AT THE WHITE GATE

Michael Fairless

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CHAPTER I

A GREAT joy has come to me; one of those unexpected gifts which life loves to bestow after we have learnt to loose our grip of her. I am back in my own place very near my road the white gate lies within my distant vision; near the lean grey Downs which keep watch and ward between the country and the sea; very near, nay, in the lap of Mother Earth, for as I write I am lying on a green carpet, powdered yellow and white with the sun's own flowers; overhead a great sycamore where the bees toil and sing; and sighing shimmering poplars golden grey against the blue. The day of Persephone has dawned for me, and I, set free like Demeter's child, gladden my eyes with this foretaste of coming radiance, and rest my tired sense with the scent and sound of home. Away down the meadow I hear the early scythe song, and the warm air is fragrant with the fallen grass. It has its own message for me as I lie here, I who have obtained yet one more mercy, and the burden of it is life, not death.

I remember when, taking a grace from my road, I helped to mow Farmer Marler's ten−acre field, rich in ripe upstanding grass. The mechanism of the ancient reaper had given way under the strain of the home meadows, and if this crop was to be saved it must be by hand. I have kept the record of those days of joyous labour under a June sky. Men were hard to get in our village; old Dodden, who was over seventy, volunteered his services he had done yeoman work with the scythe in his youth and two of the farm hands with their master completed our strength.

We took our places under a five o'clock morning sky, and the larks cried down to us as we stood knee−deep in the fragrant dew−steeped grass, each man with his gleaming scythe poised ready for its sweeping swing. Old Dodden led by right of age and ripe experience; bent like a sickle, brown and dry as a nut, his face a tracery of innumerable wrinkles, he has never ailed a day, and the cunning of his craft was still with him. At first we worked stiffly, unreadily, but soon the monotonous motion possessed us with its insistent rhythm, and the grass bowed to each sibilant swish and fell in sweet−smelling swathes at our feet. Now and then a startled rabbit scurried through the miniature forest to vanish with white flick of tail in the tangled hedge; here and there a mother lark was discovered sitting motionless, immovable upon her little brood; but save for these infrequent incidents we paced steadily on with no speech save the cry of the hone on the steel and the swish of the falling swathes. The sun rose high in the heaven and burnt on bent neck and bare and aching arms, the blood beat and drummed in my veins with the unwonted posture and exercise; I worked as a man who sees and hears in a mist. Once, as I paused to whet my scythe, my eye caught the line of the untroubled hills strong and still in the broad sunshine; then to work again in the labouring, fertile valley.

Rest time came, and wiping the sweat from brow and blade we sought the welcome shadow of the hedge and the cool sweet oatmeal water with which the wise reaper quenches his thirst. Farmer Marler hastened off to see with master−eye that all went well elsewhere; the farm men slept tranquilly, stretched at full length, clasped hands for

pillow; and old Dodden, sitting with crooked fingers interlaced to check their trembling betrayal of old age, told how in his youth he had "swep" a four−acre field single−handed in three days an almost impossible feat and of the first reaping machine in these parts, and how it brought, to his thinking, the ruin of agricultural morals with it. "'Tis again nature," he said, "the Lard gave us the land an' the seed, but 'Ee said that a man should sweat. Where's the sweat drivin' round wi' two horses cuttin' the straw down an' gatherin' it again, wi' scarce a hand's turn i' the day's work?"

Old Dodden's high−pitched quavering voice rose and fell, mournful as he surveyed the present, vehement as he recorded the heroic past. He spoke of the rural exodus and shook his head mournfully. "We old 'uns were content wi' earth and the open sky like our feythers before us, but wi' the children 'tis first machines to save doin' a hand's turn o' honest work, an' then land an' sky ain't big enough seemin'ly, nor grand enough; it must be town an' a paved street, an' they sweat their lives out atwixt four walls an' call it seein' life 'tis death an' worse comes to the most of 'em. Ay, 'tis better to stay by the land, as the Lard said, till time comes to lie under it." I looked away across the field where the hot air throbbed and quivered, and the fallen grass, robbed already of its freshness, lay prone at the feet of its upstanding fellows. It is quite useless to argue with old Dodden; he only shakes his head and says firmly, "An old man, seventy−five come Martinmass knows more o' life than a young chap, stands ter reason"; besides, his epitome of the town life he knows nothing of was a just one as far as it went; and his own son is the sweeper of a Holborn crossing, and many other things that he should not be; but that is the parson's secret and mine.

