OUT OF THE SHADOW

Michael Fairless

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CHAPTER I

I AM no longer a roadmender; the stretch of white highway which leads to the end of the world will know me no more; the fields and hedgerows, grass and leaf stiff with the crisp rime of winter's breath, lie beyond my horizon; the ewes in the folding, their mysterious eyes quick with the consciousness of coming motherhood, answer another's voice and hand; while I lie here, not in the lonely companionship of my expectations, but where the shadow is bright with kindly faces and gentle hands, until one kinder and gentler still carries me down the stairway into the larger room.

But now the veil was held aside and one went by crowned with the majesty of years, wearing the ermine of an unstained rule, the purple of her people's loyalty. Nations stood with bated breath to see her pass in the starlit mist of her children's tears; a monarch greatest of her time; an empress conquered men called mother; a woman Englishmen cried queen; still the crowned captive of her people's heart the prisoner of love.

The night−goers passed under my window in silence, neither song nor shout broke the welcome dark; next morning the workmen who went by were strangely quiet.

'VICTORIA DEI GRATIA BRITANNIARUM REGINA.'

Did they think of how that legend would disappear, and of all it meant, as they paid their pennies at the coffee−stall? The feet rarely know the true value and work of the head; but all Englishmen have been and will be quick to acknowledge and revere Victoria by the grace of God a wise woman, a great and loving mother.

Years ago, I, standing at a level crossing, saw her pass. The train slowed down and she caught sight of the gatekeeper's little girl who had climbed the barrier. Such a smile as she gave her! And then I caught a quick startled gesture as she slipped from my vision; I thought afterwards it was that she feared the child might fall. Mother first, then Queen; even so rest came to her not in one of the royal palaces, but in her own home, surrounded by the immediate circle of her nearest and dearest, while the world kept watch and ward.

I, a shy lover of the fields and woods, longed always, should a painless passing be vouchsafed me, to make my bed on the fragrant pine needles in the aloneness of a great forest; to lie once again as I had lain many a time, bathed in the bitter sweetness of the sun−blessed pines, lapped in the manifold silence; my ear attuned to the wind of Heaven with its call from the Cities of Peace. In sterner mood, when Love's hand held a scourge, I craved rather the stress of the moorland with its bleaker mind imperative of sacrifice. To rest again under the lee of

Rippon Tor swept by the strong peat−smelling breeze; to stare untired at the long cloud− shadowed reaches, and watch the mist−wraiths huddle and shrink round the stones of blood; until my sacrifice too was accomplished, and my soul had fled. A wild waste moor; a vast void sky; and naught between heaven and earth but man, his sin−glazed eyes seeking afar the distant light of his own heart.

With years came counsels more profound, and the knowledge that man was no mere dweller in the woods to follow the footsteps of the piping god, but an integral part of an organised whole, in which Pan too has his fulfilment. The wise Venetians knew; and read pantheism into Christianity when they set these words round Ezekiel's living creatures in the altar vault of St Mark's:−

QUAEQUE SUB OBSCURIS DE CRISTO DICTA FIGURIS HIS APERIRE DATUR ET IN HIS, DEUS IPSE NOTATUR.

"Thou shalt have none other gods but me." If man had been able to keep this one commandment perfectly the other nine would never have been written; instead he has comprehensively disregarded it, and perhaps never more than now in the twentieth century. Ah, well! this world, in spite of all its sinning, is still the Garden of Eden where the Lord walked with man, not in the cool of evening, but in the heat and stress of the immediate working day. There is no angel now with flaming sword to keep the way of the Tree of Life, but tapers alight morning by morning in the Hostel of God to point us to it; and we, who are as gods knowing good and evil, partake of that fruit "whereof whoso eateth shall never die"; the greatest gift or the most awful penalty Eternal Life.

I then, with my craving for tree and sky, held that a great capital with its stir of life and death, of toil and strife and pleasure, was an ill place for a sick man to wait in; a place to shrink from as a child shrinks from the rude blow of one out of authority. Yet here, far from moor and forest, hillside and hedgerow, in the family sitting−room of the English−speaking peoples, the London much misunderstood, I find the fulfilment by antithesis of all desire. For the loneliness of the moorland, there is the warmth and companionship of London's swift beating heart. For silence there is sound the sound and stir of service for the most part far in excess of its earthly equivalent. Against the fragrant incense of the pines I set the honest sweat of the man whose lifetime is the measure of his working day. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" wrote Blessed John, who himself loved so much that he beheld the Lamb as it had been slain from the beginning when Adam fell, and the City of God with light most precious. The burden of corporate sin, the sword of corporate sorrow, the joy of corporate righteousness; thus we become citizens in the Kingdom of God, and companions of all his creatures. "It is not good that the man should be alone," said the Lord God.

I live now as it were in two worlds, the world of sight, and the world of sound; and they scarcely ever touch each other. I hear the grind of heavy traffic, the struggle of horses on the frost− breathed ground, the decorous jolt of omnibuses, the jangle of cab bells, the sharp warning of bicycles at the corner, the swift rattle of costers' carts as they go south at night with their shouting, goading crew. All these things I hear, and more; but I see no road, only the silent river of my heart with its tale of wonder and years, and the white beat of seagulls' wings in strong inquiring flight.

