, straying apart, sang shrill or soft

and low or in stormy luxuriance after their own kind. And ever and anon the flocks of those who had soared now floated downward across the moon and went over my head with necks outstretched and crying towards the mountains and moors and pools or sloped still lower and alighted and sailed on the waters, where they screamed each time the black surface yawned at a new birth of white or many-coloured wings. Very soon the sea was chequered from shore to horizon with birds, and the sky was heaving continually with others, so that the moon could be seen either not at all or in slits and wedges, and the crags were covered, as if with moss and leaves, with birds, chiefly those that sing, and they mingled their voices as if in a dawn of May.

"At a word from the preacher creeping in upon me, I forgot about the fifth day of the Creation, but not about the birds, and as it was then February, I thought chiefly about their nests and eggs. I went over in my mind the different kinds I had taken the year before. They were all in one long box procured from the village shop where it used to hold bottles of cheapest scent. I had not troubled to arrange

them, and in the chapel I saw the confusion of the moorhen's and coot's big freckled eggs, and between these, often in double layers, the blue and the white and the olive, the spotted, the blotched and the scrawled eggs. For a minute, I forgot the eggs by thinking of a poem I had begun to copy out and had laid away with the eggs. It was the first poem I had ever read for my own pleasure several times, and I had begun to copy it in my best handwriting, the capitals in red ink. I had got as far as 'Some mute inglorious Milton here may . . .' I tried to repeat the verses but could not, and so I returned to the eggs. I thought of the April past and the April to come, when I should once more butt my way through thickets of perpendicular and stiff and bristling stems, through brier and thorn and bramble in the double hedges; I would find the thrushes' nests in a certain oak and blackthorn copse where the birds used hardly anything but moss, and you could see them far away among the dark branches which seldom had many leaves but were furred over with lichens. I would go to all those little ponds shadowed by hazels close to the farms, where there was likely to be a solitary moorhen's home,

and up into the pollard willow which used to have four starling's eggs at the bottom of a long narrow pocket. In all those spring days I had no aim but finding nests, and if I was not scrambling in a wood I walked with my head lifted up to the trees or turned aside to the hedges or bent down to the grass and undergrowth. I was not in the least curious about the eggs, or any question of numbers or variation in size, shape, or colour. Sun, rain, wind, deep mud, water over the boots and knees, scratches to arms and legs and face, dust in the eyes, fear of gamekeepers and farmers, excitement, dizziness, weariness, all were expressed by the plain or marked eggs in the scent box; they were all I had and I valued them in the same way and for the same reason as the athlete valued the parsley crown. I recalled the winning of this one and that, repenting sometimes that I had taken more than I should have done from the same nest, sometimes that I had not taken as many as would have been excusable: also, I blushed with annoyance because I had never revisited certain nests which were unfinished or empty when I discovered them—what a pity, perhaps the ploughboy robbed them completely. How

careless the country boys were, putting them in their hats and forgetting all about them, often breaking them wantonly. I envied them their opportunities and despised them for taking them as a matter of course.

"I thought of the flowers I trampled over and the smell and the taste of the cowslips and primroses and various leaves and the young brier stems chewed and spat out again as I walked. I began to count up the Sundays that must go before there would be any chance of finding rooks' eggs. And that reminded me of the rookery in the half-dozen elms of a farmhouse home-field close by the best fishing place of all. The arrow-headed reeds grew in thick beds here and there and the water looked extraordinarily mysterious just this side of them, as if it might contain fabulous fish. Only last season I had left my line out there while I slipped through the neighbouring hedge to look for a reed-bunting's nest, and when I returned I had to pull in an empty line which the monster had gnawed through and escaped with hooks and bait. It was just there between the beds of arrow-head and that immense water-dock on the brink: I vowed to try again. Everybody had seen the

monster or at least the swirl he made as he struck out into the deeps at a passing tread. 'As long as my arm, I daresay,' said the carter, and cracked his whip emphatically, with a suggestion that the fish was not to be caught by me. Well, we shall see.

"As usual, the idea of fishing was connected with my Aunt Ann. There was none worth speaking of unless we stayed with her in our holidays. I often saw persons fishing, who certainly did not stay with her and probably would not have known of her if she was mentioned, but they never caught anything. The way their floats swam had not the right look. Now, I could have enjoyed fishing by those arrow-heads without a bait, so fishy did it look, especially on Sundays when no fishing was allowed: it was unbearable to see that look and have no rod or line."

"Yes," I interrupted, "that fascinating look is quite indescribable, and I can quite understand how

Simple Simon went a-fishing
For to catch a whale,
But all the water he had got
Was in his mother's pail.

I have seen that look in tiny ponds and fished in one simply on the strength of it and against popular advice, but gave it up because I caught newts continually and nothing else. Do you know, when I lifted them up out of that strange water I shuddered and felt as if I were being punished by a spirit of the pond?"

"I have the same feeling about eels and never fish a second time where I have caught one: their twisting is utterly abandoned and unmingled protest and agony, and I feel that if men did not think even so, would they writhe in pain or grief.

"To my wool-gathering. In the chapel I could see that shadowed water by the reeds and the float in the midst. In fact, I always could see that picture in my mind. I liked the water best when it was quite smooth; the mystery was greater, and I used to think I caught more fish out of it in that state. I hoped it would be a still summer and very warm. It was nearly three-quarters of a year since I was there by the rookery meadow last—eight months since I last tasted my aunt's doughy cake! I could see her making it, first stoning the raisins, while the dough was rising in a pan by

the fire; when she thought I was not looking she stoned them with her teeth, but I did not mind, and now I come to think of it they were very white teeth, so that I can't think why no man ever married her for them alone. I suppose she was too busy, making cakes and wiping the dough off her fingers, and wondering if we had got drowned in the river, to think about lovers. I am glad no man did marry her; I mean, I was glad then. For she would probably have given up making doughy cakes full of raisins and spice if she had married. She existed for that and for supplying us with lamb and mint sauce and rhubarb tart with cream when we came in from bird's-nesting. How dull it must be for her, thought I in the chapel, all alone there and the fishing over and no birds laying yet, no nephews and, therefore, I supposed, no doughy cakes, for she could not be so greedy as to make them only for herself. She lived all alone in a little cottage in a row at the edge of a village. Hers was an end house. The rest were very neat, but hers was hidden by ivy which grew through the walls, up between the flagstones of the floor, and flapped in at the windows; it grew also over the panes, and was

so dense that the mice ran up and down it, and you could see their pale silky bellies as they crossed the glass, if they did not look in over the sill and enter. The ivy was full of sparrows' nests, and it made the neighbours angry that she would not have them pulled out. We never thought of touching these nests, not if the neighbours' sons, who were acquaintances, suggested it. I wished I lived there always, always in a house covered with ivy, and kept by an aunt who baked and fried for you and tied up your cuts, and would clean half-a-hundred perchlings without a murmur, though at the end she had half covered her face and the windows with the flying scales. 'Why don't you catch two or three really big ones?' she said, sighing for weariness, but still smiling at us, and putting on her crafty-looking spectacles. 'Whew! if we could!' we said to one another: it seemed possible as we stood there, for she was a wonderful woman, and the house wonderful too—no anger, no sorrow, no fret, such a large fireplace, everything different from London and altogether better. The ticking of her three clocks was delicious, especially early in the morning as you lay awake, or when you got home tired, and it

was twilight and no lamps. Everything had been like that in the house 'ever so long,' you could not tell how long; it was natural, like the trees; it was never stale; you never came down in the morning and felt you had done the same yesterday and would do the same to-morrow, as if each day was like a new badly-written line in a copy-book, with the same senseless, dismal words at the head of the page. Why couldn't we always live there? There was no chapel for us. Sunday was not the day of grim dulness when everybody was set free from work, only to show that he or she did not know what to do or not to do; if they had been chained slaves, they could not have been stiffer or more grim.

"In my fancy these adult people were a different race: I had no thought that I should become like that, and I laughed without a pang. How different my aunt with her face serene, kind, notwithstanding that she was bustling about all day and had trodden down her heels and let her hair break out into horns and wisps. I thought of the race of women and girls. I thought (with a little pity) they were very much nicer than men, thought more of you and were kinder. I would rather be a man, I mused, and yet I

was sure women were better. I would not give up my right to be a man some day, but for the present there was no comparison between the two in my affections; there was not a man I should have missed. Odd things the women did, though. They always wore gloves when they went out, for example. Now, if I put on gloves, it was almost as bad as putting a handkerchief over my eyes, or cotton-wool in my ears. They picked flowers with gloved hands. Certainly they had their weaknesses. But think of the different ways of giving an apple. A man caused it to pass into your hands in a way that made it annoying to give thanks. A woman gave herself with it, and it was as if the apple was part of her, and you took it away and ate it, sitting alone very peacefully and thinking of nothing. A boy threw it at you as if he wanted to knock your teeth out, and, of course, you threw it back at him again with the same intent. A girl gave it so that you wanted to give it back, if you were not somehow afraid. I thought of three girls who lived near my aunt, and would do anything I wanted, as if it was not I but they who wanted it. Perhaps it was. Perhaps they wanted

nothing except to give. Well, and that was rather stupid, too.

"There the preacher's voice must have half released me from the spell, and I turned to a dozen things, as what o'clock it was, whether one of my pigeons would have laid its second egg when I got home, and how many I should have altogether in a year's time, whether Monday's post would bring a letter from a friend who was in Kent, going about the woods with a game-keeper who gave him squirrels, stoats, jays, magpies, an owl, and once a woodcock to skin. I recalled the sweet smell of the squirrels; it was abominable to kill them, but I liked skinning them. I went over the increasing row of books on my shelf. First came 'The Compleat Angler,' the thought of which gave me a brief entry into an indefinite alluring world of men rising early in the mornings and catching many fish, and talking to milkmaids who had sung songs with beautiful voices, and using strange baits. I wish I could say now how that book (a very poor edition) shut up between its gilded covers a different, embalmed, enchanted life without any care, from which life I emerged with the words 'as wholesome as a pearch of Rhine,'

which recalled actual perch swimming in clear water in the green streets of the ponds on sunny days. Then there were Scott's poems, a book which then only meant a vision of armed men rising suddenly out of heather and rocks on a mountain side, and a fierce, plaided chief exclaiming:

And, Saxon, I am Rhoderick Dhu.

Next 'Robinson Crusoe,' 'Grimm's Fairy Tales,' 'The Iliad,' and a mass of almost babyish books, tattered and now untouched, but strictly preserved; and lastly, 'The Adventures of King Arthur and the Round Table.' As I reached this book, 'Inexorable man,' I heard the lady of the lake say to Merlin, 'thy powers are resistless'; moonlit waters overhung by mountains and castles on their crags, boats with a dark, mysterious freight; knights trampling and glittering; sorceries, battles, dragons, kings and maidens, stormed or flitted through my mind, some only as words and phrases learnt by heart, some as pictures. It was a delicious but shadowy entertainment with an indefinable quality of remoteness tinged by the pale moonshine and

the cold lake that finally suggested the reward and solid comfort of tea at my aunt's house, and thick slices, 'cut ugly,' of her doughy cake.

"Processions of living people, these also partly in words and partly in pictures, passed through my mind. They were faces peering above bundles of clothes, but some crying out for clearer recognition by means of tones of voice, decided and often repeated expressions of all the features acting together, and producing the effect which was their soul. They came up to me for judgment. Most I sent quickly away; others I stopped and, like a schoolmaster, compelled them to recite some chance word or deed of theirs tarrying in my memory. On they came, and I became conscious of the numbers at that moment surrounding me in the chapel seat. I looked at them and grew afraid of their silent solitude, and tried to keep myself distinct yet felt myself melting into the mass when the preacher quoted the words:

> He liveth best who loveth best
> All creatures great and small.

What he went on to say was lost. I looked at the people to see what they would do. The

preacher said the words majestically, and I supposed them to be true. I was sorry for those squirrels which the gamekeeper shot, but I wanted to have their skins: with all these others I thought it must be different. They had listened to the sermon, they came to listen, and probably to learn and follow the true. I was expecting them to get up and go out, and show that they loved something very small, like an ant or fly. At that moment a small moth alighted on my knee, and I watched it creep and flutter up my leg to my shoulder. I did not feel that I loved it. The moth flew on to the upper part of a man's sleeve in front of me. He scarcely moved his head, but I knew he had seen the flight; he lifted his hand slowly, dropped it swiftly on the moth, whose scales powdered his coat, and then became rigid again. Evidently the words were not believed to be true. Why did poets say so many things that people seemed to like and did not believe, I wondered? But what if they were true, after all? I resolved to go on with my copying of Gray's 'Elegy' that very afternoon, also not to collect moths. It entered my head that my aunt was merciless to mice; it was a grave objection, for she was

to me the corner-stone of the universe. Here the sermon ended with a sneeze. I was very sorry for the preacher, but I fear I did not love him. As to moths, I never became a collector."

"What a very consistent wool-gathering," said I; "I don't suppose the sermon was more so. And did you notice it was all pictorial? I'll be bound you don't go wool-gathering in that fashion now, and if the child is so much superior to us, how much more the caveman may have been!"

"Except that I don't believe any caveman ever had such an aunt as mine. There can have been no superfluous good women in those days, born simply to delight their sisters' and brothers' boys."

"And now let us set out for Gwithavon!"

(1913.)

THE SHIP OF SWALLOWS

III

THE SHIP OF SWALLOWS

SOMEONE was talking in very glowing words about a sunrise, and this set the artist raging:

"Hark at that gentleman talking about a sunrise—in October, too—and his only one, I warrant! Half our modern verses and prose for that matter would never have been written if an unwonted early rising or late sitting had not set the writer's nerves on edge, and made their nasty vapours 'stream in the firmament.' This Nature poetry-stuff is the jejune enthusiasm of townsmen who are ashamed to confess that they are such. It dates from the turning of England into a town with a green backyard. When men lived in the fields and rose early, they cared too much for these things to think to please one another by writing impressively about them. Who of these men, or of outdoor men to-day, can stomach fellows like that arum-lily talking, and the poet he quotes, who at least

has the wisdom to watch his dawns from a comfortable bed ?"

The speaker was a little wiry man, with blue eyes in a brown tangly face like speedwells in a furze bush, whose fondness for being about at all hours of the day and night was extreme enough to explain the low repute of his canvases.

" But you go too far the other way," said a mild, pale man with spectacles, whose body was bent in a slight curve by his large head. " The dawn has always been the same. . . ."

" I deny that," said the youngest. " The dawn changes as men change. Caractacus would not recognize a dawn of Turner's, and I should only be interested as a person with an historic sense in the kind of dawn that lighted Caractacus to his spear and his sword."

" The dawn," continued the mild, pale man, " has always been the same, and clothes the passing of time for us, in spite of our clocks, as for those who had none, with beauty and awe. It will be some years before a man ceases to feel himself a member of no mortal or only mundane commonwealth, when he sees with what ceremony the day begins. At this hour Nature

wears the buskin, and justifies all poetry and pride of man. I see chiefly sunsets myself. It does not suit me to rise for sunrises in town when I am working, or in the country when I am trying not to work. Still, I have seen them. My father farmed two hundred and fifty acres in Kent, milked forty cows, and grew enough hops to make half a hundred children happy for a week in picking them. . . . No, well, I don't pretend to be a countryman, except while I am rheumaticky."

The artist was smiling good-naturedly now. He liked the stiffly-curved man in spite of a certain stateliness. The two took a turn round the garden together. The artist was lured so far as to talk about dawns simply for what weather they foretold. The other went on:

"The beauty of a dawn in fair weather does me good. I believe it liberalises my feelings for the rest of the day. In spite of ill health I think I may say I have no morbidity. I have heard women speak as if they felt just what I feel, and they have less morbidity and less poetry than men. But I remember one in particular, chiefly because of the extraordinary unsought image by which it is now represented

in my mind. You might do a painting of it, though it is more suitable for a symbolist.