We took rank again and swept steadily on through the hot still hours into the evening shadows, until the sinking sun set a GLORIA to the psalm of another working day. Only a third of the field lay mown, for we were not skilled labourers to cut our acre a day; I saw it again that night under the moonlight and the starlight, wrapped in a shroud of summer's mist.

The women joined us on the third day to begin haymaking, and the air was fragrant of tossed and sun−dried grass. One of them walked apart from the rest, without interest or freedom of movement; her face, sealed and impassive, was aged beyond the vigour of her years. I knew the woman by sight, and her history by hearsay. We have a code of morals here not indeed peculiar to this place or people that a wedding is 'respectable' if it precedes child−birth by a bare month, tolerable, and to be recognised, should it succeed the same by less than a year (provided the pair are not living in the same village); but the child that has never been 'fathered' and the wife without a ring are 'anathema,' and such in one was Elizabeth Banks. She went away a maid and came back a year ago with a child and without a name. Her mother was dead, her father and the village would have none of her: the homing instinct is very strong, or she would scarcely have returned, knowing the traditions of the place. Old Dodden, seeing her, grumbled to me in the rest−time. "Can't think what the farmer wants wi' Lizzie Banks in 'is field." "She must live," I said, "and by all showing her life is a hard one." "She 'ad the makin' of 'er bed," he went on, obstinately. "What for do she bring her disgrace home, wi' a fatherless brat for all folks to see? We don't want them sort in our village. The Lord's hand is heavy, an' a brat's a curse that cannot be hid."

When tea−time came I crossed the field to look for a missing hone, and saw Elizabeth Banks far from the other women, busied with a bundle under the hedge. I passed close on my search, and lo! the bundle was a little boy. He lay smiling and stretching, fighting the air with his small pink fists, while the wind played with his curls. "A curse that cannot be hid," old Dodden had said. The mother knelt a moment, devouring him with her eyes, then snatched him to her with aching greed and covered him with kisses. I saw the poor, plain face illumined, transfigured, alive with a mother's love, and remembered how the word came once to a Hebrew prophet:−

Say unto your brethren Ammi, and to your sisters Ruhamah.

The evening sky was clouding fast, the sound of rain was in the air; Farmer Marler shook his head as he looked at the grass lying in ordered rows. I was the last to leave, and as I lingered at the gate drinking in the scent of the field and the cool of the coming rain, the first drops fell on my upturned face and kissed the poor dry swathes at

my feet, and I was glad.

David, child of the fields and the sheepfolds, his kingship laid aside, sees through the parted curtain of the years the advent of his greater Son, and cries in his psalm of the hilltops, his last prophetic prayer:−

He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass.

Even so He came, and shall still come. Three days ago the field, in its pageant of fresh beauty, with shimmering blades and tossing banners, greeted sun and shower alike with joy for the furtherance of its life and purpose; now, laid low, it hears the young grass whisper the splendour of its coming green; and the poor swathes are glad at the telling, but full of grief for their own apparent failure. Then in great pity comes the rain, the rain of summer, gentle, refreshing, penetrating, and the swathes are comforted, for they know that standing to greet or prostrate to suffer, the consolations of the former and the latter rain are still their own, with tender touch and cool caress. Then, once more parched by the sun, they are borne away to the new service their apparent failure has fitted them for; and perhaps as they wait in the dark for the unknown that is still to come they hear sometimes the call of the distant rain, and at the sound the dry sap stirs afresh they are not forgotten and can wait.

"SAY UNTO YOUR SISTERS RUHAMAH," cries the prophet.

"HE SHALL COME DOWN LIKE RAIN ON THE MOWN GRASS," sang the poet of the sheepfolds.

"MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS, SAITH THE LORD."

I remember how I went home along the damp sweet−scented lanes through the grey mist of the rain, thinking of the mown field and Elizabeth Banks and many, many more; and that night, when the sky had cleared and the nightingale sang, I looked out at the moon riding at anchor, a silver boat in a still blue sea ablaze with the headlights of the stars, and the saying of the herdsman of Tekoa came to me as it has come oftentimes since:−

Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of earth; the Lord is His name.