Sometimes there is naught to see on the waterway but a solitary black hull, a very Stygian ferry−boat, manned by a solitary figure, and moving slowly up under the impulse of the far−reaching sweeps. Then the great barges pass with their coffined treasure, drawn by a small self−righteous steam−tug. Later, lightened of their load, and waiting on wind and tide, I see them swooping by like birds set free; tawny sails that mind me of red−roofed Whitby with its northern fleet; black sails as of some heedless Theseus; white sails that sweep out of the morning mist "like restless gossameres." They make the bridge, which is just within my vision, and then away past Westminster and Blackfriars where St Paul's great dome lifts the cross high over a self−seeking city; past Southwark where England's poet illuminates in the scroll of divine wisdom the sign of the Tabard; past the Tower with its haunting ghosts of history; past Greenwich, fairy city, caught in the meshes of riverside mist; and then the salt and speer of the sea, the companying with great ships, the fresh burden.

At night I see them again, silent, mysterious; searching the darkness with unwinking yellow stare, led by a great green light. They creep up under the bridge which spans the river with its watching eyes, and vanish, crying back a warning note as they make the upper reach, or strident hail, as a chain of kindred phantoms passes, ploughing a contrary tide.

Throughout the long watches of the night I follow them; and in the early morning they slide by, their eyes pale in the twilight; while the stars flicker and fade, and the gas lamps die down into a dull yellow blotch against the glory and glow of a new day.

CHAPTER II

FEBRUARY is here, February fill−dyke; the month of purification, of cleansing rains and pulsing bounding streams, and white mist clinging insistent to field and hedgerow so that when her veil is withdrawn greenness may make us glad.

The river has been uniformly grey of late, with no wind to ruffle its surface or to speed the barges dropping slowly and sullenly down with the tide through a blurring haze. I watched one yesterday, its useless sails half−furled and no sign of life save the man at the helm. It drifted stealthily past, and a little behind, flying low, came a solitary seagull, grey as the river's haze a following bird.

Once again I lay on my back in the bottom of the tarry old fishing smack, blue sky above and no sound but the knock, knock of the waves, and the thud and curl of falling foam as the old boat's blunt nose breasted the coming sea. Then Daddy Whiddon spoke.

"A follerin' burrd," he said.

I got up, and looked across the blue field we were ploughing into white furrows. Far away a tiny sail scarred the great solitude, and astern came a gull flying slowly close to the water's breast.

Daddy Whiddon waved his pipe towards it.

"A follerin' burrd," he said, again; and again I waited; questions were not grateful to him.

"There be a carpse there, sure enough, a carpse driftin' and shiftin' on the floor of the sea. There be those as can't rest, poor sawls, and her'll be mun, her'll be mun, and the sperrit of her is with the burrd."

The clumsy boom swung across as we changed our course, and the water ran from us in smooth reaches on either side: the bird flew steadily on.

"What will the spirit do?" I said.

The old man looked at me gravely.

"Her'll rest in the Lard's time, in the Lard's gude time but now her'll just be follerin' on with the burrd."

The gull was flying close to us now, and a cold wind swept the sunny sea. I shivered: Daddy looked at me curiously.

"There be reason enough to be cawld if us did but knaw it, but I he mos' used to 'em, poor sawls." He shaded his keen old blue eyes, and looked away across the water. His face kindled. "There be a skule comin', and by my sawl

'tis mackerel they be drivin'."

I watched eagerly, and saw the dark line rise and fall in the trough of the sea, and, away behind, the stir and rush of tumbling porpoises as they chased their prey.

Again we changed our tack, and each taking an oar, pulled lustily for the beach.

"Please God her'll break inshore," said Daddy Whiddon; and he shouted the news to the idle waiting men who hailed us.

In a moment all was stir, for the fishing had been slack. Two boats put out with the lithe brown seine. The dark line had turned, but the school was still behind, churning the water in clumsy haste; they were coming in.

Then the brit broke in silvery leaping waves on the shelving beach. The threefold hunt was over; the porpoises turned out to sea in search of fresh quarry; and the seine, dragged by ready hands, came slowly, stubbornly in with its quivering treasure of fish. They had sought a haven and found none; the brit lay dying in flickering iridescent heaps as the bare−legged babies of the village gathered them up; and far away over the water I saw a single grey speck; it was the following bird.

The curtain of river haze falls back; barge and bird are alike gone, and the lamplighter has lit the first gas−lamp on the far side of the bridge. Every night I watch him come, his progress marked by the great yellow eyes that wake the dark. Sometimes he walks quickly; sometimes he loiters on the bridge to chat, or stare at the dark water; but he always comes, leaving his watchful deterrent train behind him to police the night.

Once Demeter in the black anguish of her desolation searched for lost Persephone by the light of Hecate's torch; and searching all in vain, spurned beneath her empty feet an earth barren of her smile; froze with set brows the merry brooks and streams; and smote forest, and plain, and fruitful field, with the breath of her last despair, until even Iambe's laughing jest was still. And then when the desolation was complete, across the wasted valley where the starveling cattle scarcely longed to browse, came the dreadful chariot and Persephone. The day of the prisoner of Hades had dawned; and as the sun flamed slowly up to light her thwarted eyes the world sprang into blossom at her feet.

