Quality and Other Essays

John Galsworthy

Table of Contents

Quality and Other Essays

John Galsworthy

This etext was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

STUDIES AND ESSAYS

By John Galsworthy

"Je vous dirai que l'exces est toujours un mal."
—ANATOLE FRANCE

QUALITY

I knew him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots; inhabiting with his elder brother two little shops let into one, in a small by−street−now no more, but then most fashionably placed in the West End.

That tenement had a certain quiet distinction; there was no sign upon its face that he made for any of the Royal Family—merely his own German name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. I remember that it always troubled me to account for those unvarying boots in the window, for he made only what was ordered, reaching nothing down, and it seemed so inconceivable that what he made could ever have failed to fit. Had he bought them to put there? That, too, seemed inconceivable. He would never have tolerated in his house leather on which he had not worked himself. Besides, they were too beautiful—the pair of pumps, so inexpressibly slim, the patent leathers with cloth tops, making water come into one's mouth, the tall brown riding boots with marvellous sooty glow, as if, though new, they had been worn a hundred years. Those pairs could only have been made by one who saw before him the Soul of Boot—so truly were they prototypes incarnating the very spirit of all foot−gear. These thoughts, of course, came to me later, though even when I was promoted to him, at the age of perhaps fourteen, some inkling haunted me of the dignity of himself and brother. For to make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remark, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot:

"Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr. Gessler?"

And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the sardonic redness of his beard: "Id is an Ardt!"

Himself, he was a little as if made from leather, with his yellow crinkly face, and crinkly reddish hair and beard; and neat folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth, and his guttural and one−toned voice; for leather is a sardonic substance, and stiff and slow of purpose. And that was the character of his face, save that his eyes, which were grey−blue, had in them the simple gravity of one secretly possessed by the Ideal. His elder brother was so very like him—though watery, paler in every way, with a great industry—that sometimes in early days I was not quite sure of him until the interview was over. Then I knew that it was he, if the words, "I will ask my brudder," had not been spoken; and that, if they had, it was his elder brother.

When one grew old and wild and ran up bills, one somehow never ran them up with Gessler Brothers. It would not have seemed becoming to go in there and stretch out one's foot to that blue iron−spectacled glance, owing him for more than—say—two pairs, just the comfortable reassurance that one was still his client.

For it was not possible to go to him very often—his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary—some, as it were, essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, in the mood of: "Please serve me, and let me go!" but restfully, as one enters a church; and, sitting on the single wooden chair, waited—for there was never anybody there. Soon, over the top edge of that sort of well—rather dark, and smelling soothingly of leather—which formed the shop, there would be seen his face, or that of his elder brother, peering down. A guttural sound, and the tip−tap of bast slippers beating the narrow wooden stairs, and he would stand before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking—as if awakened from some dream of boots, or like an owl surprised in daylight and annoyed at this interruption.

And I would say: "How do you do, Mr. Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russia leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me, retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would, continue to rest in the wooden chair, inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his thin, veined hand a piece of gold−brown leather. With eyes fixed on it, he would remark: "What a beaudiful biece!" When I, too, had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you wand dem?" And I would answer: "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say: "To−morrow fordnighd?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brudder!"

Then I would murmur: "Thank you! Good−morning, Mr. Gessler." "Goot− morning!" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip−tap of his bast slippers restoring him, up the stairs, to his dream of boots. But if it were some new kind of foot−gear that he had not yet

made me, then indeed he would observe ceremony—divesting me of my boot and holding it long in his hand, looking at it with eyes at once critical and loving, as if recalling the glow with which he had created it, and rebuking the way in which one had disorganized this masterpiece. Then, placing my foot on a piece of paper, he would two or three times tickle the outer edges with a pencil and pass his nervous fingers over my toes, feeling himself into the heart of my requirements.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him; "Mr. Gessler, that last pair of town walking−boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said:

"Id shouldn'd 'ave greaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You goddem wed before dey found demselves?"

"I don't think so."

At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots, and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing.

"Zend dem back!" he said; "I will look at dem."

A feeling of compassion for my creaking boots surged up in me, so well could I imagine the sorrowful long curiosity of regard which he would bend on them.

"Zome boods," he said slowly, "are bad from birdt. If I can do noding wid dem, I dake dem off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent−mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm's. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

"Dose are nod my boods."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

"Id 'urds you dere,", he said. "Dose big virms 'ave no self−respect. Drash!" And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"Dey get id all," he said, "dey get id by adverdisement, nod by work. Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods. Id gomes to this— bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less you will see." And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle—and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of the purchase of those ill−omened boots. But his face and voice made so deep impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs. Nemesis fell! They lasted more terribly than ever. And I was not able conscientiously to go to him for nearly two years.

When at last I went I was surprised to find that outside one of the two little windows of his shop another name was painted, also that of a bootmaker−making, of course, for the Royal Family. The old familiar boots, no longer in dignified isolation, were huddled in the single window. Inside, the now contracted well of the one little shop was more scented and darker than ever. And it was longer than usual, too, before a face peered down, and the tip−tap of the bast slippers began. At last he stood before me, and, gazing through those rusty iron spectacles, said:

"Mr.——−, isn'd it?"