CHAPTER II

THIS garden is an epitome of peace; sun and wind, rain, flowers, and birds gather me into the blessedness of their active harmony. The world holds no wish for me, now that I have come home to die with my own people, for verify I think that the sap of grass and trees must run in my veins, so steady is their pull upon my heart− strings. London claimed all my philosophy, but the country gives all, and asks of me only the warm receptivity of a child in its mother's arms.

When I lie in my cool light room on the garden level, I look across the bright grass IL VERDE SMALTO to a great red rose bush in lavish disarray against the dark cypress. Near by, amid a tangle of many−hued corn−flowers I see the promise of coming lilies, the sudden crimson of a solitary paeony; and in lowlier state against the poor parched earth glow the golden cups of the eschseholtzias. Beyond the low hedge lies pasture bright with buttercups, where the cattle feed. Farther off, where the scythe has been busy, are sheep, clean and shorn, with merry, well−grown lambs; and in the farthest field I can see the great horses moving in slow steady pace as the farmer turns his furrow.

The birds are noisy comrades and old friends, from the lark which chants the dew−steeped morning, to the nightingale that breaks the silence of the most wonderful nights. I hear the wisdom of the rooks in the great elms;

the lifting lilt of the linnet, and the robin's quaint little summer song. The starlings chatter ceaselessly, their queer strident voices harsh against the melodious gossip of the other birds; the martins shrill softly as they swoop to and fro busied with their nesting under the caves; thrush and blackbird vie in friendly rivalry like the Meister− singer of old; sometimes I hear the drawling cry of a peacock strayed from the great house, or the laugh of the woodpecker; and at night the hunting note of the owl reaches me as he sweeps by in search of prey.

To−day I am out again; and the great sycamore showers honey and flowers on me as I lie beneath it. Sometimes a bee falls like an over−ripe fruit, and waits awhile to clean his pollen−coated legs ere he flies home to discharge his burden. He is too busy to be friendly, but his great velvety cousin is much more sociable, and stays for a gentle rub between his noisy shimmering wings, and a nap in the hollow of my hand, for he is an idle friendly soul with plenty of time at his own disposal and no responsibilities. Looking across I can watch the martins at work; they have a starling and a sparrow for near neighbours in the wooden gutter. One nest is already complete all but the coping, the other two are a−building: I wonder whether I or they will be first to go south through the mist.

This great tree is a world in itself, and the denizens appear full of curiosity as to the Gulliver who has taken up his abode beneath it. Pale green caterpillars and spiders of all sizes come spinning down to visit me, and have to be persuaded with infinite difficulty to ascend their threads again. There are flies with beautiful iridescent wings, beetles of all shapes, some of them like tiny jewels in the sunlight. Their nomenclature is a sealed book to me; of their life and habits I know nothing; yet this is but a little corner of the cosmos I am leaving, and I feel not so much desire for the beauty to come, as a great longing to open my eyes a little wider during the time which remains to me in this beautiful world of God's making, where each moment tells its own tale of active, progressive life in which there is no undoing. Nature knows naught of the web of Penelope, that acme of anxious pathetic waiting, but goes steadily on in ever widening circle towards the fulfilment of the mystery of God.

There are, I take it, two master−keys to the secrets of the universe, viewed SUB SPECIE AETERNITATIS, the Incarnation of God, and the Personality of Man; with these it is true for us as for the pantheistic little man of contemptible speech, that "all things are ours," yea, even unto the third heaven.

I have lost my voracious appetite for books; their language is less plain than scent and song and the wind in the trees; and for me the clue to the next world lies in the wisdom of earth rather than in the learning of men. "LIBERA ME AB FUSCINA HOPHNI," prayed the good Bishop fearful of religious greed. I know too much, not too little; it is realisation that I lack, wherefore I desire these last days to confirm in myself the sustaining goodness of God, the love which is our continuing city, the New Jerusalem whose length, breadth, and height are all one. It is a time of exceeding peace. There is a place waiting for me under the firs in the quiet churchyard; thanks to my poverty I have no worldly anxieties or personal dispositions; and I am rich in friends, many of them unknown to me, who lavishly supply my needs and make it ideal to live on the charity of one's fellow−men. I am most gladly in debt to all the world; and to Earth, my mother, for her great beauty.