"We lost our second child when she was only a year old. She died in the afternoon, in the middle of a shower that suddenly dashed down upon the heat of July. Soon after midnight my wife at last fell asleep. I could not sleep. So I put on my clothes and read a book, a story or two of very thin stuff as it seemed to me, and I have never cared for that author since. I put down the book and went out. Very soon I left the streets and walked with the edge of the common on one side, and on the other the gardens of some old-fashioned houses now demolished. There had been no more rain, and there was no wind. There was no sky visible. The air thickened into a downy grey, motionless, and without either stars or forms of cloud. A clock tinkled three. There was just a pallor in the darkness. The dawn was thinly and evenly poured into every inch of air between earth and sky. The night was dying, but instead of day replacing it, a neutral, soft grey was succeeding that might be the end and dissolution of all; as if all things were melted down in this cup of grey air; and this idea was

at the time not unpleasant. Some big trees overhung a little cottage at one side of my path. All their million leaves were still.

"I was tired, and I leaned upon the gate. A thrush began to sing very clear. On the other side of the common another sang, and a third and perhaps a fourth farther away. There were not so many as in May, yet enough to mingle into a strange pleasing little medley. I knew that if I could have travelled at that hour from there to my father's house, there would be thrushes all the way, in gardens, in roadside trees, in hedges and thickets.

"I did not see them fly up, but presently two swallows were twittering on the chimney of the cottage. It was not the musical, happy twitter of sunlight, but lower and perhaps timid: they did not yet dare to launch themselves into the air for the day's flight. It was sound, nevertheless, that prevented me from thinking of anything else—I was very tired, you must remember. I did not notice the thrushes any longer whilst listening to this low twitter. It was as soft and pallid as the light, and increased with it in quality very slowly. I was now leaning back and looking at nothing but the

whitening grey sky. I do not think I closed my eyes, but I found myself looking up at the bows of a huge, dark ship, very high, and overhanging me, and gleaming as if with dew. It rose up shadowy, and I could not see the bulwarks. I cannot tell how I knew that it was a ship, though I could see portions of a figure-head, a woman's breast and throat and head leaning forward. But it was a ship, and it was just setting out on a voyage, as it seemed to me, of peculiar solemnity and significance, like that of Columbus or St. Brendan or Jason; even the sea before it—though it stood upon the grassy land—was infinite and mysterious. Clinging about the ship's sides were many swallows, hardly visible against the gleaming black timber, but sharply outlined upon the white and gold of the figure-head. They were twittering low with clustering, sweet notes. There was awe at the sea and the solemn voyage in the sound of their little voices. There was expectation also, and a sort of blind, gentle hope. And I knew that I was to go on board of that ship soon, and to share in the mystery and the hope. When I opened my eyes the light was beautiful, though the sun was not up in the

gilt sky. The swallows were still twittering, but they were flying now backwards and forwards over the garden and along the roadway. The feeling of expectation and hope remained, and a subdued cheerfulness that must have had something to do with the tranquillity of those next few days with all their gloom. . . ."

MORGAN

IV

MORGAN

The storm is over; Morgan is dead. Once more we can hear the brook's noise, which was obliterated all night by the storm and by our thoughts. The air is clear and gentle in the forest and all but still, after the night of wind and of death. High up in the drifting rose of dawn the multitudes of tall, slender trees are swaying their tips, as if stirred rather by memory of the tempest. They make no sound with the trembling of their slender length: some will never sound any more, for they lie motionless and prone in the underwood, or hang slanting among neighbour branches where they fell in last night's storm, and the mice may nibble at crests that once wavered among the stars. The path is strewn with broken branches and innumerable twigs.

The silence is so great that we can hear, by enchantment of the ears, the storm that passed

away with night. The tragic repose of ruin is unbroken. One robin sings, and calls up the roars and tumults that had had to cease utterly before his small voice could gain this power of peculiar sweetness and awe, and make itself heard.

The mountains and sky, beautiful as they are, are more beautiful because a cloak of terror has been lifted from them and left them free to the dark and silver, and now rosy, dawn. The masses of the battlemented mountains are still heavy and sombre, but their ridges bite sharply into the sky, and the uttermost peaks are born again. They are dark with shadows of clouds of a most lustrous whiteness that hang, round above round, like a white forest, very far off, in the country of the sun, and the edges of the rounds are gilded; seen out of the clear gloom of the wood, this country is as a place to which a man might wholly and vainly desire to go, knowing that he would be at rest only there. In the valley between this forest and the mountains the frost is rosy with the roses of the zenith.

As we listen, walking the ledge between precipice and precipice in the forest, the silence

seems to murmur of the departed tempest like a sea-shell, and we also remember again the sound of the dark hills convulsed with a hollow roaring as of an endless explosion.

Trees were caught up and shaken in the furious air like grasses; branches were stricken and struck back, were ground and beaten together and broken. The sound of one twig was drowned by that of myriads; the sound of one tree by that of leagues; and all were mingled with the sound of the struggle in the high spaces of the air. Between earth and sky there was nothing but sound and darkness plunging confused. Outside the window branches were brandished wildly, and their anger was the more terrible because the voice of it could not be heard or distinguished amidst the universal voice. The sky itself seemed to aid the roar. It was dark with the darkness of black water, and the planets raced over it among floes of white cloud; dark, menacing clouds flitted on messages of darkness across the white. We looked out from the death-room, having turned away from the helpless, tranquil bed and the still wife, and saw the forest surging under the wild moon, but it was strange and no longer to be recognized

while the earth was heaving and be-nightmared by the storm. Yes, the forest is still under the awe of that hour. That is why its clearness is so solemn, its silence so pregnant, its gentleness so sublime. But not for that only. It is fresh after the sick room, calm after the storm and after the vain conflict with death, sad because every thought in it leads to death, and made majestic by the character of the life that has ended and never saw this dawn. It is as if his soul had bereaved the forest also. The robin's song is poured into the silence and shivers and is chilled by falling into the dark cave of death, as a brooklet falls over a cliff into a sunless sea.

The blue smoke rises straight up as if nothing had happened from the house of death, over there among the white fields. As if nothing had happened! But we have been walking here an hour, and have come to see even in that smoke a significant tranquillity as of a beacon or sacrifice. It comes from the room where the wife sits and looks at the white face peering through its black hair like seaweed, and still speaking of the old ecstasy, solitude, and irony that it had in life. A strange life—of which

the woman who shared without breaking his solitude can tell nothing, and would tell nothing if she could: for she wishes only to persuade us that, in spite of his extraordinary life, he was a good man and very good to her. She has become as silent as he is and as he was. Nevertheless, they say that twenty years ago, when she began to live with him on the mountain, she was a happy, gay woman, the best singer and dancer in the village, and had the most lovers, while now her wholly black, small Silurian eyes have turned inwards and have taught her lips their mystery and Morgan's, have taught also that animal softness to her steps and all her motions. It would not be surprising were she to strive to be buried along with him, if only she had not lost so much of herself in losing him. She guards him like a hound and like a spirit. She shadowed and clung to the doctor and the minister, so that their offices were a mockery, yet they dared not attempt to keep her away. Perhaps she will go back to his Tower and live there alone.

If this winding path between two of the forest precipices be followed to that bank where the eastern sun now falls upon the dazzle of a

myriad celandines, the top of Morgan's Tower, or Folly, can be seen against a wedge of sky among the hills; there are no trees at that height, and it is distinct and unmistakable. It is a slender, square tower containing three rooms one above the other, and above these an uncovered look-out. If she returns there she will be able to visit the upper room and the look-out for the first time.

Morgan built the Tower before he was thirty, and he dwelt there nearly thirty years; whether out of cruel constancy to his first resolution, no one knows; but once he had gone there he never left it, except to die in the great house where he was born, and where he chiefly lived, until the building of the Tower. For a time he tried to live entirely in London, devoting himself and his riches to social reform, which seemed the only way to gain some tranquillity and save himself from too often remembering that he was in hell. He drew back because he could not understand the town life, and it was absurd to reform what he could not understand. At first, and for several years, the sight of the men and women and children living a pure and simple town life allowed him no rest. It was easy to

provide them with things which seemed to him to be good for them. But it was not easy, it was in the end not possible, to put away the thought that his motive was a false one, and yet one for which he could see no practical alternative. He was trying to alter the conditions of other men's lives because he could not have endured them himself, because it would have been unpleasant to him to be like them in their hideous pleasure, hideous suffering, hideous indifference. He saw in this attitude a modern Pharisaism, whose followers desired not merely to be unlike others, but to make others like themselves. It was due to lack of imagination, he thought, of imagination which would enable the looker-on to see their lives as compared with their conscious or unconscious ideals. Did they, for example, fall farther short from their ideals than he from his ? He had not the imagination to see, but he thought perhaps not; and he did see that, lacking as their life might be in antique beauty and power, it yet had in it a profound unconsciousness and dark strength which might some day bring forth beauty—might even now be beautiful to simple and true eyes—and had already given them a fitness to

their place, such as he himself was far from having reached. He never hesitated when it was food and warmth that were lacking, but beyond supplying those needs he could never feel sure that he was not fancifully interfering with a force which he did not understand and could not overestimate. So leaving all save a little of his money to be used for giving food and warmth to the hungry and the cold, he escaped from the sublime unintelligible scene. He went up into the Tower, that he had built upon a rock in his own mountains, to think about life before he began to live. Up there he hoped to learn why it was that sometimes, in the London streets, beneath the new and the multitudinous there was a simple and pure beauty, beneath the turmoil a placidity, beneath the noise a silence which he longed to reach and to drink deeply and to perpetuate, but in vain. He desired to learn to see in human life, as we see in the life of bees, the unity which perhaps some higher order of living beings can easily see through the complexity that confuses us. He had set out to seek at first by means of science, but he found that science was only the modern method of looking at the world, possibly

a transitory method, and that too often it was an end and not a means. For a hundred years men had been reading science and experimenting, as they had been reading history, with the result that they knew—some science and some history. So he went up into his bright Tower.

From there he looked out at the huge, desolate heaves of the grey beacons. Their magnitude and pure form gave him hours of great calm. Here there was nothing human, gentle, disturbing, as in the vales. There was nothing but the hills and the silence that was God. The greater heights, set free from night and mist, looked as if straight from the hands of God, as if here He also delighted in pure form and magnitude that was worthy of His love; and the huge shadows moving slowly over the grey spaces of winter, the olive spaces of summer, were as His hand. While Morgan watched, the dream came, more and more often, of a paradise to be established upon the mountains when at last the sweet winds should blow across a clean world that knew not the taint of life any more than of death, and then his thought swept rejoicing through the high Gate of the Winds that cleft the hills far off, where a shadow ten

miles long slept across the peaks, but left the lower wild as yellow in the sunlight as corn. Following his thought he walked upward to that Gate of the Winds, to range the high spaces, sometimes to sleep there. Or he lay among the gorse—he could have lain on his back a thousand years hearing the cuckoo among the gorse and looking up at the blue sky above the mountains. Or in the rain and wind he sat against one of the rocks among the autumn bracken until the sheep surrounded him, half visible and shaggy in the mist, peering at him fearlessly as if they had not seen a man since the cairns were heaped on the summit; he sat on and on in the mystery, part of it but divining it not, and in the end went discontented away. The crags stared at him on the hill-top, where the dark spirits of the earth had crept out of their abysses into the day, and still clad in darkness looked grimly at him, at the sky, and the light. More and more he stayed in his Tower, since even in his own mountains, as in the cities of men, he was dismayed by numbers, by variety, by the grotesque, by the thousand gods demanding idolatry instead of the One whom he desired, Whose hand's shadow he had seen far off.

Looking on a May midnight at Algol rising out of the mountain, the awe and the glory of that first step into the broad heaven exalted him; a sound arose as of the whole of time making a music behind him, a music of something passing away to leave him alone in the silence, as if he also were stepping up into the blue air—always to stumble back. Or it was the moon rising. Then the sombre ranges to eastward seemed to be the edge of the earth, and as the globe ascended the world was emptied and grieved, having given birth to this mighty child; he was left alone, and the great white clouds sat round about upon the horizon and judged him. For days he would lie desolate and awake and dream and stir not. Once again he returned to London and saw the city pillared, above the shadowy abyss of the river, on columns of light; and it was less than one of his dreams. It was winter and he was resolved to work, and was crossing one of the bridges, full of purpose and thought, going against the tide of the crowd. But the beauty of the bridge and the water took hold of him. It was a morning with a low, yellow sky of fog. About the heads of the crowd swayed a few gulls, interlacing so

that they could not be counted, and they swayed like falling snow and screamed. They brought light on their long wings, as down below a great ship setting out slowly with misty masts brought light to the green and leaden river upon the foam at her bows. And ever about the determined careless faces of the men swayed the pale wings like wraiths of evil and good calling, and calling to ears which do not know that they hear. And they tempted his brain with the temptation of their beauty; he went to and fro to hear and see them until they slept and the crowd had flowed away. He thought that they had made ready his brain, and that on the mountains he would find fulness of beauty at last, and simplicity, so he went away and never returned. There, too, among the mountains was weariness, because he also was there.

But not always weariness. For was not the company of planet and star in the heavens the same as had bent over prophet and poet and philosopher? By day a scene unfolded, as when the first man spread forth his eyes and saw more than his soul knew. These things lifted up his heart, so that the voices of fear and doubt were not so much in that infinite silence as little rivers

in an unbounded plain. There were days when it seemed to him the sheer mountains were the creation of his lean, terrible thoughts, and he was glad, and the soft, wooded hills below and behind were the creation of the pampered luxurious thoughts he had left behind in the world of many men. It was thus, in the style of the mountains, he would have thought and spoken—but language, except to genius and simple men, was but a paraphrase, dissipating and dissolving the forms of passion and thought. Then, again, time lured him back out of eternity, and he believed that he longed to die, as he lay and watched the sky at sunset, inlaid with swart forest, and watched it with a dull eye and a cold heart.

So much was known or could be guessed from his talk. For in those early days of his retreat he was not silent to those who met him upon the mountains, nor did he turn aside so as not to encounter them. And much more was told in the legend that flourished about the strange truth, and at last entangled and stifled it, so that the legend was all, and no one cared about the man. He was said to have buried money somewhere in the caves of the hills. He

was said to worship a God who had never entered chapel or church. He was said to speak with raven and kite and curlew and fox. He was said to pray for the end of man and the world. He was called atheist, blasphemer, outlaw, madman, brute. But the last that was known of him was that one summer he used to come down night after night courting Angharad who became his wife. One of the most persistently reported of his solitary obsessions was the belief in a race who had kept themselves apart from the rest of men though found in many nations, perhaps in all. Some said the belief was from the Bible and that this was the race that grew up alongside the family of Cain, the guiltless "daughters of men" from whom the fratricide's children took their wives. These knew not the sin or the knowledge or the shame of Adam, Eve, and Cain—so he was said to believe—and neither had they any souls. They were a careless and godless race, knowing neither evil nor good. They had never been cast out of Eden. Some of the branches of this race had perished already by men's hands, such as the fairies, the nymphs, the fauns. Others had adopted for safety many of men's

ways, and had become moorland and mountain men, living at peace with their neighbours and yet not recognized as equals. They were even to be found in the towns. There the uncommon beauty of the women sometimes led to unions of violent happiness and of calamity, and now and then to the birth of a poet or musician or a woman who could abide neither with the strange race nor with the children of Adam. They were allowed to live and compelled to suffer for their power and beauty. Their happiness—it was considered by men to be something other than happiness, lighter, not earned or deserved, mere gaiety—was the cause of envy and hate, and it met with lust or with torture. They were feared, but more often despised, because they retained what was charming in the animal with the form of men, and because they lived as if time was not, and yet could not be persuaded to a belief in a future life. Up in his Tower, Morgan came to regard his father as one of these, the man who had forsaken his wife before the child was born, and left only a portrait behind. If only he could capture one of this race, thought Morgan, and make her his wife, he would be content.