"Ah! Mr. Gessler," I stammered, "but your boots are really too good, you know! See, these are quite decent still!" And I stretched out to him my foot. He looked at it.

"Yes," he said, "beople do nod wand good hoods, id seems."

To get away from his reproachful eyes and voice I hastily remarked: "What have you done to your shop?"

He answered quietly: "Id was too exbensif. Do you wand some boods?"

I ordered three pairs, though I had only wanted two, and quickly left. I had, I do not know quite what feeling of being part, in his mind, of a conspiracy against him; or not perhaps so much against him as against his idea of boot. One does not, I suppose, care to feel like that; for it was again many months before my next visit to his shop,

paid, I remember, with the feeling: "Oh! well, I can't leave the old boy—so here goes! Perhaps it'll be his elder brother!"

For his elder brother, I knew, had not character enough to reproach me, even dumbly.

And, to my relief, in the shop there did appear to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

"Well, Mr. Gessler," I said, "how are you?"

He came close, and peered at me.

"I am breddy well," he said slowly "but my elder brudder is dead."

And I saw that it was indeed himself—but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked; I murmured: "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Yes," he answered, "he was a good man, he made a good bood; but he is dead." And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of death. "He could nod ged over losing de oder shop. Do you wand any hoods?" And he held up the leather in his hand: "Id's a beaudiful biece."

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend's. I had left a man of sixty, I came back to one of seventy−five, pinched and worn and tremulous, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

"Oh! Mr. Gessler," I said, sick at heart; "how splendid your boots are! See, I've been wearing this pair nearly all the time I've been abroad; and they're not half worn out, are they?"

He looked long at my boots—a pair of Russia leather, and his face seemed to regain steadiness. Putting his hand on my instep, he said:

"Do dey vid you here? I 'ad drouble wid dat bair, I remember."

I assured him that they had fitted beautifully.

"Do you wand any boods?" he said. "I can make dem quickly; id is a slack dime."

I answered: "Please, please! I want boots all round—every kind!"

"I will make a vresh model. Your food must be bigger." And with utter slowness, he traced round my foot, and felt my toes, only once looking up to say:

"Did I dell you my brudder was dead?"

To watch him was painful, so feeble had he grown; I was glad to get away.

I had given those boots up, when one evening they came. Opening the parcel, I set the four pairs out in a row. Then one by one I tried them on. There was no doubt about it. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather, they were the best he had ever made me. And in the mouth of one of the Town walking−boots I found his bill.

The amount was the same as usual, but it gave me quite a shock. He had never before sent it in till quarter day. I flew down−stairs, and wrote a cheque, and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone. Still there, in the window, were the slim pumps, the patent leathers with cloth tops, the sooty riding boots.

I went in, very much disturbed. In the two little shops—again made into one—was a young man with an English face.

"Mr. Gessler in?" I said.

He gave me a strange, ingratiating look.

"No, sir," he said, "no. But we can attend to anything with pleasure. We've taken the shop over. You've seen our name, no doubt, next door. We make for some very good people."

"Yes, Yes," I said; "but Mr. Gessler?"

"Oh!" he answered; "dead."

"Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week."

"Ah!" he said; "a shockin' go. Poor old man starved 'imself."

"Good God!"

"Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn't have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won't

wait. He lost everybody. And there he'd sit, goin' on and on—I will say that for him not a man in London made a better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?"

"But starvation——!"

"That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin' is—but I know myself he was sittin' over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see I used to watch him. Never gave 'imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don't know. He regular let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots."

"Yes," I said, "he made good boots."

And I turned and went out quickly, for I did not want that youth to know that I could hardly see.

1911

THE GRAND JURY—IN TWO PANELS AND A FRAME

Read that piece of paper, which summoned me to sit on the Grand Jury at the approaching Sessions, lying in a scoop of the shore close to the great rollers of the sea—that span of eternal freedom, deprived just there of too great liberty by the word "Atlantic." And I remember thinking, as I read, that in each breaking wave was some particle which had visited every shore in all the world—that in each sparkle of hot sunlight stealing that bright water up into the sky, was the microcosm of all change, and of all unity.

PANEL I

In answer to that piece of paper, I presented myself at the proper place in due course and with a certain trepidation. What was it that I was about to do? For I had no experience of these things. And, being too early, I walked a little to and fro, looking at all those my partners in this matter of the purification of Society. Prosecutors, witnesses, officials, policemen, detectives, undetected, pressmen, barristers, loafers, clerks, cadgers, jurymen. And I remember having something of the feeling that one has when one looks into a sink without holding one's nose. There was such uneasy hurry, so strange a disenchanted look, a sort of spiritual dirt, about all that place, and there were—faces! And I thought: To them my face must seem as their faces seem to me!