I can never remember the time when I did not love her, this mother of mine with her wonderful garments and ordered loveliness, her tender care and patient bearing of man's burden. In the earliest days of my lonely childhood I used to lie chin on hand amid the milkmaids, red sorrel, and heavy spear−grass listening to her many voices, and above all to the voice of the little brook which ran through the meadows where I used to play: I think it has run through my whole life also, to lose itself at last, not in the great sea but in the river that maketh glad the City of God. Valley and plain, mountain and fruitful field; the lark's song and the speedwell in the grass; surely a man need not sigh for greater loveliness until he has read something more of this living letter, and knelt before that earth of which he is the only confusion.

It is a grave matter that the word religion holds such away among us, making the very gap seem to yawn again which the Incarnation once and for ever filled full. We have banished the protecting gods that ruled in river and mountain, tree and grove; we have gainsayed for the most part folk−lore and myth, superstition and fairy−tale, evil only in their abuse. We have done away with mystery, or named it deceit. All this we have done in an

enlightened age, but despite this policy of destruction we have left ourselves a belief, the grandest and most simple the world has ever known, which sanctifies the water that is shed by every passing cloud; and gathers up in its great central act vineyard and cornfield, proclaiming them to be that Life of the world without which a man is dead while he liveth. Further, it is a belief whose foundations are the most heavenly mystery of the Trinity, but whose centre is a little Child: it sets a price upon the head of the sparrow, and reckons the riches of this world at their true value; it points to a way of holiness where the fool shall not err, and the sage may find the realisation of his far−seeking; and yet, despite its inclusiveness, it is a belief which cannot save the birds from destruction, the silent mountains from advertisement, or the stream from pollution, in an avowedly Christian land. John Ruskin scolded and fought and did yeoman service, somewhat hindered by his over−good conceit of himself; but it is not the worship of beauty we need so much as the beauty of holiness. Little by little the barrier grows and 'religion' becomes a RULE of life, not life itself, although the Bride stands ready to interpret, likened in her loveliness to the chief treasures of her handmaid−Earth. There is more truth in the believing cry, "Come from thy white cliffs, O Pan!" than in the religion that measures a man's life by the letter of the Ten Commandments, and erects itself as judge and ruler over him, instead of throwing open the gate of the garden where God walks with man from morning until morning.

As I write the sun is setting; in the pale radiance of the sky above his glory there dawns the evening star; and earth like a tired child turns her face to the bosom of the night.

CHAPTER III

ONCE again I have paid a rare visit to my tree to find many things changed since my last sojourn there. The bees are silent, for the honey−laden flowers of the sycamore are gone and in their place hang dainty two−fold keys. The poplar has lost its metallic shimmer, the chestnut its tall white candles; and the sound of the wind in the fully−leaved branches is like the sighing of the sea. The martins' nests are finished, and one is occupied by a shrill− voiced brood; but for the most part the birds' parental cares are over, and the nestlings in bold flight no longer flutter on inefficient wings across the lawn with clamorous, open bill. The robins show promise of their ruddy vests, the slim young thrush is diligently practising maturer notes, and soon Maid June will have fled.

It is such a wonderful world that I cannot find it in my heart to sigh for fresh beauty amid these glories of the Lord on which I look, seeing men as trees walking, in my material impotence which awaits the final anointing. The marigolds with their orange suns, the lilies' white flame, the corncockle's blue crown of many flowers, the honeysuckle's horn of fragrance I can paraphrase them, name, class, dissect them; and then, save for the purposes of human intercourse, I stand where I stood before, my world bounded by my capacity, the secret of colour and fragrance still kept. It is difficult to believe that the second lesson will not be the sequence of the first, and death prove a "feast of opening eyes" to all these wonders, instead of the heavy−lidded slumber to which we so often liken it. "Earth to earth?" Yes, "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," but what of the rest? What of the folded grave clothes, and the Forty Days? If the next state be, as it well might, space of four dimensions, and the first veil which will lift for me be the material one, then the "other" world which is hidden from our grosser material organism will lie open, and declare still further to my widening eyes and unstopped ears the glory and purpose of the manifold garment of God. Knowledge will give place to understanding in that second chamber of the House of Wisdom and Love. Revelation is always measured by capacity: "Open thy mouth wide," and it shall be filled with a satisfaction that in itself is desire.