And Angharad, the shy and bold and fierce and dark Angharad, whose black eyes radiated light and blackness together, was one of them. So he took her up to his Tower.

After that these things only were certainly known: that she was unhappy; that when she came down to the village for food she was silent, would never betray him or fail to return; and that he never came down, that he also was silent, that he looked like a wild man with unshorn hair. He was seen at all hours, always far off, on the high paths of the mountains. His hair was as black as when he was a boy. He was never known to have ailed, until one day, the wild wife knocked at the door of his birthplace, and asked for help to bring him where he might be tended as was necessary, since he would have no one but her in the Tower. And so he came and last night he died, having thanked the Earth for its strength and its beauty, for what it had given him and for what it might have given had he been wise, having prayed that his body might be dutiful to Earth in the grave and bound up more purely than it had been during his living days "in the bundle of life with the Lord my God." She has not

always been silent, but has cried aloud with a voice far wilder than the curlew's because she is left alone with the children of men. And that is why this gentle morning is so grave and so forlorn, and why Morgan's Folly stands up so greatly and notably in its blackness against this dawn.

(1913.)

HELEN

V

HELEN

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the chief inhabitants of Crowbit lands were squirrels, the chief crops hazel nuts and flints. To-day it is a forlorn declining old-new settlement, with the look of a wrecked suburb, and resembling a village only in that it has one idiot and one great house, every pane of every window in it broken by the stones of happy children. In another twenty-five years the old condition will probably be restored. It is the highest land on a high plateau and the plough has never been over it. The greater part is treeless, but the slopes bear copses of poor oaks and in the bottoms are families of ancient beeches and enough grass for many rabbits. One straight main road crosses it now as it has long done, but for some reason it is avoided, and in spite of an old man always bent over it the weeds and grass grow apace. The other roads are, and were, broad

green lanes deeply fringed with untended hazel and bracken and the purple and gold flowers that love to be among bracken. Even twenty-five years ago no tract of southern England was richer in green lanes almost without rut or footprint. Perhaps a gipsy came one day, but next day was not there. One farmhouse there was, and the only reason for that seemed to be to avoid the scandal of so large a district in this prosperous country being without one. Every year or two it was partly painted and the garden half weeded, lest the predestinate tenant should see it and pass by: once or twice there were tenants—not farmers, but a poor middle-class family with an indigent mother or sister, or children too young for school—for not more than six months. The great house was at the very edge of Crowbit, turning its back on the misty plateau, its face towards a better land of dairy and corn in comfortable proportions. It was a square grey house among oaks, dull and substantial, a perfect breeding-place for men about town, like the Salanders. They could not live there because the consumption of cigarettes and spirits which it enforced gave it a reputation for unhealthiness and costliness;

but they had been happy there as children and they liked to come down in the autumn for pheasants, in the summer for trout—not in their own land, which had not one flash of running water. The Salanders had some reason for expecting trouble: in fact, the only reason against it was that it had long been delayed. The only way out was work—and that was impossible—until one day a low, but amusing friend of George Salander offered another. The lord of the manor had just landed a game trout and held it in his hand with a sunny hard smile, saying in compliment "Jolly plucky little beggar," before putting his thumbnail deep into the spine of a creature which, he knew, had done its best to give him pleasure. At Johnson's proposal he smiled in the same way.

Within a year the plan was a success. The healthy situation and lovely scenery of Crowbit, the fitness for poultry and small fruit farms, and the convenience of a five-mile-distant railway station upon a branch line, were enthusiastically advertised by Johnson, the railway company, the Press, and in a quiet way, by Salander himself. The newcomers were old and middle-aged men who had saved a little

money in shops, young men at their first venture and men no longer young at their last. They enclosed parallelograms of an acre or half-an-acre with wire-netting; they planted trees which died; they dug up plots of innocent grass where forthwith exulted the hardiest and most offensive weeds; they erected low buildings of corrugated iron, white framed windows and doors and many lace curtains. The old farmhouse received a corrugated iron roof from ridge to eaves over its thatch and the name of "The Laurels"; and inside or outside of it could be heard a cheerful baritone voice singing "The Boys of the Old Brigade." Many lengths of the green lanes were furrowed hither and thither by heavy wheels, and the mud well mixed with broken glass, crockery and coloured paper. Gaps were torn in the hedges for gate-ways and to allow a view when the mist cleared. Everywhere, the sound of hammers on deal and corrugated iron. Chickens made paths in all directions. Faces of extreme cheerfulness or extreme anxiety went up and down riding bicycles or eagerly pushing them.

Salander had ready-money. He came down to see the place and told Johnson, "It is like a

damned circus, only it won't go away." He was genuinely enraged with Johnson.

Some of the people did, nevertheless, go away before long. Some who had hoped they would be isolated were wedged in a dense row: others found it lonely in a lane with no sound but their own chickens: some longed for the town, some for the country. But enough had been sold to overcome Salander's distaste; he was able to send his idle eldest son, Aylwin Salander, to a mining school, and later on to Canada.

Some of the invaders stayed. The Browns, for example, kept to their little red house, and in ten years' time they alone remained of the original settlers. The slope up to their front door and its white wooden steps was carefully mown and broken into beds of lilac and laburnum, roses, sunflowers and nasturtiums in their seasons. Of the half-dozen spruce trees only one had lived through the first summer, and this was the nearest to the house. It was absurdly near, as Mrs. Brown pointed out; it grew apace and its branches brushed the wall of the house. On the night when her first child was born, and on other nights she could then remember, she was tormented by this tree rasping the corrugated

iron in the rainy wind. " You devil," she said to it when first she stepped out with little Helen in her arms; but she let it remain, and it continued to flourish while its companions rotted very slowly in the ground. Helen flourished like the tree, which she watered all through the summers; and Salander, passing by a shed one day where she was playing, threw away his cigar to have a good look at her. Outside, it was a day of glory in the sky and of harvest peace and abundance on the earth: inside, the child was in deep shadow and looked down at him with eyes bright, glowing cheeks, rosy lips, and teeth glistening, all the more lovely for the shadow which her face overcame and seemed to illuminate like a lantern. He tried to talk to her, and she said " Yes " or " No " or sometimes nothing. He remembered as he looked at her an old countrywoman's remark to him when he was a boy: " Birds have great wisdom; not one of them except the cuckoo has said a thing men can understand, not since the Creation." Before he left she reminded him still more of a bird, for she suddenly put on a face like an owl which was evidently a favourite accomplishment. This she maintained for about half a minute

and then broke into laughter, under cover of which Salander departed. He did not profess to know anything about women until they were seventeen or so, and none that he had ever troubled with was like a bird; yet his complacency was hurt by the bird-like Helen. She grew more and more beautiful, to the confusion of old and afterwards of young Salander. She had a peering face, narrowing down to the chin and sharpened forwards—a face that asked many questions no man could answer. She had olive eyes, long dark lashes, and dark eyebrows, a rather more than usually projecting mouth which seemed to make the whole world wreathe in a smile with it; her skin was nothing rarer than damask; her pale yellow hair was open to the imputation of tow, inclined to stick together in tails, and only just rippled out of the straight, yet radiant and original whether it swished about her in running or was held across her mouth for her to bite while she spoke; perhaps only her ears could be called perfect, being of a unique simple curve up, round and down, and within of a subtlety suggesting with even a shade of painfulness in its subtlety, the hidden brain which it furnished with the sounds of the

world. Many other women had some of these elements in more perfection, not a few had them all: there was never one who combined them in these proportions to this result, which was so much more than the sum of them all that one like old Salander could pretend to see it as such only when there was a Crowbit mist moaning and shaking the spruce against Helen's home and the rain drummed on corrugated iron, and he felt in his teeth that he was old. He was, in fact, deeply impressed by her beauty. It was the most surprising fact within his knowledge that this brand-new, rasping new, never-to-be-old, settlement and two plain parents could produce one like Helen, could nourish and preserve her year after year, while she ran up and down the deep-rutted lanes and over the scratched flinty fields among the chickens, climbed his great beeches in the bottoms still mainly belonging to the squirrels, and later on raced about on a rattling bicycle with a milk can or a parcel from the station. She wore bad clothes, always torn, often dirty—but so much the better! they gave her laughing loveliness another triumph. It was always laughing, though not perhaps for what Salander

or most others would have called happiness. Her mother was angry with her for laughing at nothing: she did not know, she believed the child did not know, why this laughter; and she accused her of pretence, the more certainly because the gravity of her eyes was never disturbed by it. At school she learned only to fear school-teachers and lofty rooms with shiny pictures. All her wisdom was in the quickness of her feet and the light of her eyes. Some thought her daft.

When Helen was seventeen, old Salander died suddenly. Aylwin had returned from Canada, something worn by indolence, but still handsome. He was a perfect Salander externally—had a neat head, close-cropped mouse-coloured hair, regular features and excellent teeth, but also a melancholy and rash futility that grinned at the masterly military exterior. He wooed Helen outright. She was now a woman of a great new beauty, neither of the town nor of the country. She was the offspring of the union or conflict between country and town, the solitude of Crowbit and the corrugated iron. The union showed itself in the astonishing blend of the wild and the delicate in her beauty,

the conflict, in her uselessness—she could do nothing with her hands or her head, she could not even sing, though her voice was worthy of her—in what the neighbours called her stupidity or imbecility. She was like a deer enchanted into a woman's form, nothing like a deer except sometimes in her gesture of suspicion, and yet a deer underneath. Salander used to come down to the " King's Head " at Newton Salander for several days at a time and make opportunities to see the wandering Helen instead of fishing. At some visits he sat down and drank peaceably for hours, to fend off the sad looks of Crowbit; at others, he would not touch alcohol, for the same reason; in both moods he would talk of fitting out two rooms at the manor-house, of keeping fowls and Arcadianising. It was pretty well known why he came, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown, though not yet consulted, saw no reason to be sorry, since it might do them good and would, at least, take the solitary and useless girl off their hands. The neighbours blamed sometimes them and sometimes Helen, when they knew her entire liberty with Salander. They accused the Browns of thrusting her upon him. His friends, on the other hand, thought it

would be quite unnecessary for him to marry her.

Helen herself seemed to take no notice of him, to be the only person who could not see what was happening. Then suddenly it was known that she and Salander were to be married. It was said that he had lain in wait for her in one of her secret haunts, and that there for some reason she had struck him so that he fell and was stunned. It was said that his helpless body had raised her pity; she had tended and kissed him back to consciousness. After this he could apparently do anything with her, except persuade her to leave " Fair View " where she was born. She used to compare herself to the solitary spruce-tree. She had never lived anywhere else, and she never could. But as soon as possible Salander meant to take her right away from it.

After the wedding Helen was gay and gentle with all, until she came to the gates of the manor-house. She trembled and leaned heavily on her husband's arm, and he was all but carrying her as they approached the door. At the threshold she was powerless; he lifted her in, helpless and drooping as a sheaf of barley.

She is now what all would call mad. She fell into silence, untranslatable sounds, and her old laughter. She refused to sleep anywhere except in her birthplace, and as she was not admitted there she stayed out of doors. She thought that she was a spruce fir, and spreading out her arms with a grave look she shivered and made a sound like the wind in fir needles without opening her lips, and having gradually become silent she burst out into laughter and turned away. Salander was much condoled with by her parents, and in his watchfulness he was often out all night, following her until he was tired and she disappeared. His fowls arrived, but he made a present of them to his father-in-law. In a few weeks he departed, leaving the key in the door with a hope that she might return. He comes down now and then to see if she is changed, but when he appears she runs fast away. They have relented at "Fair View," and she sleeps there once more. She works hard in the garden and among the fowls, and goes on errands. If the little boys of Crowbit stop her and say, "Helen, what is that noise?" she stands still, slowly extends her arms and moans like a fir-tree, and the boys grin at one another

until out comes her wild laughter, and they grin no more. The people at Crowbit are not proud of her, though she is still as beautiful as the dawn; but at the next village an old woman says it is good to have one idiot in a place, and very lucky—" It keeps things quiet," she says.

(1911.)

ISOUD

VI

ISOUD

THE other day a thick snowfall whitened the hills. Winter it is not yet nevertheless; a black insistence here and there of hillock or jag was left to remind us of the living form; though tucked down, stiff and angular like a corpse, in its shroud, the earth still lived. It was buried, yet buried alive; and it needed only a tumultuous enthusiasm of sunshine to awaken what had seemed the lifeless angles of knees and chin to life. That enthusiasm came. First an icy fog overclouded the pools, garrisoned by melancholy lime and elm, mostly bare, and by gracious poplars hardly wasted or discoloured, over and among which floated three swallows continually. But the light invaded and barred the beech-trunks with the shadow of their own boughs. Then rapidly the splendour drew off, only to be followed by a sweet-tempered afternoon which later on was visited by notable light, diluted and

invisible, so homely and so companionable, as though from a fountain closer than the sun, from something on earth, something not far off; a light under which the very asphalt of aching streets will receive the shadows of tree and spire. All the grim jewelleries of the hoar frost were gone. Far off a sudden fusillade occasionally surprised the air. Then the hour between light and darkness was one of the holy eves of autumn. . . . With sunset a vigorous gale took flight from the north, and overthrew the barriers of day and uplifted the heavens a league higher, until the storm came, preceded, while it was yet light, by a wonderful stir and freshness of the air between those heaving bergs of cloud immersed and reluctantly smouldering in blue sky water east and west; and this was the hour for the unexpected, the marvellous, for the extending of Nature's bounds. A moment or two of sumptuous calm—as if one slept upon pillows of wild-hop blossom; the waterfall's breath ceased to tease the ivy foliage, and the storm whipped it instead. Thunder came, and a wind that plucked out the poplar boughs as if they had been hen feathers. That, too, gave way with rumblings of retreat: and the rain

was globed prettily on the silver underside of a leaf that lay stiff. So the latest memory of that day was powerful and sweet. We saw the mighty motion of the steadfast tide as it swerved, swerved slowly in echelon at the broadest point of the river, where two streams, both voices of the sea, though querulous, enter it; we saw how the water, all red in the recurrent ardours of sunset, was burdened with foam; how the low grassy shore hissed, and the big, tawny moon leant at watch—as if with a pensive arm—on the hills, quite near. That night also passed, the perfect silence of it expounded by the unaccountable murmur as of gigantic pinions beating slowly at the horizon, and the black bars of midnight weighing heavily upon the brow, until the white moon was deluged by fiery clouds of dawn. Importunate sunlight then called us forth early to a long day of breezes that drove the lark giddily backward in its song. With an imposing promise of the far away spring, a great poplar, in a spurt of delicate rain, rose up in magically aggrandized magnificence into a lustrous pane of sky. But most impressively the memory of that day is inseparable from a reading of Malory's narrative

of the knight Kehydius. Out of doors I had read this story, which is an unimportant appanage of Tristram's tragedy, and told fragmentarily over many pages after Malory's way —stealing like a meek rosy thread of silk through the purple and sea-green pomps of a sombre embroidered imagery. The open air endowed it with what it lacked: not that it was without art, though it is not purely art that gilds such a history as Elaine's; he speaks, as it were, for, he is the melodious mouth for, Nature herself. Indeed, of all books none is so fitted for such reading. One can fancy it the work of an old woodlander who wrote in his splashed hunting dress. His stories have all the carelessness and haste of stories told by eager riders in a joyful chase; that is how he came to add fondly to his picture of a lion-guarded castle in the tale of Galahad—" and the moone shone clere "; and Kehydius is one of those constellated knights whom he just names, with sympathy, it is true, but no more. So after a dreamy reading of the book were my own thoughts of Kehydius and Malory's ejaculations combined in one history that came to me all day in intermitted harmony. The sound thereof was as of distant music

coming and going with the pulse of the breeze, or like light

> That from heaven is with the breezes blown
> Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

One thought of the beginning of the life of Kehydius in some towered town; of his melancholy youth, full of hopes for a future that will never be, and regrets for a past that has never been. And one day Tristram and Lamorak "took Kehydius at the fosters hous and soo they rode with hym to the ship."