Soon I was taken with my accomplices to have my name called, and to be sworn. I do not remember much about that process, too occupied with wondering what these companions of mine were like; but presently we all came to a long room with a long table, where nineteen lists of indictments and nineteen pieces of blotting paper were set alongside nineteen pens. We did not, I recollect, speak much to one another, but sat down, and studied those nineteen lists. We had eighty−seven cases on which to pronounce whether the bill was true or no; and the clerk assured us we should get through them in two days at most. Over the top of these indictments I regarded my eighteen fellows. There was in me a hunger of inquiry, as to what they thought about this business; and a sort of sorrowful affection for them, as if we were all a ship's company bound on some strange and awkward expedition. I wondered, till I thought my wonder must be coming through my eyes, whether they had the same curious sensation that I was feeling, of doing something illegitimate, which I had not been born to do, together with a sense of self−importance, a sort of unholy interest in thus dealing with the lives of my fellow men. And slowly, watching them, I came to the conclusion that I need not wonder. All with the exception perhaps of two, a painter and a Jew looked such good citizens. I became gradually sure that they were not troubled with the lap and wash of speculation; unclogged by any devastating sense of unity; pure of doubt, and undefiled by an uneasy conscience.

But now they began to bring us in the evidence. They brought it quickly. And at first we looked at it, whatever it was, with a sort of solemn excitement. Were we not arbiters of men's fates, purifiers of Society, more important by far than Judge or Common Jury? For if we did not bring in a true bill there was an end; the accused would be discharged.

We set to work, slowly at first, then faster and still faster, bringing in true bills; and after every one making a mark in our lists so that we might know where we were. We brought in true bills for burglary, and false pretences, larceny, and fraud; we brought them in for manslaughter, rape, and arson. When we had ten or so, two of us would get up and bear them away down to the Court below and lay them before the Judge. "Thank you, gentlemen!" he would say, or words to that effect; and we would go up again, and go on bringing in true bills. I noticed that at the evidence of each fresh bill we looked with a little less excitement, and a little less solemnity, making every time a shorter tick and a shorter note in the margin of our lists. All the bills we had—fifty−seven—we brought in true. And the morning and the afternoon made that day, till we rested and went to our homes.

Next day we were all back in our places at the appointed hour, and, not greeting each other much, at once began to bring in bills. We brought them in, not quite so fast, as though some lurking megrim, some microbe of dissatisfaction with ourselves was at work within us. It was as if we wanted to throw one out, as if we felt our work too perfect. And presently it came. A case of defrauding one Sophie Liebermann, or Laubermann, or some such foreign name, by giving her one of those five−pound Christmas−card banknotes just then in fashion, and receiving from her, as she alleged, three real sovereigns change. There was a certain piquancy about the matter, and I well remember noticing how we sat a little forward and turned in our seats when they brought in the prosecutrix to give evidence. Pale, self−possessed, dressed in black, and rather comely, neither brazen nor furtive, speaking but poor English, her broad, matter−of− fact face, with its wide−set grey eyes and thickish nose and lips, made on me, I recollect, an impression of rather stupid honesty. I do not think they had told us in so many words what her calling was, nor do I remember whether she actually disclosed it, but by our demeanour I could tell that we had all realized what was the nature of the service rendered to the accused, in return for which he had given her this worthless note. In her rather guttural but pleasant voice she answered all our questions—not very far from

tears, I think, but saved by native stolidity, and perhaps a little by the fear that purifiers of Society might not be the proper audience for emotion. When she had left us we recalled the detective, and still, as it were, touching the delicate matter with the tips of our tongues, so as not, being men of the world, to seem biassed against anything, we definitely elicited from him her profession and these words: "If she's speaking the truth, gentlemen; but, as you know, these women, they don't always, specially the foreign ones!" When he, too, had gone, we looked at each other in unwonted silence. None of us quite liked, it seemed, to be first to speak. Then our foreman said: "There's no doubt, I think, that he gave her the note—mean trick, of course, but we can't have him on that alone—bit too irregular—no consideration in law, I take it."

He smiled a little at our smiles, and then went on: "The question, gentlemen, really seems to be, are we to take her word that she actually gave him change?" Again, for quite half a minute; we were silent, and then, the fattest one of us said, suddenly: "Very dangerous—goin' on the word of these women."

And at once, as if he had released something in our souls, we all (save two or three) broke out. It wouldn't do! It wasn't safe! Seeing what these women were! It was exactly as if, without word said, we had each been swearing the other to some secret compact to protect Society. As if we had been whispering to each other something like this: "These women—of course, we need them, but for all that we can't possibly recognise them as within the Law; we can't do that without endangering the safety of every one of us. In this matter we are trustees for all men—indeed, even for ourselves, for who knows at what moment we might not ourselves require their services, and it would be exceedingly awkward if their word were considered the equal of our own!" Not one of us, certainly said anything so crude as this; none the less did many of us feel it. Then the foreman, looking slowly round the table, said: "Well, gentlemen, I think we are all agreed to throw out this bill"; and all, except the painter, the Jew, and one other, murmured: "Yes." And, as though, in throwing out this bill we had cast some trouble off our minds, we went on with the greater speed, bringing in true bills. About two o'clock we finished, and trooped down to the Court to be released. On the stairway the Jew came close, and, having examined me a little sharply with his velvety slits of eyes, as if to see that he was not making a mistake, said: "Ith fonny—we bring in eighty thix bills true, and one we throw out, and the one we throw out we know it to be true, and the dirtieth job of the whole lot. Ith fonny!" "Yes," I answered him, "our sense of respectability does seem excessive." But just then we reached the Court, where, in his red robe and grey wig, with his clear−cut, handsome face, the judge seemed to shine and radiate, like sun through gloom. "I thank you, gentlemen," he said, in a voice courteous and a little mocking, as though he had somewhere seen us before: "I thank you for the way in which you have performed your duties. I have not the pleasure of assigning to you anything for your services except the privilege of going over a prison, where you will be able to see what sort of existence awaits many of those to whose cases you have devoted so much of your valuable time. You are released, gentlemen."