There is a child here, a happy quiet little creature holding gently to its two months of life. Sometimes they lay it beside me, I the more helpless of the two perhaps the more ignorant and equally dependent for the supply of my smallest need. I feel indecently large as I survey its minute perfections and the tiny balled fist lying in my great palm. The little creature fixes me with the wise wide stare of a soul in advance of its medium of expression; and I, gazing back at the mystery in those eyes, feel the thrill of contact between my worn and sustained self and the innocence of a little white child. It is wonderful to watch a woman's rapturous familiarity with these newcomers.

A man's love has far more awe in it, and the passionate animal instinct of defence is wanting in him. "A woman shall be saved through the child−bearing," said St Paul; not necessarily her own, but by participation in the great act of motherhood which is t open, and declare still further to my widening eyes and unstopped ears the glory and purpose of the manifold garment of God. Knowledge will give place to understanding in that second chamber of the House of Wisdom and Love. Revelation is always measured by capacity: "Open thy mouth wide," and it shall be filled with a satisfaction that in itself is desire.

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It seems incredible that this is what a woman will barter for the right to "live her own life"—surely the most empty of desires. Man − VIR, woman—FEMINA, go to make up THE man—HOMO. There can be no comparison, no rivalry between them; they are the complement of each other, and a little child shall lead them. It is easy to understand that desire to shelter under the dear mantle of motherhood which has led to one of the abuses of modern Romanism. I met an old peasant couple at Bornhofen who had tramped many weary miles to the famous shrine of Our Lady to plead for their only son. They had a few pence saved for a candle, and afterwards when they told me their tale the old woman heaved a sigh of relief, "Es wird bald gut gehen: Die da, Sie versteht," and I saw her later paying a farewell visit to the great understanding Mother whom she could trust. Superstitious misapprehension if you will, but also the recognition of a divine principle.

It was Behmen, I believe, who cried with the breath of inspiration, "Only when I know God shall I know myself"; and so man remains the last of all the riddles, to be solved it may be only in Heaven's perfection and the light of the Beatific Vision. "Know thyself" is a vain legend, the more so when emphasised by a skull; and so I company with a friend and a stranger, and looking across at the white gate I wonder concerning the quiet pastures and still waters that lie beyond, even as Brother Ambrose wondered long years ago in the monastery by the forest.

The Brother Ambrose was ever a saintly man approved of God and beloved by the Brethren. To him one night, as he lay abed in the dormitory, came the word of the Lord, saying, "Come, and I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb's wife." And Brother Ambrose arose and was carried to a great and high mountain, even as in the Vision of Blessed John. 'Twas a still night of many stars, and Brother Ambrose, looking up, saw a radiant path in the heavens; and lo! the stars gathered themselves together on either side until they stood as walls of light, and the four winds lapped him about as in a mantle and bore him towards the wondrous gleaming roadway. Then between the stars came the Holy City with roof and pinnacle aflame, and walls aglow with such colours as no earthly limner dreams of, and much gold. Brother Ambrose beheld the Gates of Pearl, and by every gate an angel with wings of snow and fire, and a face no man dare look on because of its exceeding radiance.

Then as Brother Ambrose stretched out his arms because of his great longing, a little grey cloud came out of the north and hung between the walls of light, so that he no longer beheld the Vision, but only heard a sound as of a great multitude crying 'Alleluia'; and suddenly the winds came about him again, and lo! he found himself in his bed in the dormitory, and it was midnight, for the bell was ringing to Matins; and he rose and went down with the rest. But when the Brethren left the choir Brother Ambrose stayed fast in his place, hearing and seeing nothing because of the Vision of God; and at Lauds they found him and told the Prior.