Underfoot one of the clear brown Gwili's little tributaries all its course runs beneath close hazel and thorn bushes, till it is unfettered into sparkling liberty over tumbled rocks, in a deep bed whose sides were in September the home of the finest ivy, of all plants indeed, refined to a crepuscular paleness and frailness; there, too, or close at hand, was the hot pimpernel, hot as if it had burnt like a tongue of volcanic flame from the scorched pebbles.

There was Kehydius marching with the great knights. Surely he will not long love his life! He is to love the highest and loveliest in all the world. That soul was never wholly sincere

except with Nature; and perhaps his eyes had never opened with the fearlessness, the innocence, the eternal surprise of childhood—save to the sky! There would be days when the despotic splendour of the sunlight never permitted him to rest, but only to gaze and dream. And "the fyrst time that ever syre Kehydius sawe la Beale Isoud he was soo enamoured upon her that for very pure love he myghte never withdrawe it. . . . And at the last as ye shall here or the book be ended syre Kehydius dyed for love of la Beale Isoud."

And Autumn came. Fine pale ferns nodded beside the path; the red campions blossomed with smaller and smaller flowers; children harvested the blackberries from sprays of crisp green arched over serpentining red stems; and there were all the pleasures of a day abroad—the stepping-stones in lustrous brown water! the fear of cattle too indolent to raise a horn! and the damp, cool crystal of the air before evening below the oaks and hazels of a lane!

Kehydius has written to Isoud, and drawn replies from that stately queen. The events following have all the sorrowful comedy of real life: Tristram maddens with jealousy at Isoud's

condescending response to Kehydius, who leaps from the scene, but afterward goes on affectionate search for his rival; and not alone; at least he is pursued by one that loved him hopelessly, a maiden named Summer Night, whose very step was desirable and full of love and always tender as if she feared to break the slumber of one beloved and sick. From her Kehydius learned to play upon Tristram's harp so faultlessly that they drew him with tears to their side, only to depart, however, with "The harp is the harp of Tristram, but the harper . . .!" But Kehydius "saide that he wolde goo in to Bretayn."

Evening is at hand. Long, delicate amber ribands of sunshine lie across the page in a quiet sunset of misty gold, whose beams glance night by night off a neighbouring window to this spot, but soon, as now, escape along with the memorable splendour upon the book.

Night closes the story appropriately. Kehydius has returned and after curing Tristram with the herbs of the love-wise Summer Night has gone forth, neglectful of her, with the knight. Again they quarrelled over Isoud. One night, therefore, Kehydius left Tristram asleep, harp

at side, and rode with intent never to return. . . . Let us not be content with Malory's allusion to "the noble knyghte syre Kehydius that dyed for the love of la Beale Isoud."

To what weird banquet are those gloomy clouds journeying amid the firs, with bat and with crow, in the fervid but lightless west? From what weird banquet or witching tryst in the dead east are they returning like sullen guests? The year has "passed into many yesterdays," and now the arborets of brier and thorn that stagger up and down the acclivities moan in the invectives of the wind.

Never had Sir Kehydius joy such as on that night; there was joy even in the thought that cropped up among his memories, the thought that

Grief is to bliss a blindfold sister sweet.

Suddenly then came the fear that Tristram might suffer harm in his sleep. He rode hot-foot back, therefore, and sat to watch until day; when he bethought him of the harp; he would play once again—a stanza only, perhaps of the glade

Where light and white the wood nymphs go.

Those tones were his own obsequies. . . . His fingers and voice ran through all the subtleties of delight and love. . . . The light of a sunken moon was fading by delicate diminuendo among the woods. . . . Even Tristram wondered and admired. Finally, the recollection of Isoud! The tristful majesty of her praises could not restrain his hand, the hand that presently drove a sword, through the misty quivering chords, into the heart of Kehydius. Summer Night was close by. She took up the corpse, and herself scooped a grave in the forest's heart where dew is dried not even at noon. But when the grave was deep, she could not endure to loosen those fair limbs into the pit; so, descending herself and drawing his body over the edge, she, crushed by the weight and effortless with fright and grief, died; and no robins covered the sorrow of those two; only when Tristram and Isoud passed there in the chase, they found that the hair of Summer Night had expanded over all as if in pity; and Isoud, with her elegiac voice, praised the hair.

A MAN OF THE WOODS

VII

A MAN OF THE WOODS

LONG years of soldiering, tilling the soil, gamekeeping, and poaching o' nights, moulded our man of the woods to what we find him now in a hale, iron old age. In the education of such a man, not one of these elements could have been spared; all will be found deeply essential. Without the drill and exposure of a soldier's life, his back would never have been so straight, nor his step so true, nor his eye so instantly correct; and it again gave him an insight, also, into phases of life on which he will begin to dwell, in a chattering senility, when sermons are uttered more and more frequently from the grandfather's chair. Tilling the soil was slow, certain preparation for the interchangeable crafts of poacher and gamekeeper. It was then that, in the lengthened dinner-hours under the summer sky, he could glean unutterable lore of the hare and his many ways. Partridges nested in his

master's fields, and it needed no more than ordinary care to mark their lines of travel, their hours of home-coming and outgoing, and their favoured corners when the coveys packed in the time of the ripening hazel-nuts. At odd hours, in his tiny youth, opportunities were his to learn something of the economies of the smaller wild things of the hedgerows and leas; the thronging of strange racketing birds to the red October hips—these, the fieldfares, he called "felts"—and the advent of the nightingale in earliest April to the spinney or the hazel-nook. He had been something of a favourite with the hunt; received valuable commissions which kept him in silent places, where the only stir was the "rattle" which he whirled to turn the followed fox from a known retreat of his that could not be blocked. There, with occasions innumerable, answered by desires, he learned much, and reasoned, too, in his unguided way, and developed a tenderness towards wild creatures which was often in contrast with freaks of heedlessness. This tenderness stays with him now; he remembers the caged dormouse clicking for food over him, even in his nightly armchair. Keepering and poaching rank to-

gether in his education. Both gave him intricacies of knowledge in woodcraft that are impossible otherwise. Had he been a worse keeper, he would never have made so good a poacher; a worse poacher, and he were a useless keeper. Education, and "better manners," he will say, have been the means of reducing the frequency of poaching, or, at least of the loud, bold poaching which he knew—desperate attacks of desperate men. Many such he recalls when the price of bread was high and wages low; cruel times for his class, he moans yet. Then a certain moodiness took hold of the cottagers; a dull, stubborn carelessness; and murderous affrays were the results. Such times have gone, he thinks, like the coast-war with smugglers. It is a memory of his that banded labourers in the cold winters of the years of the Crimea attacked the game woods. The raids called for unusual preparations against their success, and keepers sat or stood up in the covers all night in silence behind suspended sacks as protection from the wind. Nights like these ruined and bowed many good men.

Picture him in his woods; for he has been a man of the woods all his life, and is so yet.

Wild, full locks whiten his brown neck and cheeks; a beard graces his chin. His eyes have the cold pale-blue brightness, suggestive of weak or short sight, which is almost always noticeable in men whose eyes are much used out of doors. The power of these eyes is genius, or instinct; their characteristic is that they realize everything in their sweep, noting details which ordinary vision would not appreciate or be conscious of. His gaze is inevitably and surely arrested by whatsoever moves within his ken; he knows that the rush-tufts dappling the hills are not the hares he seeks, but he also knows that they are rush-tufts; nothing can escape him, and he makes certain, by an unconscious effort, of all he sees. Yet his glance is as rapid as possible; taking in, using or rejecting, what he sees, is the work of an inappreciable moment of time. He is little above the middle height, but his straight build gives him the appearance of being taller, and makes him what he is, a powerful man, whose strength is accompanied by agility, weight by speed. He has always been a runner; boasts, too, of his father's prowess across country. And one of the signs of his own enduring strength is that his breath is still good; he can run, if

necessary, and mount the Downs, or climb a pollard-willow yet. He may tell you that "the rheumatics" trouble him, but we find how much that means in a long tramp in the nutting season, up and down, over brooks and ha-has: then he is the last to complain, for the excitement of youth over the gipsying is as strong as ever in him. His dress, though he knows it not, by a curious but natural adaptation to surroundings, has become of unspeakable hues; slowly he has taken the colours of the wildwood in autumn's grey and brown, like the lizard in its native fern and parched rock or sward. Reminiscences of bird's-nesting raids are about him; undoubted evidences of his trespassing, in the stains of the keeper's "tar trap"; sand, from the quarries, where an owl occupied two martins' tunnels whose partition slipped; lichen from the oaks, and green mould from the beeches where we sup. Many, many colours impress his sunburnt coat, his hat no less; unlike the Downs of his nativity, his cloth has emeralded in the sunshine.

He is a sportsman, with knowledge of a gun, but a better poacher, we confess; a fisherman, who can bait a hook, yet a better "tickler" of

tench and trout. In fishing he shows a failing that is often conspicuous in men used, as he is, to other methods and waters; he has too much slow patience—fonder, with rod in hand, of a joke than of his sport, and of the moorhen paddling than of either; he will sit for hours with no encouragement but "something in the air" to keep him at his work. David is a naturalist, yet something of a quack—knows and loves the gold agrimony wand or the pile-wort, February's star, but fears nightshade and brooklime more. On the subject of herbs, he is, of course, superstitiously old-fashioned, daring not to doubt; to him they are infallible. The same reverence for the sweet, small gifts of Nature makes him over-ready oftentimes to find "Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks; Sermons in stones, and good in everything." His "tongues," there found, are too often dumb or vain; his "books" might be deemed idle; but good he does find, and communicates with rare simplicity. His love of the greenwood is, in very fact, deep-seated. The superstition of our man of the woods with regard to herbs is allied to his speculation about birds; but it is only the speculation of almost all dwellers in

the country. Just as the old people know there are tree magpies, and bush magpies, so he will have it that the "twink" is other than the "piefinch"; yet his twink, evidently named from the chaffinch's cry, makes a similar nest to the piefinch, and is as dainty in its use of lichen. "Piefinch" is a common West Country name for the chaffinch. The songs, the call-notes, the flights, the habits, sociable or solitary, of wild birds are known to him. His imitations of the cries of woodlanders and birds of the field are exquisitely close; their consummation is in his rendering of the bullfinch's melancholy "pipe," and of the young rook's clamour, swallowing a worm.

The old man's vocabulary is mixed and strange; many of its words being untraceable, most of them derived from contact with the wandering gipsies. He knows something of Romany, and speaks of the "Diddikai," as he correctly calls him, or half-bred gipsy, as more dangerous and fierce than the rest. David, the old poacher and soldier, "traveller" once, perchance, is keen-witted and thoughtful; at times a light smile plays gracefully about the wrinkles of time and trouble in his cheek. At

night, when he gathers his boys about him, there is grave talk and bandied jest, and thrusts of wit. Perhaps in the midst of the "godship" one is ailing, and inevitably he suffers doctoring with long, dark, bitter draughts of mysterious tea.

(1897.)

SEVEN TRAMPS

VIII

SEVEN TRAMPS: A STUDY IN BROWN

We were a close-knit and easily divisible covey of seven tramps—a woman, two boys and a girl, and three men; there was, too, an ass, but he was a gentleman and had belonged to a great house that lay near our path one summer night. We were the most dirty of mankind. No tramp ever joined us, except one, who was an artist. He painted us and said that we might have belonged to the middle ages. "Yes," said one, demanding ale, "we have known better times." We thought ourselves honest tramps; for we never robbed a poor man, not even the artist, who had art in his head instead of brains. He could not paint dirt, he confessed, and he unscrupulously invented and painted a sash on the girl of eight, so that she cried when she felt in vain for the pleasant crimson thing.

This girl was our only burden; she was like a doll some child has defaced, and had a thin,

coughing laugh that went into my heart like a needle at times.

The two boys were in place of a dog. They could clean a copse of pheasants' eggs, or mind the camp. The arm of one of them, "Snag," would go through a letter box, a natural gift which he never abused. They lived more wildly than we, having come to us from a London working family, as apprentices or "halves." The elder, "Hag," was sometimes called grandfather; when he had been drinking, he looked older than anyone I have ever seen.

Of Nell, the woman, it is hard to say anything except that she was a woman and could weep. She bore children who died, and helped the ass up hill. She "married" Tim when she was seventeen, a gay dairy beauty from Devon; but when she was twenty she was "that ugly that to see her when she got up in the morning was a curse." She was foolish when drunk, mad when sober, and talked continually at the top note of tragical expression. None was more cruel to her child than she. Our cruelty, which I confess was great, she rather encouraged. I hear her laugh sometimes; it *walks* in the winter evenings and is all that is left of her now

that she is dead. But she alone was kind to the girl, and should any other use endearments towards the child she became a fury. She practised kindness as a secret indulgence; I have overheard her making the child shriek with her desperate caress. I have said that she was a woman, mainly because she re-arranged her rags with coquettish assiduity; her face was not that of a woman so much as of a type that had been created by an artist in love with mere despair.

Her husband, a brown, haystack man, had an almost romantic interest in female beauty. Chamber maids, barmaids, and sporting women, he worshipped, and would consequently attend at meets of hounds. The white skirts and well polished boots of servants raised his speech to rhapsody. Yet he cared for his wife and beat her only during periods of very good or very bad fortune. He could snare a bird or rabbit exquisitely, and a certain pedantic hate of careless work sometimes left us supperless. Had he been clean I should have said there was a polish in his ways. "Not a pigeon, your honour; 'twas a handsome cock pheasant," was his scrupulous interjection in court. I believe

he gloried in the name of tramp and could have confounded a clever man by a favourable comparison of his profession with the rest. "A quart of six on a wet night—a strange, neat girl in a long, long lane—to knock your man down—to have a bonny child on your knee on Christmas day"—such was his ode to life.

"Partridge" could make the most superior farmer or gamekeeper impotently ridiculous by touching his cap and keeping within the letter of respect. The finesse of insult and abjection were his life-study. He was master of all the arts of eloquence that are not in Cicero. For he had been a waiter and was a linen-draper's son. But I will not attempt to put his eloquence in print lest I should prove him to have been second-rate. According to our standard he was the gentleman of us all. He stood five immaterial feet high; grasped an oak wand taller than himself; and wore his hair over his face. I value his memory for the way he had of cajoling the basest of men, all the while looking like an early Czar. . . . He had the brow of a great man, a singular thing. Of old the brow made the man and the God. It was his natural gonfanon—the brow of Jupiter—

of Aphrodite—of Plato—of Augustus—was for centuries an altar where human thoughts and dreams did reverence. The history of sculpture is a *te deum laudamus* to the brow. Now the soul has descended a step of the temple and dwells in the eyes. On the stock exchange, in parliament, in the army and in literature, victory is won by the eyes. "Partridge" had that calm and ample span of curving bone, but his eyes slept, and he was a failure. Having once caught a partridge, the accident was considered apt to give him the name by which he was known.