Looking at each, other a little hurriedly, and not taking too much farewell, for fear of having to meet again, we separated.

I was, then, free—free of the injunction of that piece of paper reposing in my pocket. Yet its influence was still upon me. I did not hurry away, but lingered in the courts, fascinated by the notion that the fate of each prisoner had first passed through my hands. At last I made an effort, and went out into the corridor. There I passed a woman whose figure seemed familiar. She was sitting with her hands in her lap looking straight before her, pale−faced and not uncomely, with thickish mouth and nose—the woman whose bill we had thrown out. Why was she sitting there? Had she not then realised that we had quashed her claim; or was she, like myself, kept here by mere attraction of the Law? Following I know not what impulse, I said: "Your case was dismissed, wasn't it?" She looked up at me stolidly, and a tear, which had evidently been long gathering, dropped at the movement. "I do nod know; I waid to see," she said in her thick voice; "I tink there has been mistake." My face, no doubt, betrayed something of my sentiments about her case, for the thick tears began rolling fast down her pasty cheeks, and her pent−up feeling suddenly flowed forth in words: "I work 'ard; Gott! how I work hard! And there gomes dis liddle beastly man, and rob me. And they say: 'Ah! yes; but you are a bad woman, we don' trust you—you speak lie.' But I speak druth, I am nod a bad woman—I gome from Hamburg." "Yes, yes," I murmured; "yes, yes." "I do not know this country well, sir. I speak bad English. Is that why they do not drust my word?" She was silent for a moment, searching my face, then broke out again: "It is all 'ard work in my profession, I make very liddle, I cannot afford to be rob. Without the men I cannod make my living, I must drust them—and they rob me like this, it is too 'ard." And the slow tears rolled faster and faster from her eyes on to her hands and her black lap. Then

quietly, and looking for a moment singularly like a big, unhappy child, she asked: "Will you blease dell me, sir, why they will not give me the law of that dirty little man?"

I knew—and too well; but I could not tell her.

"You see," I said, "it's just a case of your word against his." "Oh! no; but," she said eagerly, "he give me the note—I would not have taken it if I 'ad not thought it good, would I? That is sure, isn't it? But five pounds it is not my price. It must that I give 'im change! Those gentlemen that heard my case, they are men of business, they must know that it is not my price. If I could tell the judge—I think he is a man of business too he would know that too, for sure. I am not so young. I am not so veree beautiful as all that; he must see, mustn't he, sir?"

At my wits' end how to answer that most strange question, I stammered out: "But, you know, your profession is outside the law."

At that a slow anger dyed her face. She looked down; then, suddenly lifting one of her dirty, ungloved hands, she laid it on her breast with the gesture of one baring to me the truth in her heart. "I am not a bad woman," she said: "Dat beastly little man, he do the same as me—I am free−woman, I am not a slave bound to do the same to−morrow night, no more than he. Such like him make me what I am; he have all the pleasure, I have all the work. He give me noding—he rob my poor money, and he make me seem to strangers a bad woman. Oh, dear! I am not happy!"

The impulse I had been having to press on her the money, died within me; I felt suddenly it would be another insult. From the movement of her fingers about her heart I could not but see that this grief of hers was not about the money. It was the inarticulate outburst of a bitter sense of deep injustice; of all the dumb wondering at her own fate that went about with her behind that broad stolid face and bosom. This loss of the money was but a symbol of the furtive, hopeless insecurity she lived with day and night, now forced into the light, for herself and all the world to see. She felt it suddenly a bitter, unfair thing. This beastly little man did not share her insecurity. None of us shared it—none of us, who had brought her down to this. And, quite unable to explain to her how natural and proper it all was, I only murmured: "I am sorry, awfully sorry," and fled away.

PANEL II

It was just a week later when, having for passport my Grand Jury summons, I presented myself at that prison where we had the privilege of seeing the existence to which we had assisted so many of the eighty−six.

"I'm afraid," I said to the guardian of the gate, "that I am rather late in availing myself—the others, no doubt——?"

"Not at all, sir," he said, smiling. "You're the first, and if you'll excuse me, I think you'll be the last. Will you wait in here while I send for the chief warder to take you over?"