We can never be too Pagan when we are truly Christian, and the old myths are eternal truths held fast in the Church's net. Prometheus fetched fire from Heaven, to be slain forever in the fetching; and lo, a Greater than Prometheus came to fire the cresset of the Cross. Demeter waits now patiently enough. Persephone waits, too, in the faith of the sun she cannot see: and every lamp lit carries on the crusade which has for its goal a sunless, moonless, city whose light is the Light of the world.

"Lume e lassu, che visibile face lo creatore a quella creatura, che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace."

Immediately outside my window is a lime tree a little black skeleton of abundant branches in which sparrows congregate to chirp and bicker. Farther away I have a glimpse of graceful planes, children of moonlight and mist; their dainty robes, still more or less unsullied, gleam ghostly in the gaslight athwart the dark. They make a brave show even in winter with their feathery branches and swinging tassels, whereas my little tree stands stark and uncompromising, with its horde of sooty sparrows cockney to the last tail feather, and a pathetic inability to look anything but black. Rain comes with strong caressing fingers, and the branches seem no whit the cleaner for her care; but then their glistening blackness mirrors back the succeeding sunlight, as a muddy pavement will sometimes lap our feet in a sea of gold. The little wet sparrows are for the moment equally transformed, for the sun turns their dun−coloured coats to a ruddy bronze, and cries Chrysostom as it kisses each shiny beak. They are dumb Chrysostoms; but they preach a golden gospel, for the sparrows are to London what the rainbow was to eight saved souls out of a waste of waters a perpetual sign of the remembering mercies of God.

Last night there was a sudden clatter of hoofs, a shout, and then silence. A runaway cab−horse, a dark night, a wide crossing, and a heavy burden: so death came to a poor woman. People from the house went out to help; and I heard of her, the centre of an unknowing curious crowd, as she lay bonnetless in the mud of the road, her head on the kerb. A rude but painless death: the misery lay in her life; for this woman worn, white−haired, and wrinkled had but fifty years to set against such a condition. The policeman reported her respectable, hard−working, living apart from her husband with a sister; but although they shared rooms, they "did not speak," and the sister refused all responsibility; so the parish buried the dead woman, and thus ended an uneventful tragedy.

Was it her own fault? If so, the greater pathos. The lonely souls that hold out timid hands to an unheeding world have their meed of interior comfort even here, while the sons of consolation wait on the thresh−hold for their footfall: but God help the soul that bars its own door! It is kicking against the pricks of Divine ordinance, the ordinance of a triune God; whether it be the dweller in crowded street or tenement who is proud to say, "I keep myself to myself," or Seneca writing in pitiful complacency, "Whenever I have gone among men, I have returned home less of a man." Whatever the next world holds in store, we are bidden in this to seek and serve God in our fellow−men, and in the creatures of His making whom He calls by name.

It was once my privilege to know an old organ−grinder named Gawdine. He was a hard swearer, a hard drinker, a hard liver, and he fortified himself body and soul against the world: he even drank alone, which is an evil sign.

One day to Gawdine sober came a little dirty child, who clung to his empty trouser leg he had lost a limb years before with a persistent unintelligible request. He shook the little chap off with a blow and a curse; and the child was trotting dismally away, when it suddenly turned, ran back, and held up a dirty face for a kiss.

Two days later Gawdine fell under a passing dray which inflicted terrible internal injuries on him. They patched him up in hospital, and he went back to his organ−grinding, taking with him two friends a pain which fell suddenly upon him to rack and rend with an anguish of crucifixion, and the memory of a child's upturned face. Outwardly he was the same save that he changed the tunes of his organ, out of long−hoarded savings, for the jigs and reels which children hold dear, and stood patiently playing them in child−crowded alleys, where pennies are not as plentiful as elsewhere.

He continued to drink; it did not come within his new code to stop, since he could "carry his liquor well;" but he rarely, if ever, swore. He told me this tale through the throes of his anguish as he lay crouched on a mattress on the floor; and as the grip of the pain took him he tore and bit at his hands until they were maimed and bleeding, to keep the ready curses off his lips.

He told the story, but he gave no reason, offered no explanation: he has been dead now many a year, and thus would I write his epitaph:−

He saw the face of a little child and looked on God.

CHAPTER III

"TWO began, in a low voice, 'Why, the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a RED rose−tree, and we put a white one in by mistake.'"

As I look round this room I feel sure Two, and Five, and Seven, have all been at work on it, and made no mistakes, for round the walls runs a frieze of squat standard rose−trees, red as red can be, and just like those that Alice saw in the Queen's garden. In between them are Chaucer's name−children, prim little daisies, peering wideawake from green grass. This same grass has a history which I have heard. In the original stencil for the frieze it was purely conventional like the rest, and met in spikey curves round each tree; the painter, however,

who was doing the work, was a lover of the fields; and feeling that such grass was a travesty, he added on his own account dainty little tussocks, and softened the hard line into a tufted carpet, the grass growing irregularly, bent at will by the wind.