As for "Mud" (short for Muddle), he was a poor human creature, and a tramp by accident. He would never tell the facts of his early life, though his way and conversation made them a subject for secure surmise. He had left his own class and become a labourer. His health failing, he had taken to the road with no certain aim. After spending his money unadventurously he lay dying when we passed near, and Nell lifted him on to the ass and made him one of us. He recovered, but always seemed to be dying; his voice was a long sigh; yet was he the happiest of us all. I have heard him utter sour words,

only against "the rich," "the world," and "men," who were the mainstay of his incurable pessimism of thought. His behaviour with men and women belied the theory of this gentle optimist in practice. Should any decisive political or social movement stir the world, he would not fail to point out its anti-human tendency, its trifling probable influence upon the sum of things. But the man—the politician or agitator at the helm—even if he happened to be well-fed, attracted his sympathy at once: he would insist on the man's character as a man, and on the way in which every man's actions when extended out of the reach of his sight will vary from their original cast. I believe he was an idealist. He spent whole days in searching for straight hazels in the copses and returned with a bundle like Jupiter's quiverful of lightning. "I tried to get them perfectly straight," he explained. He seemed in truth to have in his mind a long shelf of platonic ideas, dusty, rusted, moth-eaten by sorrow and the ills of the body. To these he referred all he saw in real life. His ideas were castles, Dulcineas, Micomiconas; and since he rarely met anything better than a Maritornes, his dull sight—or perhaps

his charity—raised up the hands of these mortal, rotten things to his cobwebs and his gods, associating them. He would single out some poor house or inn, some unlucky girl's face, and transfer to them the glowing sentiments which he had once reserved for his inner, ideal vision of these things. He saw a miracle where there was in truth but a second-rate dawn. He felt an enchantment when everybody else felt cold. He thought that the ways of a tramp sorted better with the history of mankind than any other. Responsibilities and duties he had, but should he perish none would suffer. The responsibilities were co-terminous with the length of life which chance had planned for him. Nomadic, unencumbered by property, relatives, or social status, he was a creature in keeping with an unaccountable world. No storm, no social disaster, no philosopher or tyrant concerned him save as a spectacle. The stars in their courses were not more serene, more lonely than he. Such a friend of night was he, the stars were nearer to him than man. "If only they would warm my hands!" he cried. When the north wind blew, it killed someone's sheep, broke windows, laid the corn; his ears tingled,

he grew silent, and I believe that he rode upon the wind as happily as a witch or a brown leaf. A noble sound, the sight of the sea, or the perfume of a lane—" I eat and drink them," said he. Thus he seemed to me the half, as it were the female half, of the greatest poet that ever did not live. By difficult ways and strange, such a man is made a poet. He was once narrating the wonders of an evening in a wood; he paused and paused as I became expectant, and at last said with some shame that the very trees were " like a church full of men when the organ begins; and I was no better than any one of them." In outward appearance he was, like the other six, a brown tramp.

(1902.)

DEATH BY MISADVENTURE

IX

DEATH BY MISADVENTURE

As the train slowed down between the long grey platforms all the men in the carriage dropped their newspapers to their knees and raised their eyes, without any appearance of thought or emotion, in short with a railway-carriage expression, to scan the name of the station, the small groups by the bookstall, the two or three intending passengers just coming through the doorway of the booking-office. On steeply rising ground above the station flocks of white linen flapped wildly and brightly in the back gardens of rows of new cottages. Above these, white clouds went nobly through the sky like ships ages ago on some long quest of love or of war.

When the train was still, there was not one shout. No one called out the name of the town or the place for which we were bound. No one cried " Chocolate," " Paper " or " Violets "

though the vendors of these things were at hand a moment ago.

A stout man in black coat and black gaiters opened the door of our carriage and got in puffing, yet saying as he closed the door:

"Man killed. Carelessness. Nobody's fault except his own. Teach platelayers a lesson. Smoker and drinker, I'll be bound."

People began to hurry past our windows towards the engine. Those in the carriage who sat nearest the windows put their newspaper on their seats and in turn put out their heads to look. "You can't see anything," said one.

The train backed slowly a few yards. "He was under the engine," said the observer. Some of us were dimly pleased to have had an experience which not everyone has every day; the stout man was disturbed by the delay; others were uncomfortable during this movement, as knowing that they were in part the cause of the accident and that their weight was now helping to crush out the blood and life of a man; one wanted to jump out, but while no one was willing to leave the carriage, all were bent on taking their turn at the window.

A policeman walked smartly by, and one of the

seated passengers remarked that "on the Continent" they arrest the engine-driver as a matter of course. Two porters followed with a stretcher.

"Now they are picking him up, but I can't see for the crowd," said the one who now had his head out. "Here he comes. . . . No. He must be dead. . . . There is some more." The train backed yet a little again. "They have got all of him."

In the little gardens the housewives and daughters were already watching. Old and young, buxom and slender, fresh and worn, in their white aprons and print dresses, leaned over the low fences, one stood upon the fence and stared. The scent of death had not taken a minute to reach those women whose sons and husbands and fathers and lovers include some—it is not known which of them—who are destined to die bloodily and unexpectedly. There was not a sound except the hissing of the steam, until the guilty train began to grunt forward again and take us past a little group of uniformed men with ashen faces surrounding the brown humpy cloth which covered the remains of the chosen one.

(1911.)

A COLLOQUY IN A LIBRARY

X

A COLLOQUY IN A LIBRARY

PERSONÆ:
Some Men; Many Books; Nature.

THE moon rose amid the comfortable, melancholy noise of rain in darkness, and it was near the time I set apart for dreams, dreams in a kind of mental euthanasia, which is as superior to mere sleep as dining is to eating. If I remember well, it was on such a chair as roused Evelyn's wonder in Florence (before these dreams were invented), "a conceited chair to sleep in with the legs stretched out, with hooks, and pieces of wood to draw out longer or shorter." In the absolutely windless air there was a nervous palpitation or fretting, more awful than ghosts. The fascinations of pure nothingness gradually overcame the fascinations of Robert Burton. I laid aside the book. . . . Presently the London midnight silence fell upon me with all its spells. It was that silence in which how

many hearts were breaking! how many souls passing beyond the veil! and yet so quietly that the clear note of a chapel bell arose above it all—nay! the ticking of my watch was louder far. A puissant spell it was; by some means more subtle and direct than thought, I realized my own intense loneliness. Then the very rain falling patiently had a magic hold upon me, and I stopped my ears as if a Siren sang. . . . The light went out. I had no will to trim it. The darkness was suffocating.

So I rose and left the house, and the white moon was genial by comparison. In Chapman's phrase, the moon had *comforted the night*. My path went towards the lodgings of a friend who would, I knew, be awake among his books.

That setting moon, seen through nocturnal scud, was turbulently besieged by clouds, black as pitch, plunging over the horizon. With its ray, or with an illumination—neither of star nor sun—that chances oftentimes by night, the western sky was pale. Everything was quiet. Sight of all save the moon and the wayside elm grove was unaccountably soon lost. Now and again the white derelict crescent foundered, and

was gone among interminable precipices of midnight; and no star shone; or, if one, it was infinitely distant, and seemed no more than the reflection of a star, as it vanished and reappeared in one of the lugubrious gulfs, among the white floes of cloud at the zenith. A wind had arisen; but, victorious over the storm, the darkness made a strange peace. Everything was quiet, though mighty trees were thrown down and buildings moaned.

The clarity of the air and the insistent outlines of things were remarkable, and as perfect as at noon, though the clarity was different, different in what it visited and what forgot. The elm trees were aggrandised in majesty and apparently in bulk, with all the mysterious aloofness of trees. The great boles were massive and near. Their delicate anatomy seemed to reach into the sky.

" Sprites of the blest and every saint y-dead " were abroad in that pure night, and by the time I reached the study of —— my spirits were recovered.

We talked of many things. We agreed (we had need to) in cursing print for destroying in part the individuality or value of handwriting

by separating it from authorship; and —— became autobiographical. He began:

" ' If I am no better than other men, at least I am different,' said Rousseau. It was an unnecessary preliminary. The least of us can say as much. The poet fears that Nature has broken the mould that shaped his mistress; but the earth is littered with chrysalides: no two are alike. Hence the folly of accusing anyone of plagiarism. For when I have spoken a word —no matter who has spoken it before—it becomes mine. The accent, the context, the particular intention, shapes it anew. The meanest can say this; and who knows so thoroughly his neighbour's soul as to say truthfully, ' I understand thee ' ? Thus we are all authors, all original. This man buys a book, and it becomes his in every sense, when he has read it, though it bears another's name on the back. When I see my friend's bookshelves I say to myself, ' These are ——'s or ——'s works. The author has done nothing more than put on paper what this man has put into his heart and on his shelves: the more cunning he!' To open a book is ever to go on a voyage of discovery. The anchor is up, and you are adrift

on the unknown. This is virgin soil you touch. With your discoveries you deal as discoverers have done before; you take possession of it in the name of the king—yourself; your possession is confirmed by a bull from the Pope—yourself; you are Columbus and Ferdinand and Alexander in one. You shall know a man by his books. I was away from home once, and a lady I had never seen occupied my room. She was taken suddenly ill, and left an unfinished letter on the desk—which I read for good reasons. Judge whether it was kind or unkind! but the letter contained a portrait of me, drawn in a page of subtle sentences, from my books. . . . When I see a fat russet folio make itself a home between the gaudy fashions of to-day—ragged and grim—

In bearded majesty

I know how I shall greet the man that is owner thereof. Moving often among books, I came to see a likeness in them to men. Again, some men resemble books. There is ——, enormous, well-groomed, unsociable, inarticulate, but with an expression that says 'Look within'; he is like an old dictionary 'in one volume quarto, old calf, neat.' To what, save Cato's 'Agriculture'

bound in pigskin, shall I compare ——, blunt, autochthonous, truthful to a fault? Again ——, fantastic, always in mourning for a relative whose ink runs dry when she should have put him in her will—but ever youthful and going 'merrily to heaven'; he must go on the same shelf as yonder duodecimo 'Elia' in gloomy levant. What gentle, tender damsels—what old maids, lachrymose and devout—what red-faced, stout-hearted housewives, are there among books! and great fellows with yard-long oaths (writ with a sword), and melancholic lovers. Like men, too, no doubt—and not unlike women—the exterior often seems (only, perhaps, because we know not how to judge) to misrepresent the soul of the book, as must happen more often as the binding becomes wholly separate from the writing of a book; and as people come to look merely at the 'object' of a writer, and soon regard the book not as a medium, but as an obstacle, between mind and mind; 'c'est pourquoi,' says Rabelais half in sadness, 'fault ouvrir le livre et soigneusement peser ce que y est deduict.'

"The other day I saw a new whim in a library that vastly pleased me. There were folios that

might serve to prop a temple—dear, old malodorous, rain-worn 'Compleat Anglers'; *Spectators* with breakfast stains; Lambs so marked that only a line here and there was left, and that found, after all, to be the best! . . . a nation of books, in perfect order, *simplex munditiis*. Such order, however, I had not seen elsewhere. It was a concatenation in which no book (had it lived and could say Good-morrow!) would have disdained its neighbour. Every book, indeed, seemed just to have ceased talking to its neighbours when I came in. Many of the books I knew. That Shelley, for example, reminded me of days among the caracoling birch trees of Wimbledon, and the light grey lances of the hazels interwoven by the wind. . . . Every shelf was a chord of meditation. That '*Can a Thelyn*,' again, unlocked a Welsh vignette, seen from Bryn Gwyn Bach (The Little White Hill)—a moonlit estuary like a shield of silver, emblazoned with sable tree shadows. By reminiscential evocation, that 'Temple' seemed to bear the very scent of Eton lime blossoms, an amber fervid evening, and all the nuptial splendour of June. In that way every shelf told in orderly fashion more

truth than most autobiographies so called. But one shelf contained a harlequinade of books. I tried to reconcile them, but failed. The editions spoke of no choice. For the most part they were gay and cheap, and (strange for such a good uncle of books) dog's-eared. The 'Compleat Angler,' books of travel, King Arthur, Scott—this was strange harmony! So I took one down. The flyleaf bore my friend's name in an unknown handwriting, very childish, precise, yet awkward, with the early date of 18—.

"'These, then,' I said, 'must be the books of your childhood?'

"'You are right,' said he. 'Have you not seen how a gardener lovingly permits some ragged brier to wander free, because it was the step-parent to those exquisite roses that cling in December, like handfuls of early snow, to the grey walls? Well, for something like his reasons I preserve these books. That Defoe, for example, is father to every romance upon my shelves; that 'Compleat Angler' to every book of poems and philosophy—to Shelley, Wordsworth, Dyer, to Coleridge, Ruskin, Lamb. I could not live without them. It is true that

I live, as Leonardo wrote, backwards; but even were it otherwise, I should be like one bereft of memory or her keys, without them, and life would be more histrionic than ever. These are, indeed, but ' bundles of cypress,' or locks of hair from a life that is dead; but they save me from the pain of feeling that death itself is dead. . . . And as you have said, they seemed to be rather my books than Scott's or Walton's; I should resent their ill-treatment as if they were. For between the lines are inscribed in subtle, invisible characters my earliest half thoughts; the backgrounds of the pictures are peopled by my earliest dreams. The book is mine by interchange of thought.

He piped, I sung; and when he sung I piped.

" A book to me was a piece of enchantment more fascinating than the monotonous miracles of Grimm. It was quite possible for a dainty sapient fairy—as, indeed, I read somewhere —to emerge from the leaves of a reverend book. The fairy was there, and marshalled hosts of fantastic creatures, as real as the people I saw around, and yet:

> As they please
> They limn themselves, and colour, shape or size,
> Assume as likes them best, condense or rare.

"I had few preferences at first; one book was as wonderful as another; and I could have ill-endured that holocaust suggested by Sir Thomas Browne 'to condemn to the fire those swarms and millions of rhapsodies begotten only to distract and allure the weaker judgment of scholars, and to maintain the trade and mystery of typographers!' The mystery of typographers! there lay half the spell. The child had only to read a few words and the charm worked—

> And from these create he can
> Forms more real than living man,
> Nurselings of immortality.

The words might be never so poor, the print never so faulty, the binding base—it was ethereal substance; I cared only for the characters. For the fancy worked so finely, and took wing at the barest suggestion. No matter how strange and exotic the matter, I was at once at home. Was it the polar world, the tropic forest and its myriad rainbow wings, the sea? I was not surprised, I had been there—long ago; all was

as it should be; yes! I had been there in my dreams and anticipated the boldest explorers. I might have safely shaken my head after reading Sir Samuel Baker's Travels; 'but I knew it all'—in fancy outstripping his painful marches, like the swallows that fly overhead. I should have greeted Man Friday with no more surprise than I should my brother. I filled every inch with living forms. No street was empty. No sky was bare. I was never alone. Often, indeed, I exchanged masks with the fictitious characters. I lived their life: therefore, I find myself now confusing the adventures of hero and heroine with my own, and read of the deeds of Amadis or Amaryllis as mine. Was it I, or was it Lancelot, that carried Arthur's offer of marriage to Guinevere? . . . I was a tyrannous master of all puppets that books put into my sway. If the author did not describe them —and probably also if he did—I put them into garments to suit my sense of fitness. I chose their background: I knew, for example, the sandy shore of a pond on a certain common, where years ago, if you sought carefully, you would find the cannibal footsteps that startled Crusoe. I knew the very gap in the coppice of

oaks through which Tristram appeared in his armour, all dew-bespattered, as if with actual fire. Even now as I pass I see Palomides, pensively treading the forest walks, so tall that his charger follows without drooping head. To me the author was a magician—as Virgil and Horace were to the dark ages. I would have credited *sortes Malorianæ*. The watchful lamp shining for miles over the sleepy land; the quill (a rhabdomancer's wand); the library overhead and around; the white paper on which the mind was casting lines of shadow; and he writing alone in the hushed midnight with 'earthquake and eclipse' for ink, were no less impressive than the crucible and enginery of alchemists, elaborating puissant alcahests in olden times. Every letter was a symbol whose import was not fully interpretable even by sages. More lay hid in printed pages than met the eye; and authors found in me the perfect reader, who read all 'en la perfectissime partie.' There was vanity in my affection, too; so that I cared for old quaint authors partly because I could correct such 'errors' of spelling as I found in the '*Compleat* Angler.' I was what quaint John Earle calls 'the surgeon of old authors,'

who ' healed the wounds of dust and ignorance.' Later on, when I made fishing an excuse for many hours afield, Izaak had his revenge, for I tried all the strange baits with which he deluded himself, if not the fish; but at first I was chiefly pleased by the visions of a sweet life passed in the meadows and in rooms where the scent of the meadows lingered. The scene was indeed new, though I expected all as it came. But in a life of disappointments, the advent of the thing expected is really the finest of surprises. So in many books I enjoyed the matter even though my knowledge of it first came through books. No wonders of tropic sound and colour startled me. Great rivers ' big as any sea '; infinite wilds of palm and sand; olive and chestnut of Italy were no stranger than the hollyhocks under the apple-trees in the old Welsh garden. I suppose it was the splendour of the dream world,

A prophet oft (and oft a historie),

that prepared my mind for the splendour of the earth. When I crossed the Arctic deserts (bolstered in an armchair by crimson cushions) I felt as little surprised as the most battered

mariner; I had seen ice-fields vaster. The Alps were fine, but I knew finer hills than that. Como was a dull puddle compared with what I knew.