He showed me then to what he called the Warder's Library—an iron− barred room, more bare and brown than any I had seen since I left school. While I stood there waiting and staring out into the prison court−yard, there came, rolling and rumbling in, a Black Maria. It drew up with a clatter, and I saw through the barred door the single prisoner—a young girl of perhaps eighteen—dressed in rusty black. She was resting her forehead against a bar and looking out, her quick, narrow dark eyes taking in her new surroundings with a sort of sharp, restless indifference; and her pale, thin−upped, oval face quite expressionless. Behind those bars she seemed to me for all the world like a little animal of the cat tribe being brought in to her Zoo. Me she did not see, but if she had I felt she would not shrink− −only give me the same sharp, indifferent look she was giving all else. The policeman on the step behind had disappeared at once, and the driver now got down from his perch and, coming round, began to gossip with her. I saw her slink her eyes and smile at him, and he smiled back; a large man; not unkindly. Then he returned to his horses, and she stayed as before, with her forehead against the bars, just staring out. Watching her like that, unseen, I seemed to be able to see right through that tight−lipped, lynx−eyed mask. I seemed to know that little creature through and through, as one knows anything that one surprises off its guard, sunk in its most private moods. I seemed to see her little restless, furtive, utterly unmoral soul, so stripped of all defence, as if she had taken it from her heart and handed it out to me. I saw that she was one of those whose hands slip as indifferently into others' pockets as into their own; incapable of fidelity, and incapable of trusting; quick as cats, and as devoid of application; ready to scratch, ready to purr, ready to scratch again; quick to change, and secretly as unchangeable as a little pebble. And I thought: "Here we are, taking her to the Zoo (by no means for the first time, if demeanour be any guide), and we shall put her in a cage, and make her sew, and give her good books which she will not read; and she will sew, and walk up and down, until we let her out; then she will return to her old haunts, and at once go prowling and do exactly the same again, what ever it was, until we catch her and lock her up once more. And in this way we shall goon purifying Society until she dies. And I thought: If indeed she had been created cat in body as well as in soul, we should not have treated her thus, but should have said: 'Go on, little cat, you scratch us sometimes, you steal often, you are as sensual as the night. All this we cannot help. It is your nature. So were you made—we know you cannot change—you amuse us! Go on, little cat!' Would it not then be better, and less savoury of humbug if we said the same to her whose cat−soul has chanced into this human shape? For assuredly she will but pilfer, and scratch a little, and be mildly vicious, in her little life, and do no desperate harm, having but poor capacity for evil behind that petty, thin−upped mask. What is the good of all this padlock business for such as she; are we not making mountains out of her mole hills? Where is our sense of proportion, and our sense of humour? Why try to alter the make and shape of Nature with our petty chisels? Or, if we must take care of her, to save ourselves, in the name of Heaven let us do it in a better way than this! And suddenly I remembered that I was a Grand Juryman, a purifier of Society, who had brought her bill in true; and, that I might not think these thoughts unworthy of a good citizen, I turned my eyes away from her and took up my list of indictments. Yes, there she was, at least so I decided: Number 42, "Pilson, Jenny: Larceny, pocket−picking. "And I turned my memory back to the evidence about her case, but I could not remember a single word. In the margin I had noted: "Incorrigible from a child up; bad surroundings. And a mad impulse came over me to go back to my window and call through the bars to her: "Jenny Pilson! Jenny Pilson! It was I who bred you and surrounded you with evil! It was I who caught you for being what I made you! I brought your bill in true! I judged you, and I caged you! Jenny Pilson! Jenny Pilson!" But just as I reached the window, the door of my waiting−room was fortunately opened, and a voice said: "Now, sir; at your service!"...

I sat again in that scoop of the shore by the long rolling seas, burying in the sand the piece of paper which had

summoned me away to my Grand Jury; and the same thoughts came to me with the breaking of the waves that had come to me before: How, in every wave was a particle that had known the shore of every land; and in each sparkle of the hot sunlight stealing up that bright water into the sky, the microcosm of all change and of all unity!

1912.

GONE

Not possible to conceive of rarer beauty than that which clung about the summer day three years ago when first we had the news of the poor Herds. Loveliness was a net of golden filaments in which the world was caught. It was gravity itself, so tranquil; and it was a sort of intoxicating laughter. From the top field that we crossed to go down to their cottage, all the far sweep of those outstretched wings of beauty could be seen. Very wonderful was the poise of the sacred bird, that moved nowhere but in our hearts. The lime−tree scent was just stealing out into air for some days already bereft of the scent of hay; and the sun was falling to his evening home behind our pines and beeches. It was no more than radiant warm. And, as we went, we wondered why we had not been told before that Mrs. Herd was so very ill. It was foolish to wonder—these people do not speak of suffering till it is late. To speak, when it means what this meant loss of wife and mother—was to flatter reality too much. To be healthy, or—die! That is their creed. To go on till they drop— then very soon pass away! What room for states between—on their poor wage, in their poor cottages?

We crossed the mill−stream in the hollow—to their white, thatched dwelling; silent, already awed, almost resentful of this so−varying Scheme of Things. At the gateway Herd himself was standing, just in from his work. For work in the country does not wait on illness— even death claims from its onlookers but a few hours, birth none at all, and it is as well; for what must be must, and in work alone man rests from grief. Sorrow and anxiety had made strange alteration already in Herd's face. Through every crevice of the rough, stolid mask the spirit was peeping, a sort of quivering suppliant, that seemed to ask all the time: "Is it true?" A regular cottager's figure, this of Herd's—a labourer of these parts—strong, slow, but active, with just a touch of the untamed somewhere, about the swing and carriage of him, about the strong jaw, and wide thick−lipped mouth; just that something independent, which, in great variety, clings to the natives of these still remote, half−pagan valleys by the moor.