The result from the standpoint of conventional art is indeed disastrous; but my sympathy and gratitude are with the painter. I see, as he saw, the far−reaching robe of living ineffable green, of whose brilliance the eye never has too much, and in whose weft no two threads are alike; and shrink as he did from the conventionalising of that windswept glory.

The sea has its crested waves of recognisable form; the river its eddy and swirl and separate vortices; but the grass! The wind bloweth where it listeth and the grass bows as the wind blows "thou canst not tell whither it goeth." It takes no pattern, it obeys no recognised law; it is like a beautiful creature of a thousand wayward moods, and its voice is like nothing else in the wide world. It bids you rest and bury your tired face in the green coolness, and breathe of its breath and of the breath of the good earth from which man was taken and to which he will one day return. Then, if you lend your ear and are silent minded, you may hear wondrous things of the deep places of the earth; of life in mineral and stone as well as in pulsing sap; of a green world as the stars saw it before man trod it under foot of the emerald which has its place with the rest in the City of God.

"What if earth Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein, Each to each other like, more than on earth to thought?"

It is a natural part of civilisation's lust of re−arrangement that we should be so ready to conventionalise the beauty of this world into decorative patterns for our pilgrim tents. It is a phase, and will melt into other phases; but it tends to the increase of artificiality, and exists not only in art but in everything. It is no new thing for jaded sentiment to crave the spur of the unnatural, to prefer the clever imitation, to live in a Devachan where the surroundings appear that which we would have them to be; but it is an interesting record of the pulse of the present day that 'An Englishwoman's Love Letters' should have taken society by storm in the way it certainly has.

It is a delightful book to leave about, with its vellum binding, dainty ribbons, and the hallmark of a great publisher's name. But when we seek within we find love with its thousand voices and wayward moods, its shy graces and seemly reticences, love which has its throne and robe of state as well as the garment of the beggar maid, love which is before time was, which knew the world when the stars took up their courses, presented to us in gushing outpourings, the appropriate language of a woman's heart to the boor she delights to honour.

"It is woman who is the glory of man," says the author of 'The House of Wisdom and Love,' "REGINA MUNDI, greater, because so far the less; and man is her head, but only as he serves his queen." Set this sober aphorism against the school girl love−making which kisses a man's feet and gaily refuses him the barren honour of having loved her first.

There is scant need for the apologia which precedes the letters; a few pages dispels the fear that we are prying into another's soul. As for the authorship, there is a woman's influence, an artist's poorly concealed bias in the foreign letters; and for the rest a man's blunders so much easier to see in another than to avoid oneself writ large from cover to cover. King Cophetua, who sends "profoundly grateful remembrances," has most surely written the letters he would wish to receive.

"Mrs Meynell!" cries one reviewer, triumphantly. Nay, the saints be good to us, what has Mrs Meynell in common with the "Englishwoman's" language, style, or most unconvincing passion? Men can write as from a woman's heart when they are minded to do so in desperate earnestness there is Clarissa Harlowe and Stevenson's Kirstie, and many more to prove it; but when a man writes as the author of the "Love Letters" writes, I feel, as did the painter of the frieze, that pattern−making has gone too far and included that which, like the grass, should be spared such a convention.

"I quite agree with you," said the Duchess, "and the moral of that is 'Be what you would seem to be' or, if you'd like to put it more simply 'never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.'" And so by way of the Queen's garden I come back to my room again.

My heart's affections are still centred on my old attic, with boarded floor and white−washed walls, where the sun blazoned a frieze of red and gold until he travelled too far towards the north, the moon streamed in to paint the trees in inky wavering shadows, and the stars flashed their glory to me across the years. But now sun and moon greet me only indirectly, and under the red roses hang pictures, some of them the dear companions of my days. Opposite me is the Arundel print of the Presentation, painted by the gentle "Brother of the Angels." Priest Simeon, a stately figure in green and gold, great with prophecy, gazes adoringly at the Bambino he holds with fatherly care. Our Lady, in robe of red and veil of shadowed purple, is instinct with light despite the sombre colouring, as she stretches out hungering, awe−struck hands for her soul's delight. St Joseph, dignified guardian and servitor, stands behind, holding the Sacrifice of the Poor to redeem the First−begotten.

St Peter Martyr and the Dominican nun, gazing in rapt contemplation at the scene, are not one whit surprised to find themselves in the presence of eternal mysteries. In the Entombment, which hangs on the opposite wall, St Dominic comes round the corner full of grievous amaze and tenderest sympathy, but with no sense of shock or intrusion, for was he not "famigliar di Cristo"? And so he takes it all in; the stone bed empty and waiting; the Beloved cradled for the last time on His mother's knees to be washed, lapped round, and laid to rest as if He were again the Babe of Bethlehem. He sees the Magdalen anointing the Sacred Feet; Blessed John caring for the living and the Dead; and he, Dominic hound of the Lord having his real, living share in the anguish and hope, the bedding of the dearest Dead, who did but leave this earth that He might manifest Himself more completely.