He questioned Brother Ambrose of the matter, and when he heard the Vision bade him limn the Holy City even as he had seen it; and the Precentor gave him uterine vellum and much fine gold and what colours he asked for the work. Then Brother Ambrose limned a wondrous fair city of gold with turrets and spires; and he inlaid

blue for the sapphire, and green for the emerald, and vermilion where the city seemed aflame with the glory of God; but the angels he could not limn, nor could he set the rest of the colours as he saw them, nor the wall of stars on either hand; and Brother Ambrose fell sick because of the exceeding great longing he had to limn the Holy City, and was very sad; but the Prior bade him thank God, and remember the infirmity of the flesh, which, like the little grey cloud, veiled Jerusalem to his sight.

As I write the monastery bell hard by rings out across the lark's song. They still have time for visions behind those guarding walls, but for most of us it is not so. We let slip the ideal for what we call the real, and the golden dreams vanish while we clutch at phantoms: we speed along life's pathway, counting to the full the sixty minutes of every hour, yet the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Lying here in this quiet backwater it is hard to believe that the world without is turbulent with storm and stress and the ebb and flow of uncertain tides. The little yellow cat rolling on its back among the daisies, the staid tortoise making a stately meal off the buttercups near me, these are great events in this haven of peace. And yet, looking back to the working days, I know how much goodness and loving kindness there is under the froth and foam. If we do not know ourselves we most certainly do not know our brethren: that revelation awaits us, it may be, first in Heaven. To have faith is to create; to have hope is to call down blessing; to have love is to work miracles. Above all let us see visions, visions of colour and light, of green fields and broad rivers, of palaces laid with fair colours, and gardens where a place is found for rosemary and rue.

It is our prerogative to be dreamers, but there will always be men ready to offer us death for our dreams. And if it must be so let us choose death; it is gain, not loss, and the gloomy portal when we reach it is but a white gate, the white gate maybe we have known all our lives barred by the tendrils of the woodbine.

CHAPTER IV

RAIN, rain, rain: the little flagged path outside my window is a streaming way, where the coming raindrops meet again the grey clouds whose storehouse they have but just now left. The grass grows greener as I watch it, the burnt patches fade, a thousand thirsty beads are uplifted for the cooling draught.

The great thrush that robs the raspberry canes is busy; yesterday he had little but dust for his guerdon, but now fresh, juicy fruit repays him as he swings to and fro on the pliant branches. The blackbirds and starlings find the worms an easy prey—poor brother worm ever ready for sacrifice. I can hear the soft expectant chatter of the family of martins under the roof; there will be good hunting, and they know it, for the flies are out when the rain is over, and there are clamorous mouths awaiting. My little brown brothers, the sparrows, remain my chief delight. Of all the birds these nestle closest to my heart, be they grimy little cockneys or their trim and dainty country cousins. They come day by day for their meed of crumbs spread for them outside my window, and at this season they eat leisurely and with good appetite, for there are no hungry babies pestering to be fed. Very early in the morning I hear the whirr and rustle of eager wings, and the tap, tap, of little beaks upon the stone. The sound carries me back, for it was the first to greet me when I rose to draw water and gather kindling in my roadmender days; and if I slip back another decade they survey me, reproving my laziness, from the foot of the narrow bed in my little attic overseas.

Looking along the roadway that we have travelled we see the landmarks, great and small, which have determined the direction of our feet. For some those of childhood stand out above all the rest; but I remember few notable ones, and those few the emphatic chord of the universe, rather than any commerce with my fellows. There was the night of my great disappointment, when I was borne from my comfortable bed to see the wonders of the moon's eclipse. Disappointment was so great that it sealed my lips; but, once back on my pillow, I sobbed for grief that I had seen a wonder so far below my expectation. Then there was a night at Whitby, when the wind made speech impossible, and the seas rushed up and over the great lighthouse like the hungry spirits of the deep. I like better to remember the scent of the first cowslip field under the warm side of the hedge, when I sang to myself for pure joy of their colour and fragrance. Again, there were the bluebells in the deserted quarry like the backwash of a southern sea, and below them the miniature forest of sheltering bracken with its quaint conceits; and, crowned above all, the day I stood on Watcombe Down, and looked across a stretch of golden gorse and new−turned blood− red field, the green of the headland, and beyond, the sapphire sea.