We all moved silently to the lee of the outer wall, so that our voices might not carry up to the sick woman lying there under the eaves, almost within hand reach. "Yes, sir." "No, sir." "Yes, ma'am." This, and the constant, unforgettable supplication of his eyes, was all that came from him; yet he seemed loath to let us go, as though he thought we had some mysterious power to help him—the magic, perhaps, of money, to those who have none. Grateful at our promise of another doctor, a specialist, he yet seemed with his eyes to say that he knew that such were only embroideries of Fate. And when we had wrung his hand and gone, we heard him coming after us: His wife had said she would like to see us, please. Would we come up?

An old woman and Mrs. Herd's sister were in the sitting−room; they showed us to the crazy, narrow stairway. Though we lived distant but four hundred yards of a crow's flight, we had never seen Mrs. Herd before, for that is the way of things in this land of minding one's own business—a slight, dark, girlish−looking woman, almost quite refined away, and with those eyes of the dying, where the spirit is coming through, as it only does when it knows that all is over except just the passing. She lay in a double bed, with clean white sheets. A white−washed room, so low that the ceiling almost touched our heads, some flowers in a bowl, the small lattice window open. Though it was hot in there, it was better far than the rooms of most families in towns, living on a wage of twice as much; for here was no sign of defeat in decency or cleanliness. In her face, as in poor Herd's, was that same strange mingling of resigned despair and almost eager appeal, so terrible to disappoint. Yet, trying not to disappoint it, one felt guilty of treachery: What was the good, the kindness, in making this poor bird flutter still with hope against the bars, when fast prison had so surely closed in round her? But what else could we do? We could not give her those glib assurances that naive souls make so easily to others concerning their after state.

Secretly, I think, we knew that her philosophy of calm reality, that queer and unbidden growing tranquillity which precedes death, was nearer to our own belief, than would be any gilt−edged orthodoxy; but nevertheless (such is the strength of what is expected), we felt it dreadful that we could not console her with the ordinary presumptions.

"You mustn't give up hope," we kept on saying: "The new doctor will do a lot for you; he's a specialist—a very clever man."

And she kept on answering: "Yes, sir." "Yes, ma'am." But still her eyes went on asking, as if there were something else she wanted. And then to one of us came an inspiration:

"You mustn't let your husband worry about expense. That will be all right."

She smiled then, as if the chief cloud on her soul had been the thought of the arrears her illness and death would leave weighing on him with whom she had shared this bed ten years and more. And with that smile warming the memory of those spirit−haunted eyes, we crept down−stairs again, and out into the fields.

It was more beautiful than ever, just touched already with evening mystery—it was better than ever to be alive. And the immortal wonder that has haunted man since first he became man, and haunts, I think, even the animals—the unanswerable question,—why joy and beauty must ever be walking hand in hand with ugliness and pain haunted us across those fields of life and loveliness. It was all right, no doubt, even reasonable, since without dark there is no light. It was part of that unending sum whose answer is not given; the merest little swing of the great pendulum! And yet——! To accept this violent contrast without a sigh of revolt, without a question! No sirs, it was not so jolly as all that! That she should be dying there at thirty, of a creeping malady which she might have checked, perhaps, if she had not had too many things to do for the children and husband, to do anything for herself—if she had not been forced to hold the creed: Be healthy, or die! This was no doubt perfectly explicable and in accordance with the Supreme Equation; yet we, enjoying life, and health, and ease of money, felt horror and revolt on, this evening of such beauty. Nor at the moment did we derive great comfort from the thought that life slips in and out of sheath, like sun−sparks on water, and that of all the cloud of summer midges dancing in the last gleam, not one would be alive to−morrow.

It was three evenings later that we heard uncertain footfalls on the flagstones of the verandah, then a sort of brushing sound against the wood of the long, open window. Drawing aside the curtain, one of us looked out. Herd was standing there in the bright moonlight, bareheaded, with roughened hair. He came in, and seeming not to know quite where he went, took stand by the hearth, and putting up his dark hand, gripped the mantelshelf. Then, as if recollecting himself, he said: "Gude evenin', sir; beg pardon, M'm." No more for a full minute; but his hand, taking some little china thing, turned it over and over without ceasing, and down his broken face tears ran. Then, very suddenly, he said: "She's gone. "And his hand turned over and over that little china thing, and the tears went on rolling down. Then, stumbling, and swaying like a man in drink, he made his way out again into the moonlight. We watched him across the lawn and path, and through the gate, till his footfalls died out there in the field, and his figure was lost in the black shadow of the holly hedge.

And the night was so beautiful, so utterly, glamourously beautiful, with its star−flowers, and its silence, and its trees clothed in moonlight. All was tranquil as a dream of sleep. But it was long before our hearts, wandering with poor Herd, would let us remember that she had slipped away into so beautiful a dream.

The dead do not suffer from their rest in beauty. But the living—−!

1911.