"And how deliciously books became incorporate with places! with times of the year! with matins or vespers! 'The Ancient Mariner' rests for ever in the setting (as of sombre monastic illuminations) of the first midnight I ever looked out upon—a still midnight in black and white—in January—with a few big stars that withered one at a time occasionally under invisible cloud. The house was nervously expecting a visitor. I was left to myself, forgotten. The room was half lighted; many of the great book-shelves were in gloom; outside, the world of trees and roof ridges piercing the sky; beyond, the ghost of a great mountain, like a cloud; and all dark to the grey edges of the sea, on to where—in the moonlight 'far off their coming shone'—rollers fell with a roar every now and then. And the mystery of the everyday world seen thus, as I sat in the peopled solitude of the library, has never quite departed:

> There nothing common was or mean
> Upon that memorable scene.

At last I fell asleep and the great book almost covered me as I lay. This copy of the 'Opium-Eater,' too, summons my thoughts 'to the court of affection,' Sir Philip Sidney calls it, 'held by that racking steward Remembrance.' My fancy wandered at the passage ending: "'. . . In the very aspect and the sepulchral stillness of the motionless day, as solemnly it wore away through morning, noontide, afternoon, to meet the darkness that was hurrying to swallow up its beauty, I had a fantastic feeling as though I read the very language of resignation when bending before some irresistible agency. And at intervals I heard—in how different a key—the raving, the everlasting uproar of that dreadful metropolis, which at every step was coming nearer, and beckoning (as it seemed) to myself for purposes as dim, for issues as incalculable, as the path of cannon-shots fired at random and in darkness.' Forgive me another trifle from the rue and lavender of memory.

"It was a Sunday evening; I was left quite alone, though rather unwell—feverish and excited, seeing visions. 'Everybody was gone!' —as I cried whimpering in the folds of a curtain,

where long after dark a visitor found me out. . . . It was 'Robinson Crusoe' that produced the exaggeration of irritability and implacable loneliness that were so stamped upon my mind. Outside, swans floated shadowless on a moonlit pool. Pale summer lightning winked low down at intervals. With what mystery (remembering afresh and with pleasure ancient matters) the whole scene now returns—myself strangely isolated and belittled, as England seemed in the great globe of the library.

"I had almost forgotten this Hazlitt reminding me of a great lover of books; Corydon of —— College, Oxford, with whom I dined as a small boy. Corydon was a notable youth, his chestnut hair gadding about a delicate face, his voice like the after sound of a bell, his intellect developed in the lines of a Grecian rhapsodist, but with a certain lack of articulation and wildness of habit through which his written work savoured of wine more than the lamp. We and Corydon made a party of six. His gestures, particularly a gracious way of bowing his head as he smiled, had a magic that quickly made our number seem inevitable and right (so that one more or less would have spoilt

the whole), much as the outstretched arms of Mary in 'Our Lady of the Rocks,' harmonize and unify the group. Very soon everyone was talking eagerly in turn. A choicely laden board, of which I probably alone took notice, was cleared, before anyone was aware. Corydon only was now speaking, I remember, when hardly to our surprise, the servant carried in a strange, but noble course; my portion was a copy of 'Elia,' and I think there was nothing but Lamb upon the dish; however it was, we had each a memorable book—I put mine in my pocket—and the conversation ran happily into every nook that rivers from Helicon visit. Again and again the old servant came in with a great smile, bearing now a dish of folios, and now, as the lights in the candlesticks began to struggle ere they went out, a plate of dainty duodecimos. Some of them, as I hear, were from the inmost very kernel of Corydon library, priceless gifts. Then indeed it was fine to see the connoisseurs tasting and quickly devouring the new, ancient volumes that he provided. Wine was also on the table. One said that Shelley and champagne were excellent; and a compôte of port, Montaigne and pomegranates,

incomparable. One old bookworm, whom I may not omit, drew away into a delicious chair, with a long sought volume, like a dog with a bone, and would not be distracted. Even at the mid strokes of midnight we lingered and retiring to our rooms, when I kept feverishly awake on my father's knee, talked until the earliest swallow twittered, and we felt that last night we had truly 'dined.'"

(1900.)

FELIX

XI

FELIX

FELIX was greatly to be envied, as everyone said. He had just inherited from his father a beautiful realm, so governed by old ministers, that the late king seemed to be living still, with all his virtue and wisdom. A noble, happy people dwelt in the fields and cities of that land. The fairest women of the world were to be found in its country-sides. Every year the harvest was large and golden; the granaries ever being emptied, always full. Inter-swaying masts crowded the harbours; the seas around were aflower with white sails. Everywhere, the joyful sound of toil. The memory of a line of mighty kings made safe the uttermost capes even, though a ship had to be at least one New Year's Day afloat in putting a girdle round about the coast.

At nineteen Felix was king. As much in beauty as in rank he surpassed all of his race.

The slenderness and length, the plump tenuity, of his limbs were those of a statue; seeing him stripped, for the bath or for games, his friends praised him beyond all women. For hours he used to lie upon purple cushions, and gaze upon himself until he laughed, out of joy and pride. His chestnut-coloured hair—with paler lights as in the grain of a chestnut—

> Cast in a thousand snares and rings
> For Love's fingers and his wings,

falling lightly and massily upon his shoulders, lay there in changeful curls. His flesh was like a white rose where habitually clothed, like a red rose upon his cheeks. A certain posture of the head—when thrown slightly back, *pommettes* smiling, and lips not parted but raised at the corners—seen in profile, was irresistible to man and woman. His breath came from his mouth as odour from the calyx of a flower. There was no flaw in his voice, which never failed to be sweet, to what depths of passion soever it fell, and tender, like that of one who is dying for love. So modulated his laughter, you could almost make words of it.

From boyhood he had made verses, and

would spend hours in moulding the sense and motion of a line. It was his delight, to choose a plain, common word, and fitting it into a line, to evoke its divinity. He used to say that every word was divine. The same youth, Lucian, was his best friend, and favourite poet. Many a time and oft, they sat up so late, their cheeks were blanched a little, and they saw the labourers pacing heavily to work; then retired, to sleep until music awakened them. After a cold swim, a suspicion of fruit and milk, and a race in the quiet air, they returned, to ivory tables upheld by rods of glass, with gold feet, and thereon the choicest fruits, from vine, tree, and bush; and milk, and red or amber wine, and spring water in goblets, whose crystal stained the pure liquid. Then recumbent, they hearkened to sweet, passionless boys' voices, or courted silence until they were giddy at the precipices to which it brought them; or laughed as they saw in mirrors, through minute gaps, left by the cooling vanes that revolved outside, the ugly labourers fall swooning or dead, from heat, from slipping masonry, or from the fangs of beasts they were taming for the pleasure of Felix. Sometimes they sipped dark, poisonous-

looking draughts, auburn or purple coloured, from the cups of lilies. Next, the singing boys danced, scattering the delicatest perfumes from all their limbs. In the suspended mirrors a painter's line and colour might be seen developing on canvases that were far off. . . .

They talked of magic, alchemy, astrology, divinations, and music; and mixed with their talk of draughts that should give immortality were thoughts of a subtle fatal draught by which they should die "exquisite deaths." In that very hour they trembled at a great, distant cry, a cry that stabbed them with its appeal. So they bade the musicians play again. But the cry penetrated like a blood spot on some choice embroidery. All day long, sage chemists were busy in subterranean vaults, experimenting upon animals of every kind. These creatures were forced to take draughts, and the effect, the convulsions, the length of their agony, the cries, the attitudes when dead, were all carefully written down. Something that should kill rapidly and leave the body as if asleep was sought, or cause a slow dissolution of the senses one by one, painlessly. Anything that might soil the sweet flesh or strain the

features, or in any way fret the last repose, was at once dismissed.

Felix himself looked far from death. That mettled freshness of his brain was physical, as much as the pride of his limbs. On death he doted merely as a "romantic" contrast with the life which the serenity of his health seemed ready to prolong for ever.

At his command a chosen maiden, pale and drooping from the vales, or impetuous and red from the mountains, came in, on certain days, ushered by grimacing blacks, as the evening star appears among the first dragon clouds that night sends forth against it. Felix bowed low to her several times. He complimented her ivory features, the lustre of her eyes, her dewy voice, the fragrance of her garlands. Then he guided her from place to place about the ornate, lonely chambers, and let her taste their marvels. But the end was always the same. "Thou art very beautiful," he said to her. "Less beautiful than thou, my Felix!" said Lucian, the poet. So the prince went with her to the palace gateway, loaded her with presents and praise, and bade her farewell. "Less beautiful than thou!" echoed Felix.

It was at such a time, if at all, that a shadow fell upon his cheeks a moment, saddening the roses there. But very soon he would be as blithe as ever, with his verses "On Tears," though he never shed one; "On the Pains of Separation," though he loved truly none save himself; on "The Skull," though he knew not what it was like. The verses were carved by his slaves in marble, straight from his lips, after long thought.

Should melody cloy, Felix and Lucian fled again to the tables. This time the flesh of daintiest birds, of strange beasts, of deep sea and river fish, covered the board. A servant entered, who carefully blindfolded them with silken bandages, perfumed so as to overpower the savour of the flesh. For they never saw the meats, nor smelt them. Sometimes they spent whole days blindfolded so, or moved about only at night, and thus the other senses were perhaps more profoundly stirred. How much more impressive, they remarked, was the autumn wind in birch-trees at night, if the eyes were closed! "It were sweet," one day said Felix, "to be blind, for I think the joys of touch and smell would be profounder, that way."

After the warm, scented bath, whose sunlit waves wrought wonders on the marble, it was pleasant to sip hot draughts, followed by sherbet, out in the tempered splendour underneath the cedars. In the distance a Circean lady would be seen, swaying over her music. She could have made them swine. She made them gods. And when, in a blue room, half darkened, with wide windows opening upon a starry river and sombre trees, they sat and still hearkened, they felt as dead leaves or as clouds in the hands of that strong harmony that rose and fell, tender, minatory, turbulent, hypnotic, vast. . . .

If it rained at sunset, half an hour later, in a crystal, beamless light, they looked long at the daffodils in virgin grass under black elms. Or in a delicate going down of the sun, when a green colour as on the sunless half of a peach overspreads the north in bands, they read the poets. Or long after nightfall they watched the west, where there tarried a pane of white sky, that resisted the showers and perforated the clouds, though it gave no light. Or they sat in a seaside palace and marvelled at the galloping breakers and the great ships foundering. Then

to bed, through echoing corridors, full of the scent of flowers, and of spices—cinnamon from India and the Pacific, cassia from China, camphor from Japan, cloves and anise, and faded petals of pomegranate. For these a thousand men and a thousand women laboured with tears, upon the sea or in terrific foreign forests, or in sweet home valleys among the dew on briers and grasses. A thousand more strained for an early grave, at work on the palaces that rose beside the most crystal rivers, in the remotest and loveliest woods, by the bluest seas. Thousands that knew not Felix brought exquisite feathers from Africa and the Pacific, rubies and lapis lazuli from Tartary, oranges and citrons and lemons from Spain and Persia, dates from Mesopotamia, flowers from Japan.

Felix derided the far-heard curses of these people.

Had he not a myriad troops, accomplished in dazzling armour, sagely captained, and all of a bodily vigour and grace approved by himself ?

He knew no fear.

The people's murmurs added but a remote thundering bass to the great music which all his days he loved and listened to.

However, this bass by degrees became a discordant part. It rose above the delicate trebles and languid tenors; and he would fain have retreated unto where the harmony would again have been perfect. But presently they saw sharp flames devouring the sky at the horizon, and clear even at sunset. Some of his warriors arrived with ugly purple stains across their armour: one of them never came back. . . . The season was autumn, fast changing to winter. In the wood the leaves twitched. Winds blew in gusty circles and on the water left traces like a serpent's. Now and then a leaf dropped, and trundled along the ground, hopping, quaking, never at rest. There was a gloom about the forest that inspired a vague foreboding. Thunder or the echoes of it more than once skirted the bounds of hearing.

One day a snake, only half torpid, was found in a fruit-basket meant for the palace.

Servants at very distant stations began to disobey. A spice galleon was decoyed to a reef, and everything on board was sunk with the wreck.

A slave, in the palace itself, killed another, who had undertaken a peculiarly humiliating

task at the command of Lucian. He was rewarded in the dungeon by the fate of the beasts. But the experiment was frustrate.

Something was amiss with Lucian even. It was autumn with him, though his locks were glossy black and his feet rapid in the dance. He wrote, forsooth,

> Lo! in the heart of summer buds—the worm,

and though he laughed, a sigh followed.

Felix was a little anxious, thinking of the experiments. Once, indeed, he descended to watch the poisoning of a favourite panther that was ageing. "I would die an exquisite death," he said. Yet the experiments were very barren so far.

A little after this, news came that the people had created chiefs of their own and were clearly marching toward the palace. There was no doubt of it. The villagers on their line of march made no resistance. A skirmishing company of royal soldiers fell into their hands and was destroyed, to a man.

By Lucian's order, the music in the palace was loudened, and now continued day and night.

At last, in the mirror, the king himself saw

a buckler flash. There were swords in the wood near by. So the royal army surrounded the palace with their lines; and the siege began.

Within, a picture absorbed every effort of the artists, and Felix watched it coming as it were nearer and nearer each day—or as if the painters did but uncover the details artfully one by one. A set of verses, by himself and Lucian, was nearly finished; the slave had begun to carve them on marble. Felix and Lucian had sunshine all day in the purple winter chamber: and as the siege developed, the season sank into a wonderful golden calm, pleasanter than all those remembered by king or poet. Shrieks of pain, explosions and the following crash and fall, the shouts of rage or exhortation, were the same when they reached the secluded chamber; they became a mere ghostly tapping at window or wall. Roused by a louder tap, the king opened the door and looking out saw nothing. "Ah me!" he said, "who was that?" With white face, a slave answered: "The rebels give way."

A great defensive bastion had fallen, and one of the rebel chieftains killed, with difficulty, at the palace-door.

The music rose louder still, though Lucian foresaw that in spite of all things the sterner music of the conflict must triumph.

Not long afterwards, the chemist sent a slave to announce that his wildest hopes had been fulfilled. "Ralph," he explained, "lies dead like a statue." The corpse was brought up, and it was a noble sight. Ralph was a famous rebel captured lately: his white limbs were crossed and somewhat bent, without a stain; his back was upright, and his head, though leaning sideways rather, so that his hair lay all on one shoulder, seemed to sleep, very peacefully; his eyes were half opened, of a sparkling grey. "My good chemist henceforth shall rest until death, in luxury," exclaimed the delighted king.

In the night, however, the body vanished, and next day led once more the rebel onset.

The good weather continued, and the delicate poplar near the prince's window had not let fall one leaf, though every one was of gold. So "Come," said the king one day, in his naturally even mood, "come, let us ascend to the armoury of my forefathers, the kings. This fellow will show us the way, which I forget;

for since my father carried me there and put old Stephen's helmet upon my head—it covered my shoulders and I screamed in the darkness—I have never returned. At that time, he said he would wish me to die with that on my head—the dear, brave madman! he died at forty, and his black hair was always grizzled. Come, dearest Lucian."