Underneath, with a leap across the centuries, is Rossetti's picture; Dante this time the onlooker, Beatrice, in her pale beauty, the death−kissed one. The same idea under different representations; the one conceived in childlike simplicity, the other recalling, even in the photograph, its wealth of colour and imagining; the one a world−wide ideal, the other an individual expression of it.

Beatrice was to Dante the inclusion of belief. She was more to him than he himself knew, far more to him after her death than before. And, therefore, the analogy between the pictures has at core a common reality. "It is expedient for you that I go away," is constantly being said to us as we cling earthlike to the outward expression, rather than to the inward manifestation and blessed are those who hear and understand, for it is spoken only to such as have been with Him from the beginning. The eternal mysteries come into time for us individually under widely differing forms. The tiny child mothers its doll, croons to it, spends herself upon it, why she cannot tell you; and we who are here in our extreme youth, never to be men and women grown in this world, nurse our ideal, exchange it, refashion it, call it by many names; and at last in here or hereafter we find in its naked truth the Child in the manger, even as the Wise Men found Him when they came from the East to seek a great King. There is but one necessary condition of this finding; we must follow the particular manifestation of light given us, never resting until it rests over the place of the Child. And there is but one insurmountable hindrance, the extinction of or drawing back from the light truly apprehended by us. We forget this, and judge other men by the light of our own soul.

I think the old bishop must have understood it. He is my friend of friends as he lies opposite my window in his alabaster sleep, clad in pontifical robes, with unshod feet, a little island of white peace in a many−coloured marble sea. The faithful sculptor has given every line and wrinkle, the heavy eyelids and sunken face of tired old age, but withal the smile of a contented child.

I do not even know my bishop's name, only that the work is of the thirteenth century; but he is good to company with through the day, for he has known darkness and light and the minds of many men; most surely, too, he has known that God fulfils Himself in strange ways, so with the shadow of his feet upon the polished floor he rests in

peace.

CHAPTER IV

ON Sunday my little tree was limned in white and the sparrows were craving shelter at my window from the blizzard. Now the mild thin air brings a breath of spring in its wake and the daffodils in the garden wait the kisses of the sun. Hand−in−hand with memory I slip away down the years, and remember a day when I awoke at earliest dawn, for across my sleep I had heard the lusty golden−throated trumpeters heralding the spring.

The air was sharp−set; a delicate rime frosted roof and road; the sea lay hazy and still like a great pearl. Then as the sky stirred with flush upon flush of warm rosy light, it passed from misty pearl to opal with heart of flame, from opal to gleaming sapphire. The earth called, the fields called, the river called that pied piper to whose music a man cannot stop his ears. It was with me as with the Canterbury pilgrims:−

"So priketh hem nature in hir corages; Than longen folk to gon on pilgrimages."

Half an hour later I was away by the early train that carries the branch mails and a few workmen, and was delivered at the little wayside station with the letters. The kind air went singing past as I swung along the reverberating road between the high tree− crowned banks which we call hedges in merry Devon, with all the world to myself and the Brethren. A great blackbird flew out with a loud "chook, chook," and the red of the haw on his yellow bill. A robin trilled from a low rose−bush; two wrens searched diligently on a fallen tree for breakfast, quite unconcerned when I rested a moment beside them; and a shrewmouse slipped across the road followed directly by its mate. March violets bloomed under the sheltered hedge with here and there a pale primrose; a frosted bramble spray still held its autumn tints clinging to the semblance of the past; and great branches of snowy blackthorn broke the barren hedgeway as if spring made a mock of winter's snows.

Light of heart and foot with the new wine of the year I sped on again, stray daffodils lighting the wayside, until I heard the voice of the stream and reached the field gate which leads to the lower meadows. There before me lay spring's pageant; green pennons waving, dainty maids curtseying, and a host of joyous yellow trumpeters proclaiming 'Victory' to an awakened earth. They range in serried ranks right down to the river, so that a man must walk warily to reach the water's edge where they stand gazing down at themselves in fairest semblance like their most tragic progenitor, and, rising from the bright grass in their thousands, stretch away until they melt in a golden cloud at the far end of the misty mead. Through the field gate and across the road I see them, starring the steep earth bank that leads to the upper copse, gleaming like pale flames against the dark tree−boles. There they have but frail tenure; here, in the meadows, they reign supreme.

At the upper end of the field the river provides yet closer sanctuary for these children of the spring. Held in its embracing arms lies an island long and narrow, some thirty feet by twelve, a veritable untrod Eldorado, glorious in gold from end to end, a fringe of reeds by the water's edge, and save for that daffodils. A great oak stands at the meadow's neck, an oak with gnarled and wandering roots where a man may rest, for it is bare of daffodils save for a group of three, and a solitary one apart growing close to the old tree's side. I sat down by my lonely little sister, blue sky overhead, green grass at my feet decked, like the pastures of the Blessed, in glorious sheen; a sea of triumphant, golden heads tossing blithely back as the wind swept down to play with them at his pleasure.