THRESHING

When the drone of the thresher breaks through the autumn sighing of trees and wind, or through that stillness of the first frost, I get restless and more restless, till, throwing down my pen, I have gone out to see. For there is nothing like the sight of threshing for making one feel good—not in the sense of comfort, but at heart. There, under the pines and the already leafless elms and beech−trees, close to the great stacks, is the big, busy creature, with its small black puffing engine astern; and there, all around it, is that conglomeration of unsentimental labour which invests all the crises of farm work with such fascination. The crew of the farm is only five all told, but to−day they are fifteen, and none strangers, save the owners of the travelling thresher.

They are working without respite and with little speech, not at all as if they had been brought together for the benefit of some one else's corn, but as though they, one and all, had a private grudge against Time and a personal pleasure in finishing this job, which, while it lasts, is bringing them extra pay and most excellent free feeding. Just as after a dilatory voyage a crew will brace themselves for the run in, recording with sudden energy their consciousness of triumph over the elements, so on a farm the harvests of hay and corn, sheep−shearing, and threshing will bring out in all a common sentiment, a kind of sporting energy, a defiant spurt, as it were, to score off Nature; for it is only a philosopher here and there among them, I think, who sees that Nature is eager to be scored off in this fashion, being anxious that some one should eat her kindly fruits.

With ceremonial as grave as that which is at work within the thresher itself, the tasks have been divided. At the root of all things, pitchforking from the stack, stands—the farmer, moustached, and always upright was he not in the Yeomanry?—dignified in a hard black hat, no waistcoat, and his working coat so ragged that it would never cling to him but for pure affection. Between him and the body of the machine are five more pitch forks, directing the pale flood of raw material. There, amongst them, is poor Herd, still so sad from his summer loss, plodding doggedly away. To watch him even now makes one feel how terrible is that dumb grief which has never learned to moan. And there is George Yeoford, almost too sober; and Murdon plying his pitchfork with a supernatural regularity that cannot quite dim his queer brigand's face of dark, soft gloom shot with sudden humours, his soft, dark corduroys and battered hat. Occasionally he stops, and taking off that hat, wipes his corrugated brow under black hair, and seems to brood over his own regularity.

Down here, too, where I stand, each separate function of the thresher has its appointed slave. Here Cedric rakes the chaff pouring from the side down into the chaff−shed. Carting the straw that streams from the thresher bows, are Michelmore and Neck—the little man who cannot read, but can milk and whistle the hearts out of his cows till they follow him like dogs. At the thresher's stern is Morris, the driver, selected because of that utter reliability which radiates from his broad, handsome face. His part is to attend the sacking of the three kinds of grain for ever sieving out. He murmurs: "Busy work, sir!" and opens a little door to show me how "the machinery does it all," holding a sack between his knees and some string in his white teeth. Then away goes the sack—four bushels, one hundred and sixty pounds of "genuines, seconds, or seed"—wheeled by Cedric on a little trolley thing, to where George−the−Gaul or Jim−the−Early−Saxon is waiting to bear it on his back up the stone steps into the corn− chamber.

It has been raining in the night; the ground is a churn of straw and mud, and the trees still drip; but now there is sunlight, a sweet air, and clear sky, wine−coloured through the red, naked, beechtwigs tipped with white untimely buds. Nothing can be more lovely than this late autumn day, so still, save for the droning of the thresher and the constant tinny chuckle of the grey, thin−headed Guinea−fowl, driven by this business away from their usual haunts.

And soon the, feeling that I knew would come begins creeping over me, the sense of an extraordinary sanity in this never−ceasing harmonious labour pursued in the autumn air faintly perfumed with wood−smoke, with the scent of chaff, and whiffs from that black puffing−Billy; the sense that there is nothing between this clean toil—not too hard but hard enough—and the clean consumption of its clean results; the sense that nobody except myself is in the least conscious of how sane it all is. The brains of these sane ones are all too busy with the real affairs of life, the disposition of their wages, anticipation of dinner, some girl, some junketing, some wager, the last rifle match, and, more than all, with that pleasant rhythmic nothingness, companion of the busy swing and

play of muscles, which of all states is secretly most akin to the deep unconsciousness of life itself. Thus to work in the free air for the good of all and the hurt of none, without worry or the breath of acrimony—surely no phase of human life so nears the life of the truly civilised community—the life of a hive of bees. Not one of these working so sanely—unless it be Morris, who will spend his Sunday afternoon on some high rock just watching sunlight and shadow drifting on the moors—not one, I think, is distraught by perception of his own sanity, by knowledge of how near he is to Harmony, not even by appreciation of the still radiance of this day, or its innumerable fine shades of colour. It is all work, and no moody consciousness—all work, and will end in sleep.