The slave walked first, with ponderous keys; Felix came after, bandying a tune; the poet far behind, at a pensive pace, with bended neck. At the door they paused all together, and silent. The key would not be turned in the lock.

"Burst the door," said the king.

They burst the door, but all saving Felix drew back. The armoury was pitch-black, hard wings beat their eyes, soft wings lifted the dust of years. A bat squeaked. Owls hooted. A starling, perched somewhere, called out: "This is the day!"

"I taught her that myself," said Felix.

"The day of victory!" continued the starling.

Presently bat and owl were gone, and the slave went forward and let in the day by a narrow window, then took the coverings one by one from the armour, that began to gleam

in a lengthening line, as when lamps are lit beside a great river at nightfall.

There was tawny blood on one sword, which the king sat down to clean, while the slave told the legend of this and that piece of armour. To Felix it was a somewhat wearisome roll; and he scarce looked up from the sword, until the slave said sonorously: "These greaves your father wore when he broke the pirate legions. This helmet was cloven on your grandfather's head at the same battle. The breastplates here——" Felix heard no more, except the slave's admiration—"What a blow! how vast a shoulder!"

Outside, there was a shout of victory, to which the starling answered, in delight: "This is the day of victory." Doors were being forced, below.

The sword flashed as Felix laid it down. "Save yourself!" he cried to the slave: "But no, stay: close the door: bar it with your arm: and do you, Lucian, Lucian, my dearest friend, bring me my father's armour. Come, my poet! we shall die an exquisite death. You are grandly dressed as you are: that azure garment well becomes you. But bring me the armour quickly!"

He put it on, carefully, slowly, like a bridesmaid dressing before a mirror.

"Now the crown. . . . That is well," said Felix.

Lucian praised him, and he seated himself upon the throne, the sword across his knees unscabbarded. One delicate hand was free, a mailed gauntlet upon the other. His flushed cheek and winged eyebrows were just visible. In that attire, he looked like Cupid, masked as Mars, and far unlike his father, the tall, straight hero—with a black beard, grim and like a gravedigger's shovel.

By this time the enemy was at the door. They demanded a surrender, and hearing no reply, burst open the door. The slave lay writhing. The invaders could see nothing, and drew back in a sort of fear. Then first one, afterwards another, and finally a host, crept in and lined the wall opposite to Felix and Lucian. Both were silent; though now and then the king whispered a jest. Their calmness was torturing the rebels, who stirred neither hand nor foot, when their captain bade an archer take his stand over against the throne and shoot. The string had ceased to quiver. . . .

Felix turned to his friend, saying, "Would that Clement were here, with his canvas! I have a mind to ask the rebel's leave." He laughed. "But now," added he, "take the chisel and finish this verse."

"Your rhyme is at fault, my Felix. I swear your rhyme is at fault," said Lucian.

Here the rebels gave a cry. The archer had fired, striking the king upon the temple, so that his head fell upon his shoulder. Again he fired; the arrow tore its way through the poet's silken raiment into his side, and caused a groan. The rebels had now come forward.

"Now, by Apollo!" murmured Lucian, "you must not rhyme Romeo with row; you must not, Felix."

(1899.)

BRONWEN

XII

BRONWEN: A WELSH IDYLL

It was cool dawn on the summits of the hills. The daisy was unawakened yet in the glen, and a light mist slept across the fields beneath. Low down in the rosy drift of sunrise hung the new moon, on tip-toe, as it seemed, for flight; a brief time only it hung; and at length it dropped as the light added, on the purple peals of comfrey, bell to bell. Now, too, lark met nightingale for the last time of the year in song. For the season was the midst of June. It was the time of the white wild rose and the purple cranesbill, and the streaked convolvulus braiding dry paths.

And already Bronwen is in the grass beside her home. Lonely and content, she leans with a whisper of singing over her sweet toil, looking up seldom, and then only to number the stars that die one by one in the hot sky, or to answer the honied tones of the swallows passing her

head. Or she plucks a blossom for her brow. So, all the time, she is happy, thinking sweet thoughts in her loneliness, and in the shade of her own wild hair. For about her neck the weight of yellow hair dropped and spread, and upon the flowers, as she bent shoulder-deep in the June grass. Like marble is her form as she stoops still at her toil: like a cloud whenever she turns in her place. Her skin is like a lily; but the summer has found out the rosy life of her veins; and Bronwen is like the anemone of March. She is beautiful. But she is alone. Perhaps the light poplar-tree beside the mere longs to throw its shadow in the crystal; with her was it even so. And the agrimony wands have taken fire in the green grass.

So Bronwen sings and toils; and now, as she sits, a white star broadens and grows bright towards her out of the east, like Mercury kindling through a purple that deepens on to moonrise. She has seen this star and looks. What is it? Sometimes it burns, and sometimes it fades from sight; yet it is too constant for a sea wave catching the sunbeam at slowly returning intervals. A star of heaven it can

scarce be. Nor certainly is it a swell of the crystal air of summer flashing as oftentimes it will like a shifted shield. How like it is to the shimmer of battle steel! But then it moves slowly and alone and steadily; and for a time there is peace between the Round Table and the world. A shield, nevertheless, it is, coming to her out of the silver distance of dawn.

Looking wistfully and placidly toward the shield, like a child staring at vacancy, Bronwen pauses but a moment; then gathers up the web and instruments of her toil into her grasp; and so vanishes through the purple gloom of the ivy at her porch. Nor does she stay at the wide opened door, though the shield flash to her from the foot of the hill.

Knight and steed and shield are crossing the grass beside the home.

A bough from the fresh wood is in his hand, drooping across the saddle. His lips murmur with song momentarily, but mostly are still. And he comes out of the fastnesses of dawn clad in a liquid splendour as if bathed in that pure light which made silver of the raindrops along the moss of the wall. Eager to taste the rich morning air, he has doffed his helmet, thus dis-

closing his face. Mark the placidity with which dawn has moulded it, and the keen lines drawn by the desire of all the features to drink to the uttermost what the hour gives. Save behind, where it will escape mercurially from the clasped helm, his gold hair is close. Black, however, is the hue of his brows, and arched in tranquil purity. At first glimpse, everything shows immense capacity for delight; at the next, a tyrannous self-mastery, a strenuous content with disappointment, which would be sad but at such an hour. But his face ripples and shifts with expression in the manner of pools where gusts chase the lines of waves with changing shade and light. By the fashion of it, he has listened to many sounds, bitter and sweet. Sights without number, too, he has seen, many a sunrising and sunsetting.

Now he halts with a happy sigh like one baiting at a well-known door.

So he stands beside Bronwen's home; he gazes, and for him the flowers are shining from the garden, for him the dark ivy leaf turns to silver as it winks in its own massed glooms. Thus he waits. Waits? But he knows not that he waits, nor why he unlinks his steel and stops his horse.

Meantime, like one who goes on an errand long before appointed, Bronwen has stepped to her bower and laid by her toil. Quietly and without haste, carefully as if she robed herself for bridal, she has put off her antique silk in exchange for a festival raiment of white, drawing it from the spicy darkness with the joy of a village maiden on her rare holiday. For one minute only she stays proudly in her loneliness, without glass or mirror. Then she sweeps to the gate, to meet a guest that might have been accustomed and well known. She is there. And how her arms rise in unconscious welcome as she notes the smile meeting her own at their first sight! "A fair journey, Sir Knight!" cries Bronwen, "and may our country be kind to you." He laughs, and in reply, "Good day, lovely maiden!" cries he, "and may men be kind to you, as Heaven is kind. Wish you happy, I cannot; for I see you full of the summer and the fair weather and the dawn and this sweet place, happy thus beyond the might of my wish." Joyously she answers him. "It is fair, indeed, on my hillside this month, but lonely. Many days I see naught that moves. The knights are in the wars beyond Gwynedd.

How, then, has a hoof from Camelot reached me and stayed even a moment? On our festival day, too, finding me thus alone, the festival at the quieting of the nightingale in the hazels beside the brown Gwili—the beautiful Gwili!" Here she follows the swift's flight as it reels to the Gwili river in the south. "I am indeed from Camelot, and in peace, happily. On a blithe errand, too, I come: to carry a missive of betrothal between a lord of the white south shore and a princess of this land. I shall have toil to find her; I have seen none for leagues. Lovely she must be, if you are one of her maidens." So speaks Sir Agravaine. "Come! you will never find her. Let me have the missive. I promise, I will guard it with care from messenger so welcome as yourself. For you would never find her. The land, as you say, is lonely. Besides, for to-day, you shall be my guest: it is our wont: never would June be kind to us if we forgot her festival, which, being alone, I was like to do." He answers quickly, "On such an errand, you must needs be a sure messenger. And, as to your asking, Lady! I am glad to stay on my march. When others are thus arranging their pleasures through us,

surely their ministers may rejoice together. And may I see you at Camelot for the bridal!" She looks again to the Gwili. "As to that last, who knows what our Princess will grant? Besides, I love my home: there I was born, there I ply my sweet toil: my mother, too, sleeps there in the sun even now; and with her my baby sister, who cries now—hark! Let me go. I will haste. Now also I will hide the scrolls safely; for a day they shall stay closed; we will not risk chance under such heavens. See! the lark is weary with over-sweet. He does but flit singing from tuft to tuft: yet I think the voice sweeter thus than in soaring. Let me guard, also, that fresh bough in your hand, lest the sun looks on withered green before it is midsummer." So Sir Agravaine gives her the bough. "You shall take the larch sprig," he cries, "but at my gift. Keep it. I wait."

She runs: and when she is lost to his eyes, he rapidly lightens himself of the great steel and stalls his horse on the dry brown beneath the beech. A while he stays beside the crystal beginnings of a stream, his soul swayed and mazed by the motion of the waters, when, swift as a great liking, she returns to him. The

green larch twig is at her girdle. Let the June sun be tender to it !

Together they seek the alders of Gwili, the hazels of its raised banks, and the windy gorse beyond. Talking sweetly, and sweetly making silence, they go. At one time she points him the gathered children plucking flowers in the field. "How they hasten, leaving half the host of flowers, in their gay strife ! They cross the field, passing and repassing one another, and again overtaken, carelessly and hastily, like a flock of starlings." And one of the sweet small voices from the south sings hidden in the green leaves overhanging Gwili. They reach the moneywort gold of the banks, and her first care is to bury his armour in flowers. "There ! You shall not go from me until they fade." So she cries. "I have had a care; be sure; the alders of the Gwili are close, and the sun will be tender to these, ay ! and to me." White wild rose, therefore, heavy purple crane's-bill, gold and green gorse picked easily by fine fingers, yellow flag, honeysuckle, and all the heaped sweets of summer, dim the great steel which blood only has dimmed before this.

They try together the forgotten path of the

ancients, or pass where only the children of future time will again make a way. Now they stop to look on the sparkling fords, or where girls dip pitchers in the fast water; and the water shines as it drops from the mouth of the pitcher; and the girls laugh as they wait. Now they see a lonely child in robes of white sailing flat reeds for boats in the reaches of calm. And far off, at intervals so long that each is forgotten before one succeeds, great seas fall heavily on the shore. Masts cross and interlace on the shining sea. At times they see a white cloud scale the immense sky, hover thinned almost to nothing by the sun, and dip to hills and sea, leaving the sky bare for hours. Once, as she threads a thicket of fern, she cries aloud with a cry of pain. He is with her. "Is it a snake?" She has crushed a flower. And so they pass: and the dew is dry almost in the coolest hollows of the wood.

Sweetly they talk of the sweets of silence, they brood sweetly in silence over the sweets of past speech. They are happy. She shows him the lonely footprints of her childish walks, or fears for her baby sister, or laughs at to-day. As they pause together on the green steeps, he

names to her knight after knight travelling the pass with song. Here, men are charging beneath them, but as in dream: they see only the flash of armour. Here white maidens dance, but as in dream. Masts, clouds, hosts, all move like stars.

Dusk mellows into evening, and the lily over the steel smells once more of the earth from which it came, pleasant in death. The moon rounds the forest slowly from tree to tree. The lonely night passes, while the home of Bronwen paves the rising white footsteps of the moon. And the knight rides quietly into the blue west: and Bronwen is lost awhile to the south wind: and the bee swoons in the meadowsweet beside the brook Gwili. But, as they tell, Bronwen the Princess, on Midsummer Day, married Sir Agravaine at Camelot, before the larch spray had lost scent in her girdle.

(1903.)

MIKE

XIII

MIKE

For two or three years it had begun to be assumed and the probability even mentioned aloud that Mike would some day die. Not that there was any evidence that would bear sifting by one who was intimate with him. He was strong and hearty, and never had any wretchedness except when I threw a stick at him in anger. Looking back, we could say that his life's thread was spun "round and full out of their softest and their whitest wool" by the Fates. He could still walk as far as ever. If I travelled twenty or thirty miles over the Downs he would walk and run two or three times as far. For he was nearly always hunting at full speed, visible or audible half a mile away, or he was examining every inch of the path, seeking an excuse to be off; and if that was not to be found he would look up to see whether I was thinking or otherwise inattentive to him,

and then, his thievish thighs endued suddenly with all the wolf, he was off at his best speed which no shout could stop. In the rapture of the hunt his bark became a song, but as a rule it was hard and explosive.

Seven years before, when he became mine for five shillings—he was a stray—I used in my ignorance to beat him for hunting. Never having thought about it, I took it for granted that the habit was bad because dangerous and forbidden, and also a piece of wantonness and defiant self-indulgence. I did not cure him; I did not even make him dislike me; and therefore I began to laugh at the folly of lashing myself into a fury at the vice of disobedience under the pretext of improving the morals of an excellent dog. He forgave me so readily that it took some time for me to forgive myself. And so for seven years not a day passed but he hunted, and many were his whole nights spent in the woods. It was he who discovered for me that a partridge is eatable in May. He had no evil conscience by nature or from me, and so was often superficially unwise in choosing his bird; he would make his leap into the hedge where the partridge lay when the landlord was

only a few seconds distant. But I learnt that there is a providence watching over such simple wants. However much the pheasant screamed as it flew a few yards and then dropped with fear to run certain other yards before the dog, no harm came except to the bird; as the glade rang with screams of alarm and yelps of delight I tried to look as if Mike was not mine; the keeper was beneficently detained or deaf.

He was a magically fortunate dog, and it was fore-ordained, that however boldly he might be leaping through a wood, he was always to alight with his four feet clear of traps. Wire nooses he often ran into, and many a hare and rabbit he must have saved by first entering a snare intended for them and then freeing himself by force or subtlety, returning sometimes with the wire and its peg still fastened on his leg as an inconvenient decoration. As he hunted in his first year so he did when the judicial minds, who knew nothing of him except what they believe to be common to all dogs, began to aver that he was getting old, with a kind of smile that one so mighty and so much vaunted should be giving way before them. They pointed out that he was silvering everywhere, that his head

was almost pure white, that he lay dozing long after the house was astir; but I could see no real reason for believing that this change might not go on, as the phrase is, " for ever," and then when he was all silver he might have another life as a silver dog. So with his teeth. It was evident that the fangs which held on to a stick while humorists swung him giddily round and round were now very much shorter (I concede this), but still they held on; he ate as well as ever; he drew blood from the enemy as before. If a stump was as useful as the polished and pointed fang, why should not the bare gum of the hero be equal to the stump ?

Gradually I got into the frame of mind which was no longer violently hostile to the proposition that one day Mike would die. But this did not affect my faith; it was an intellectual position with no influence on life.