It was all mine to have and to hold without severing a single slender stem or harbouring a thought of covetousness; mine, as the whole earth was mine, to appropriate to myself without the burden and bane of worldly possession. "Thou sayest that I am a King," said the Lord before Pilate, and "My kingdom is not of this world." We who are made kings after His likeness possess all things, not after this world's fashion but in proportion to our poverty; and when we cease to toil and spin, are arrayed as the lilies, in a glory transcending Solomon's. Bride Poverty she who climbed the Cross with Christ stretched out eager hands to free us from our chains, but we flee

from her, and lay up treasure against her importunity, while Amytas on his seaweed bed weeps tears of pure pity for crave−mouth Caesar of great possessions.

Presently another of spring's lovers cried across the water "Cuckoo, cuckoo," and the voice of the stream sang joyously in unison. It is free from burden, this merry little river, and neither weir nor mill bars its quick way to the sea as it completes the eternal circle, lavishing gifts of coolness and refreshment on the children of the meadows.

It has its birth on the great lone moor, cradled in a wonderful peat−smelling bog, with a many−hued coverlet of soft mosses pale gold, orange, emerald, tawny, olive and white, with the red stain of sun−dew and tufted cotton−grass. Under the old grey rocks which watch it rise, yellow−eyed tormantil stars the turf, and bids "Godspeed" to the little child of earth and sky. Thus the journey begins; and with ever−increasing strength the stream carves a way through the dear brown peat, wears a fresh wrinkle on the patient stones, and patters merrily under a clapper bridge which spanned its breadth when the mistletoe reigned and Bottor, the grim rock idol, exacted the toll of human life that made him great. On and on goes the stream, for it may not stay; leaving of its freshness with the great osmunda that stretches eager roots towards the running water; flowing awhile with a brother stream, to part again east and west as each takes up his separate burden of service my friend to cherish the lower meadows in their flowery joyance and so by the great sea−gate back to sky and earth again.

The river of God is full of water. The streets of the City are pure gold. Verily, here also having nothing we possess all things.

The air was keen and still as I walked back in the early evening, and a daffodil light was in the sky as if Heaven mirrored back earth's radiance. Near the station some children flitted past, like little white miller moths homing through the dusk. As I climbed the hill the moon rode high in a golden field it was daffodils to the last.

CHAPTER V

THE seagulls from the upper reaches pass down the river in sober steady flight seeking the open sea. I shall miss the swoop and circle of silver wings in the sunlight and the plaintive call which sounds so strangely away from rock and shore, but it is good to know that they have gone from mudbank and murky town back to the free airs of their inheritance, to the shadow of sun−swept cliffs and the curling crest of the wind−beaten waves, to brood again over the great ocean of a world's tears.

My little tree is gemmed with buds, shy, immature, but full of promise. The sparrows busied with nest−building in the neighbouring pipes and gutters use it for a vantage ground, and crowd there in numbers, each little beak sealed with long golden straw or downy feather.

The river is heavy with hay barges, the last fruits of winter's storehouse; the lengthening days slowly and steadily oust the dark; the air is loud with a growing clamour of life: spring is not only proclaimed, but on this Feast she is crowned, and despite the warring wind the days bring their meed of sunshine. We stand for a moment at the meeting of the ways, the handclasp of Winter and Spring, of Sleep and Wakening, of Life and Death; and there is between them not even the thin line which Rabbi Jochanan on his death−bed beheld as all that divided hell from heaven.

"SPHAERA CUJUS CENTRUM UBIQUE, CIRCUMFERENTIA NULLIBUS," was said of Mercury, that messenger of the gods who marshalled reluctant spirits to the Underworld; and for Mercury we may write Life with Death as its great sacrament of brotherhood and release, to be dreaded only as we dread to partake unworthily of great benefits. Like all sacraments it has its rightful time and due solemnities; the horror and sin of suicide lie in the presumption of free will, the forestalling of a gift, the sin of Eve in Paradise, who took that which might only be given at the hand of the Lord. It has too its physical pains, but they are those of a woman in

travail, and we remember them no more for joy that a child−man is born into the world naked and not ashamed: beholding ourselves as we are we shall see also the leaves of the Tree of Life set for the healing of the nations.

We are slowly, very slowly, abandoning our belief in sudden and violent transitions for a surer and fuller acceptance of the doctrine of evolution; but most of us still draw a sharp line of demarcation between this world and the next, and expect a radical change in ourselves and our surroundings, a break in the chain of continuity entirely contrary to the teaching of nature and experience. In the same way we cling to the specious untruth that we can begin over and over again in this world, forgetting that while our sorrow and repentance bring sacramental gifts of grace and strength, God Himself cannot, by His own limitation, rewrite the Past. We are in our sorrow that which we have made ourselves in our sin; our temptations are there as well as the way of escape. We are in the image of God. We create our world, our undying selves, our heaven, or our hell. "QUI CREAVIT TE SINE TE NON SALVABIT TE SINE TE." It is stupendous, magnificent, and most appalling. A man does not change as he crosses the threshold of the larger room. His personality remains the same, although the expression of it may be altered. Here we have material bodies in a material world there, perhaps, ether bodies in an ether world. There is no indecency in reasonable speculation and curiosity about the life to come. One end of the thread is between our fingers, but we are haunted for the most part by the snap of Atropos' shears.