Time sped, and there came a day when I first set foot on German soil and felt the throb of its paternity, the beat of our common Life. England is my mother, and most dearly do I love her swelling breasts and wind−swept, salt−strewn hair. Scotland gave me my name, with its haunting derivation handed down by brave men; but Germany has always been to me the Fatherland PAR EXCELLENCE. True, my love is limited to the southern provinces, with their medieval memories; for the progressive guttural north I have little sympathy, but the Rhine claimed me from the first, calling, calling, with that wonderful voice which speaks of death and life, of chivalry and greed of gold. If you would have the river's company you should wander, a happy solitary, along its banks, watching its gleaming current in the early morning, its golden glory as it answers the farewell of parting day. Then, in the silence of the night, you can hear the wash and eddy calling one to another, count the heart−beats of the great bearer of burdens, and watch in the moonlight the sisters of the mist as they lament with wringing hands the days that are gone.

The forests, too, are ready with story hid in the fastness of their solitude, and it is a joy to think that those great pines, pointing ever upwards, go for the most part to carry the sails of great ships seeking afar under open sky. The forest holds other wonders still. It seems but last night that I wandered down the road which led to the little unheeded village where I had made my temporary home. The warm−scented breath of the pines and the stillness of the night wrapped me in great content; the summer lightning leapt in a lambent arch across the east, and the stars, seen dimly through the sombre tree crests, were outrivalled by the glow−worms which shone in countless points of light from bank and hedge; even two charcoal−burners, who passed with friendly greeting, had wreathed their hats with the living flame. The tiny shifting lamps were everywhere; pale yellow, purely white, or

green as the underside of a northern wave. By day but an ugly, repellent worm; but darkness comes, and lo, a star alight. Nature is full for us of seeming inconsistencies and glad surprises. The world's asleep, say you; on your ear falls the nightingale's song and the stir of living creatures in bush and brake. The mantle of night falls, and all unattended the wind leaps up and scatters the clouds which veil the constant stars; or in the hour of the great dark, dawn parts the curtain with the long foregleam of the coming day. It is hard to turn one's back on night with her kiss of peace for tired eye− lids, the kiss which is not sleep but its neglected forerunner. I made my way at last down to the vine−girt bridge asleep under the stars and up the winding stairs of the old grey tower; and a stone's−throw away the Rhine slipped quietly past in the midsummer moonlight. Switzerland came in its turn, unearthly in its white loveliness and glory of lake and sky. But perhaps the landmark which stands out most clearly is the solitary blue gentian which I found in the short slippery grass of the Rigi, gazing up at the sky whose blue could not hope to excel it. It was my first; and what need of another, for finding one I had gazed into the mystery of all. This side the Pass, snow and the blue of heaven; later I entered Italy through fields of many−hued lilies, her past glories blazoned in the flowers of the field.

Now it is a strangely uneventful road that leads to my White Gate. Each day questions me as it passes; each day makes answer for me "not yet." There is no material preparation to be made for this journey of mine into a far country—a simple fact which adds to the 'unknowableness' of the other side. Do I travel alone, or am I one of a great company, swift yet unhurried in their passage? The voices of Penelope's suitors shrilled on the ears of Ulysses, as they journeyed to the nether−world, like nocturnal birds and bats in the inarticulateness of their speech. They had abused the gift, and fled self−condemned. Maybe silence commends itself as most suitable for the wayfarers towards the sunrise—silence because they seek the Word − but for those hastening towards the confusion they have wrought there falls already the sharp oncoming of the curse.

While we are still here the language of worship seems far, and yet lies very nigh; for what better note can our frail tongues lisp than the voice of wind and sea, river and stream, those grateful servants giving all and asking nothing, the soft whisper of snow and rain eager to replenish, or the thunder proclaiming a majesty too great for utterance? Here, too, stands the angel with the censer gathering up the fragrance of teeming earth and forest−tree, of flower and fruit, and sweetly pungent herb distilled by sun and rain for joyful use. Here, too, come acolytes lighting the dark with tapers—sun, moon, and stars—gifts of the Lord that His sanctuary may stand ever served.

It lies here ready to our hand, this life of adoration which we needs must live hand in hand with earth, for has she not borne the curse with us? But beyond the white gate and the trail of woodbine falls the silence greater than speech, darkness greater than light, a pause of "a little while"; and then the touch of that healing garment as we pass to the King in His beauty, in a land from which there is no return.

At the gateway then I cry you farewell.