He was no ordinary dog. That, the sceptics tell me, goes without saying: they argue that because all people regard their favourite dogs as extraordinary, therefore all, including Mike, are ordinary and will turn white, lose their teeth and die. In the main he was an Irish terrier. But his hair was longer than

it "should have been," and paler and softer. His face was more pointed than was right; his ears, darker than the rest of him and silky (so that a child once fell asleep sucking one), usually hung down. His hindquarters approached those of a collie. Also his tail when he trotted along curled over his back and made children laugh aloud; but when he was thinking about the chase it hung in a horizontal bow; when stealing away or in full cry it was held slightly lower and no longer bent, and it flowed finely into the curves of his great speed. He was eloquent; his yawn alone, or the twitching of his eyebrows as he lay with head between extended paws, expressed a score of shades of emotion. He was very excitable, very tender-hearted, very pugnacious. He was a rough, swift dog, yellowish-brown above and almost white beneath, who was here, there and everywhere at once, importunate yet usually welcome and always forgiven. He would attack any dog of equal or greater size, and test the magnanimity of the mastiff and the churlishness of curs running behind carriers' carts. But if a little dog attacked him, he lifted up his head, fixed his eyes on me, and looked neither to left nor right,

but muttered: "You are neither dog nor cat; go away." As for a mouse, he thought it a kind of beetle, and was curious but kind. He would, however, kill wasps, baring his teeth to avoid the sting and snapping many times before the dividing blow.

I should like to be able to say that he had no tricks. The most splendid array of tricks only gives colour to the vulgar notion that a dog is, as it were, a human being manqué, a kind of pitiable amusing creature unfortunately denied the gifts of Smith and Brown. But this loud-voiced dog of violent ways, who leaped through a window unscathed, this fighter, this hunter, had been taught one trick before I had him: he would beg when commanded, but unwillingly and badly. The postman, cobbler, and parish clerk, a little wizened philosopher, would never let him beg for the lump of sugar which he carried as a daily gift: "I would never beg myself," he said, "and I don't like to see a noble animal beg neither." As for faults, I think he had them all, the faults, that is, which human beings call such in dogs—abruptness, invariable vivacity, the appetites . . .; they merged charmingly into his other qualities; isolated,

they looked like faults, but good and bad together swelled the energy, courage, and affection of his character. Wondering wherein lay my superiority to Mike, I found that it was in my power to send him out of the room—as it lay in Alfonso's power to shackle Tasso.

Once in his life he became, for one hour, a lap dog. A child had just been born in the house. In the evening all was very still and silent; strangers flitted up and down stairs and along passages; Mike's mistress was not to be seen as she lay motionless in bed, but from her side came cries which he had never before heard—therefore he leapt up into my lap and would not move for an hour. Seldom did he do a thing which harmonized so well with those soft brown eyes in a face that was all eyebrows.

So long as he was out of doors he was inexhaustible, and he took every opportunity of trying his strength by hunting, racing to and fro, and asking even strangers (with head on one side, eyes expectant, forelegs stamping as he alternately retreated slowly and leapt forward) to throw him a stick or stone. Perhaps it was in this expectant attitude that he looked his best, every limb braced, his steps firm and

delicate as he tripped backward obliquely, his ears erect, his mouth open, and white teeth, flame-like tongue and brown eyes gleaming together as he repeated his commanding bark. "What a nice piece of lean bacon it would make," said a child, looking at his tongue. He fought with every inch of his body, and his movements were no more to be followed than those of a wheel. His fury and alacrity never ceased until intervention ended the fight, however long. And as profound as his energy was his repose. After a fight or a night in the wood he showed no fatigue until he was indoors. Then he fell flat on his side and slept with quiverings and snuffling yaps; and even then anyone's movement of preparation for going out discovered a new fount of activity, and he was up and had burst out of the door before the latch was released.

When he was at least ten years old and looked very white slipping through the beeches and troubling the loves of the foxes under a full moon I confess that even I used sometimes to say that I hoped he would die in full career with a charge of shot in his brain. He never began to grow stout, and was never pampered; it could not be

thought of that he should come down to lying in the sun and taking quiet walks of a mile or so, and living on pity and memory and medicine, though memory, I think, he would have been spared. Better far that, if he had to make an end, one of the keepers (a good shot) should help him to it in the middle of his hunting. That would have been a fortunate death, as deaths go.

But he did not die. He forced himself through a dense hedge of blackthorn, came out combed and fine, stood hesitating among the first celandines, and was off after a hare. He never came back. If he could not bolt out of this world into a better, where there is hunting for ever, yet with his head on one side, ears cocked, eyes bright, he would not be refused entrance by any quadruped janitor of Paradise. But then we do not know what stage the belief in a future life has reached among dogs, and whatever the dogmas, heresies, scientific doctrines (that the fleshly dog manifestly does not survive, etc.), they doubtless have no power to influence the law and lawgiver, which are unknown to those it most nearly concerns. I only hope Mike is—or, rather, I wish he were—somehow,

still hunting. There seemed no reason why he should not go on for ever.

I tried to believe that each one of the Cleeve houses had a canary, or a book, or piece of furniture, or an Irish terrier, to slip a kind of a soul in among its walls—that is in the case of houses not occupied by persons whom Christianity or Maeterlinck has gifted with souls.

(1911.)

SAVED TIME

XIV

SAVED TIME

I DREAMED that I walked far along a solitary and unknown road. Nobody met or passed me, and though I looked through many gateways on either hand I saw nobody at work in the vast plains. Nor had I passed or seen anywhere in the land one house, one coil of hearth smoke, or even one ruin, when suddenly at the roadside between two trunks of oak, and under their foliage two small windows gleamed faintly in the shadow. The glass was dark with cobwebs, dead spiders, and dead flies caught in the webs of the dead spiders; nothing could be seen through it but vague forms, yet darker than the darkness within, such as are to be seen under water in a momentary half calm. But there was a door between the two windows, and I entered as if I had been expected, though never had I seen or heard before of a house in the heart of an empty and boundless wilderness, but resembling

a low second-hand furniture or marine store in a decayed part of London.

The door would not open wider than just to admit me sideways, so full was the room of its shadowy wares. These were all objects for holding things—cupboards, chests, and nests of drawers of all kinds, delicate cabinets, heavy oak chests, boxes massive or flimsy and of every material and workmanship, some no bigger than children's money-boxes, iron safes, small decorated caskets of ivory, metals, and precious woods, bags and baskets, and resting in numbers or solitary on the larger articles were trinkets with lids, snuff-boxes, and the like. They were clear and dark in a light of underground, the rows and piles that I could see mysteriously suggested one invisible infinity of others. As I trod a haze of dust rained and whispered unceasingly down upon them and from off them. Through this haze, or out of it in some way, like an animal out of its lair, appeared a small old grey man with cobweb hair, whiskers, and eyebrows, and blue eyes that flashed out of the cobwebs and dust whenever they moved. His large long grey hands wriggled and twitched like two rats cleaning themselves. He was all

head and hands, and shadowy grey clothing connected him with the carpetless floor of rotten planks on which he made no sound. The dust fell upon him unnoticed and from time to time dribbled from his hair and beard to the ground.

"This," said I suddenly, "is a useful kind of box. I should like to open it, if I may, to see whether it would suit me. It is for papers that I shall never look at again, but may serve to light a fire or make a footnote for an historian in my grandchildren's time. If you would brush the dust off . . ."

"Have you the key?" he asked in a voice that made my throat itch into a cough. Did he think me a locksmith, or what? I was annoyed, but said questioningly, "No."

"Then I am afraid it cannot be yours."

"But of course not. I wish to buy it."

"It is not for sale."

"It is reserved then for one of the multitude upon this highway?"

"Well, yes. But I hardly expect the owner to come for it now. It has been here some fifty years."

"You can't sell it?"

"Oh, no! I assure you it would be of no use except to its owner. It is full."

I rapped it, thickening the haze of dust and glancing at him to see the effect of the hollow sound on his expression. It had not the effect I expected, but he raised his eyes for a moment and said:

"You hear? It is quite full."

I smiled with a feeling in which amused expectation swamped my contempt for his deceit.

"You have made a mistake. Try one of the others," he said patiently.

I cast about for something as suitable, and having found an old oak tool-box of not too heavy make, I pointed to it and asked if he would open it. Again he replied simply:

"Have you the key?"

"Naturally not."

"Most unnaturally not. But if you have not, then the box cannot be opened. I am afraid, sir, you have come under a pretence or a mistake. This box, like all the other receptacles here is owned by someone who alone has the power to open it, if he wishes. They are stored here because it is found that they are seldom wanted. All are full. They contain nothing but time."

"Time?"

"Yes, time. It is abundant, you perceive. All those boxes, bags, etc., contain time. Down below"—here he pointed to the decayed floor—"we have more, some of them as much as fifty thousand years old."

"Then probably you have time to explain," I said, hardly covering my amazement, and in a moment awed by the reverberation of my words in a cavern which the echoes proclaimed as without end. The planks rippled under me. My eyes wandered over the shop until they stopped at a very small copper box enamelled on the sides with a green pattern as delicate as the grass-blade armour of a grasshopper; the top had the usual grey fur of dust.

"What is here?" I asked.

"That is the time saved by Lucy Goldfinch and Robert Ploughman twenty years ago. They were lovers, and used to walk every Saturday afternoon along the main road for a mile, and then by green lanes three miles more, until they came to a farm where her uncle kept twenty-five cows, and there the old man and his wife gave them tea. After they had been doing this for two years Robert learnt a path

going straight from the main road to the farm, thus saving a mile or nearly an hour, for they kissed at the gates. By and by they gave up kissing at the stiles and found that they could walk the whole way in three-quarters of an hour. Soon afterwards they were married. She died long ago, but he probably has her key. Neither of them has ever called here. This," he continued, touching a plain deal box with iron edges, " This is another box of his. After they had been married a little while he thought there was no good reason for walking three miles into the town to his work, so they moved into the town. The time thus saved was deposited in this box and it also has not been called for."

Against Robert Ploughman's box was a solemn chest of oak with panelled sides, and I asked what it was.

" This may have to go back at any time," said the manager. " Many times Mr. Beam has been expected to send for it, though it is only three or four years old. He was a squire, whose day was full from morning till night with country works and pleasures, mostly the same thing. There was no doubt that he did very much, what with planting, building,

and so on, and that he liked doing it. Sometimes he used to turn his horse Fencer up an old road and let him do as he liked, while he himself sat on a gate and read Virgil, at least such parts as he had succeeded in thoroughly understanding at school. But at last the horse died and before he had begun to remember at the thought of the old road that Fencer really was dead, a kind friend gave him a motor car. He could not read Virgil in a motor car nor could he go up the old road, so that it was clear that he saved many hours a week. Those saved in this way are sent down here, but as he has not yet learned what to do with them or had any need of them, here they remain."

He spoke with the same grey voice, scattering dust from his beard as his lips moved. I glanced here and there. The boxes were without end and I could no longer see the windows and door. The room was vast, and neither walls nor ceiling could be seen through the rows and piles. Most were of similar pattern. They were square, made of yellowish brown tin, or deal, or wicker, of about the size which holds the property of a young general servant. In the midst of some of these monotonous groups

were chests or cabinets of more massive or more delicate make. I pointed to one of the groups and asked what they contained. He thrust his finger through the dust on top of the master box which was an iron safe.

"This," he said, "holds the savings of a man who invented machines for saving time. In a few years he grew rich and bought the chief house of his native parish. He employed four gardeners. He did not live there, but occasionally paid visits with business friends. The boxes you see round about belong to his less fortunate neighbours in the parish. They also have saved time. For when he went out into the world the women used to bake their own bread, make most of the family clothes, and work in the fields half the year. Now they do none of these things, but they have saved time."

No ordinary shopman could have refrained from pride in the neat regiment of boxes over which he waved his hands at these words. But he turned with me to a solitary cabinet at the side of another group. It might have been supposed to hold letters or a few hundred cigars, and was scarcely large enough for my purpose.

"It contains," he said, "the savings of a young journalist. He was an industrious youth, earning a living without quite knowing why or how. He bit off the ends of many penholders, and often blackened his mouth with ink. He had an old pewter inkstand, once the property of a great-great-grandfather who was a pirate. He used to say that out of this inkstand he got more than ink, but his friends proved that this was not so by emptying it and showing that it was free from sediment. They advised him to buy a fountain pen because it wasted no time and it was impossible to bite the end of it. This he did. He no longer bit his pen or paused with the nib in his inkstand which was now put on his mantelpiece and polished faithfully once a week. He saved a quantity of time as his friends told him; but he did not notice it, for he continued to be industrious and to earn a living just as before. His friends, however, were right, and that box is full of the hours saved by him in ten years. It is not likely that he will come in search of them. He is busy saving more time. There are thousands of similar cabinets, saved by fountain pens, typewriters, cash registers, and the like. We have

also some millions ready for holding the hours to be saved by the navigation of the air."

He became verbose, enumerating tools, processes and machines for time saving. In one parish alone enough time was saved to extend back to William the Conqueror; in some cities it went beyond the landing of Cæsar to the Stone Age and even, according to some calculators, to the Eolithic Age—if such an age there ever was. But most of this time was now in the underground chambers that gave so solemn a resonance to my footsteps. To this too mathematical monologue I was indifferent and I strayed here and there until I seemed to recognize a home-made chest of deal. I had made several myself of the same pattern in former years. The proportions and peculiar workmanship marked this one surely as mine. I felt in my pocket for my keys and with some agitation chose one from the bunch. Yes! . . . No, not quite. Or . . . I could not open it. Yet I could have sworn. . . . Meantime the manager had come up.

"This is my chest," said I excitedly.

"Have you the key?" he asked.

"This almost fits."

"Then you must wait until you have found the right one. People sometimes lose their keys. This chest contains . . ."

But what he said was so absurdly true that I raised my hand to strike him. He fled. I followed, thundering after him through the haze of dust and the myriad chests and caskets. I slid, I waded, I leapt, with incredible feats of speed and agility after the silent grey man until he went perpendicularly down. I plunged after him into space, to end, I suppose, among the boxes containing hours saved in the time of Lear; but I awoke before I had touched ground in that tremendous apartment. Forcing myself asleep again I recovered the dream and heard much more from the shopman which it would be tedious or ridiculous to mention.

(1911.)

THE MOON

XV

THE MOON

As I could not sleep indoors, I thought I might be able to out of doors. The host and hostess were not yet in bed so I told them of my plan and went out. The full moon was halfway up the sky behind a sheet of gauze here and there gathered into folds. It was as white as the few clouds about it in the low sky. The earth was a massive black island in space with lakes of moonblaze on the plains and mists of moonlit chalk on the hills amid the blackness. My road was a river of light that gave no light as it wound into black and out to white. And there, low down beneath me or high above, I saw light on a portion of the trunk of one tree only in the dark wood. Low down it was like a fire burning without a sound or a motion, and no figures of men around it. To express the mystery of it a man would have to use better fairies than were ever yet seen or, at

any rate, depicted in book or poem. Those fairies would have to express the gaiety in what is solemn, a kind of comedy and even frivolity of law. In Rossetti's "Match with the Moon" there is too much of the man and too little of the moon, but it is a kind of beginning of what I want. I was a pure accident: there was no one whatever to see, and the moonlight was playing alone among the trees. If I had fancied it was playing for me and that I imagined the playing it would have been different. It would not have been the same if it had amused me: it was no more amusing than the majesty of the moon. I suppose I was near to imagining a deity with as little anthropomorphism as possible, certainly without personification. This was the kind of play that makes the frost flowers on dead sticks in the woods on winter nights. It had a kind of divine prettiness, a holy trickiness as of an angelic columbine. But the solemnity had always the upper hand whether the white fire was at a tree foot or nested just under the ripples of the wood surface.

I buried myself in a haycock not far from the trees and fell asleep thinking that the sky was a pool strewn with swansdown along the

currents. The wash of waves among the reeds at the edges of the land was, I suppose, the unceasing rhythmless sound of wind in the trees. I awoke several times in the face of the same white moon and immense woods, seething always in the light continuous wind.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS, LIMITED,
GUILDFORD AND ESHER

PR
6039
T35c