Socrates faced death with the magnificent calm bred of dignified familiarity. He had built for himself a desired heaven of colour, light, and precious stones the philosophic formula of those who set the spiritual above the material, and worship truth in the beauty of holiness. He is not troubled by doubts or regrets, for the path of the just lies plain before his face. He forbids mourning and lamentations as out of place, obeys minutely and cheerily the directions of his executioner, and passes with unaffected dignity to the apprehension of that larger truth for which he had constantly prepared himself. His friends may bury him provided they will remember they are not burying Socrates; and that all things may be done decently and in order, a cock must go to AEsculapius.

Long before, in the days of the Captivity, there lived in godless, blood−shedding Nineveh an exiled Jew whose father had fallen from the faith. He was a simple man, child−like and direct; living the careful, kindly life of an orthodox Jew, suffering many persecutions for conscience' sake, and in constant danger of death. He narrates the story of his life and of the blindness which fell on him, with gentle placidity, and checks the exuberance of his more emotional wife with the assurance of untroubled faith. Finally, when his pious expectations are fulfilled, his sight restored, and his son prosperously established beside him, he breaks into a prayer of rejoicing which reveals the secret of his confident content. He made use of two great faculties: the sense of proportion, which enabled him to apprise life and its accidents justly, and the gift of in−seeing, which led Socrates after him, and Blessed John in lonely exile on Patmos, to look through the things temporal to the hidden meanings of eternity.

"Let my soul bless God the great King," he cries; and looks away past the present distress; past the Restoration which was to end in fresh scattering and confusion; past the dream of gold, and porphyry, and marble defaced by the eagles and emblems of the conqueror; until his eyes are held by the Jerusalem of God, "built up with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stones," with battlements of pure gold, and the cry of 'Alleluia' in her streets.

Many years later, when he was very aged, he called his son to him and gave him as heritage his own simple rule of life, adding but one request: "Keep thou the law and the commandments, and shew thyself merciful and just, that it may go well with thee. . . . Consider what alms doeth, and how righteousness doth deliver. . . . And bury me decently, and thy mother with me." Having so said, he went his way quietly and contentedly to the Jerusalem of his heart.

It is the simple note of familiarity that is wanting in us; that by which we link world with world. Once, years ago, I sat by the bedside of a dying man in a wretched garret in the East End. He was entirely ignorant, entirely quiescent, and entirely uninterested. The minister of a neighbouring chapel came to see him and spoke to him at some length of the need for repentance and the joys of heaven. After he had gone my friend lay staring restlessly

at the mass of decrepit broken chimney pots which made his horizon. At last he spoke, and there was a new note in his voice:−

"Ee said as 'ow there were golding streets in them parts. I ain't no ways particler wot they're made of, but it'll feel natral like if there's chimleys too."

The sun stretched a sudden finger and painted the chimney pots red and gold against the smoke−dimmed sky, and with his face alight with surprised relief my friend died.

We are one with the earth, one in sin, one in redemption. It is the fringe of the garment of God. "If I may but touch the hem," said a certain woman.

On the great Death−day which shadows the early spring with a shadow of which it may be said UMBRA DEI EST LUX, the earth brought gifts of grief, the fruit of the curse, barren thorns, hollow reed, and the wood of the cross; the sea made offering of Tyrian purple; the sky veiled her face in great darkness, while the nation of priests crucified for the last time their Paschal lamb. "I will hear, saith the Lord; I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and wine and oil, and they shall hear Jezreel, and I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy, and I will say unto them which were not my people, 'Thou art my people,' and they shall say 'Thou art my God.'"

The second Adam stood in the garden with quickening feet, and all the earth pulsed and sang for joy of the new hope and the new life quickening within her, to be hers through the pains of travail, the pangs of dissolution. The Tree of Life bears Bread and Wine food of the wayfaring man. The day of divisions is past, the day of unity has dawned. One has risen from the dead, and in the Valley of Achor stands wide the Door of Hope the Sacrament of Death.

Scio Domine, et vere scio . . . quia non sum dignus accedere ad tantum mysterium propter nimia peccata mea et infinitas negligentias meas. Sed scio . . . quia tu potes me facere dignum.

CHAPTER VI

"ANYTUS and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot hurt me," said Socrates; and Governor Sancho, with all the itch of newly−acquired authority, could not make the young weaver of steel−heads for lances sleep in prison. In the Vision of Er the souls passed straight forward under the throne of necessity, and out into the plains of forgetfulness, where they must severally drink of the river of unmindfulness whose waters cannot be held in any vessel. The throne, the plain, and the river are still here, but in the distance rise the great lone heavenward hills, and the wise among us no longer ask of the gods Lethe, but rather remembrance. Necessity can set me helpless on my back, but she cannot keep me there; nor can four walls limit my vision. I pass out from under her throne into the garden of God a free man, to my ultimate beatitude or my exceeding shame. All day long this world lies open to me; ay, and other worlds also, if I will but have it so; and when night comes I pass into the kingdom and power of the dark.

I lie through the long hours and watch my bridge, which is set with lights across the gloom; watch the traffic which is for me but so many passing lamps telling their tale by varying height and brightness. I hear under my window the sprint of over−tired horses, the rattle of uncertain wheels as the street−sellers hasten south; the jangle of cab bells as the theatre−goers take their homeward way; the gruff altercation of weary men, the unmelodious song and clamorous laugh of women whose merriment is wearier still. Then comes a time of stillness when the light in the sky waxes and wanes, when the cloud−drifts obscure the stars, and I gaze out into blackness set with watching eyes. No sound comes from without but the voice of the night−wind and the cry of the hour. The clock on the mantelpiece ticks imperatively, for a check has fallen on the familiarity which breeds a disregard of

common things, and a reason has to be sought for each sound which claims a hearing. The pause is wonderful while it lasts, but it is not for long. The working world awakes, the poorer brethren take up the burden of service; the dawn lights the sky; remembrance cries an end to forgetting.

Sometimes in the country on a night in early summer you may shut the cottage door to step out into an immense darkness which palls heaven and earth. Going forward into the embrace of the great gloom, you are as a babe swaddled by the hands of night into helpless quiescence. Your feet tread an unseen path, your hands grasp at a void, or shrink from the contact they cannot realise; your eyes are holden; your voice would die in your throat did you seek to rend the veil of that impenetrable silence.

Shut in by the intangible dark, we are brought up against those worlds within worlds blotted out by our concrete daily life. The working of the great microcosm at which we peer dimly through the little window of science; the wonderful, breathing earth; the pulsing, throbbing sap; the growing fragrance shut in the calyx of to−morrow's flower; the heart−beat of a sleeping world that we dream that we know; and around, above, and interpenetrating all, the world of dreams, of angels and of spirits.

It was this world which Jacob saw on the first night of his exile, and again when he wrestled in Peniel until the break of day. It was this world which Elisha saw with open eyes; which Job knew when darkness fell on him; which Ezekiel gazed into from his place among the captives; which Daniel beheld as he stood alone by the great river, the river Hiddekel.

For the moment we have left behind the realm of question and explanation, of power over matter and the exercise of bodily faculties; and passed into darkness alight with visions we cannot see, into silence alive with voices we cannot hear. Like helpless men we set our all on the one thing left us, and lift up our hearts, knowing that we are but a mere speck among a myriad worlds, yet greater than the sum of them; having our roots in the dark places of the earth, but our branches in the sweet airs of heaven.

It is the material counterpart of the 'Night of the Soul.' We have left our house and set forth in the darkness which paralyses those faculties that make us men in the world of men. But surely the great mystics, with all their insight and heavenly love, fell short when they sought freedom in complete separateness from creation instead of in perfect unity with it. The Greeks knew better when they flung Ariadne's crown among the stars, and wrote Demeter's grief on a barren earth, and Persephone's joy in the fruitful field. For the earth is gathered up in man; he is the whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. Standing in the image of God, and clothed in the garment of God, he lifts up priestly hands and presents the sacrifice of redeemed earth before the throne of the All−Father. "Dust and ashes and a house of devils," he cries; and there comes back for answer, "REX CONCUPISCET DECOREM TUAM."

The Angel of Death has broad wings of silence and mystery with which he shadows the valley where we need fear no evil, and where the voice which speaks to us is as the "voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts." It is a place of healing and preparation, of peace and refreshing after the sharply−defined outlines of a garish day. Walking there we learn to use those natural faculties of the soul which are hampered by the familiarity of bodily progress, to apprehend the truths which we have intellectually accepted. It is the place of secrets where the humility which embraces all attainable knowledge cries "I know not"; and while we proclaim from the house−tops that which we have learnt, the manner of our learning lies hid for each one of us in the sanctuary of our souls.

The Egyptians, in their ancient wisdom, act in the desert a great androsphinx, image of mystery and silence, staring from under level brows across the arid sands of the sea−way. The Greeks borrowed and debased the image, turning the inscrutable into a semi−woman who asked a foolish riddle, and hurled herself down in petulant pride when OEdipus answered aright. So we, marring the office of silence, question its mystery; thwart ourselves with riddles of our own suggesting; and turn away, leaving our offering but half consumed on the altar of the unknown god. It was not the theft of fire that brought the vengeance of heaven upon Prometheus, but the mocking

sacrifice. Orpheus lost Eurydice because he must see her face before the appointed time. Persephone ate of the pomegranate and hungered in gloom for the day of light which should have been endless.

The universe is full of miracle and mystery; the darkness and silence are set for a sign we dare not despise. The pall of night lifts, leaving us engulphed in the light of immensity under a tossing heaven of stars. The dawn breaks, but it does not surprise us, for we have watched from the valley and seen the pale twilight. Through the wondrous Sabbath of faithful souls, the long day of rosemary and rue, the light brightens in the East; and we pass on towards it with quiet feet and opening eyes, bearing with us all of the redeemed earth that we have made our own, until we are fulfilled in the sunrise of the great Easter Day, and the peoples come from north and south and east and west to the City which lieth foursquare the Beatific Vision of God.

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Vere Ierusalem est illa civitas
Cuius pax iugis et summa iucunditas;
Ubi non praevenit rem desiderium,
Nec desiderio minus est praemium.
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