I leave them soon, and make my way up the stone steps to the "corn chamber," where tranquillity is crowned. In the whitewashed room the corn lies in drifts and ridges, three to four feet deep, all silvery− dun, like some remote sand desert, lifeless beneath the moon. Here it lies, and into it, staggering under the sacks, George−the−Gaul and Jim−the−Early Saxon tramp up to their knees, spill the sacks over their heads, and out again; and above where their feet have plunged the patient surface closes again, smooth. And as I stand there in the doorway, looking at that silvery corn drift, I think of the whole process, from seed sown to the last sieving into this tranquil resting−place. I think of the slow, dogged ploughman, with the crows above him on the wind; of the swing of the sower's arm, dark up against grey sky on the steep field. I think of the seed snug− burrowing for safety, and its mysterious ferment under the warm Spring rain, of the soft green shoots tapering up so shyly toward the first sun, and hardening in air to thin wiry stalk. I think of the unnumerable tiny beasts that have jangled in that pale forest; of the winged blue jewels of butterfly risen from it to hover on the wild− rustling blades; of that continual music played there by the wind; of the chicory and poppy flowers that have been its lights−o' love, as it grew tawny and full of life, before the appointed date when it should return to its captivity. I think of that slow−travelling hum and swish which laid it low, of the gathering to stack, and the long waiting under the rustle and drip of the sheltering trees, until yesterday the hoot of the thresher blew, and there began the falling into this dun silvery peace. Here it will lie with the pale sun narrowly filtering in on it, and by night the pale moon, till slowly, week by week, it is stolen away, and its ridges and drifts sink and sink, and the beasts have eaten it all....

When the dusk is falling, I go out to them again. They have nearly finished now; the chaff in the chaff−shed is mounting hillock−high; only the little barley stack remains unthreshed. Mrs. George−the− Gaul is standing with a jug to give drink to the tired ones. Some stars are already netted in the branches of the pines; the Guinea− fowl are silent. But still the harmonious thresher hums and showers from three sides the straw, the chaff, the corn; and the men fork, and rake, and cart, and carry, sleep growing in their muscles, silence on their tongues, and the tranquillity of the long day nearly ended in their souls. They will go on till it is quite dark.

1911.

THAT OLD−TIME PLACE

"Yes, suh—here we are at that old−time place! "And our dark driver drew up his little victoria gently.

Through the open doorway, into a dim, cavernous, ruined house of New Orleans we passed. The mildew and dirt, the dark denuded dankness of that old hostel, rotting down with damp and time!

And our guide, the tall, thin, grey−haired dame, who came forward with such native ease and moved before us, touching this fungused wall, that rusting stairway, and telling, as it were, no one in her soft, slow speech, things that any one could see—what a strange and fitting figure!

Before the smell of the deserted, oozing rooms, before that old creature leading us on and on, negligent of all our questions, and talking to the air, as though we were not, we felt such discomfort that we soon made to go out again into such freshness as there was on that day of dismal heat. Then realising, it seemed, that she was losing us, our old guide turned; for the first time looking in our faces, she smiled, and said in her sweet, weak voice, like the sound from the strings of a spinet long unplayed on: "Don' you wahnd to see the dome−room: an' all the other rooms right here, of this old−time place?"

Again those words! We had not the hearts to disappoint her. And as we followed on and on, along the mouldering corridors and rooms where the black peeling papers hung like stalactites, the dominance of our senses gradually dropped from us, and with our souls we saw its soul —the soul of this old−time place; this mustering house of the old South, bereft of all but ghosts and the grey pigeons niched in the rotting gallery round a narrow courtyard open to the sky.

"This is the dome−room, suh and lady; right over the slave−market it is. Here they did the business of the State—sure; old−time heroes up therein the roof—Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Davis, Lee− there they are! All gone—now! Yes, suh!"

A fine—yea, even a splendid room, of great height, and carved grandeur, with hand−wrought bronze sconces and a band of metal bordering, all blackened with oblivion. And the faces of those old heroes encircling that domed ceiling were blackened too, and scarred with damp, beyond recognition. Here, beneath their gaze, men had banqueted and danced and ruled. The pride and might and vivid strength of things still fluttered their uneasy flags of spirit, moved disherited wings! Those old−time feasts and grave discussions —we seemed to see them printed on the thick air, imprisoned in this great chamber built above their dark foundations. The pride and the might and the vivid strength of things—gone, all gone!

We became conscious again of that soft, weak voice.

"Not hearing very well, suh, I have it all printed, lady—beautifully told here—yes, indeed!"

She was putting cards into our hands; then, impassive, maintaining ever her impersonal chant, the guardian of past glory led us on.

"Now we shall see the slave−market—downstairs, underneath! It's wet for the lady the water comes in now yes, suh!"

On the crumbling black and white marble floorings the water indeed was trickling into pools. And down in the halls there came to us wandering—strangest thing that ever strayed through deserted grandeur—a brown, broken horse, lean, with a sore flank and a head of tremendous age. It stopped and gazed at us, as though we might be going to give it things to eat, then passed on, stumbling over the ruined marbles. For a moment we had thought him ghost—one of the many. But he was not, since his hoofs sounded. The scrambling clatter of them had died out into silence before we came to that dark, crypt−like chamber whose marble columns were ringed in iron, veritable pillars of foundation. And then we saw that our old guide's hands were full of newspapers. She struck a match; they caught fire and blazed. Holding high that torch, she said: "See! Up there's his name, above where he stood. The auctioneer. Oh yes, indeed! Here's where they sold them!"

Below that name, decaying on the wall, we had the slow, uncanny feeling of some one standing there in the gleam and flicker from that paper torch. For a moment the whole shadowy room seemed full of forms and faces. Then the torch lied out, and our old guide, pointing through an archway with the blackened stump of it, said:

"'Twas here they kept them indeed, yes!"

We saw before us a sort of vault, stone−built, and low, and long. The light there was too dim for us to make

out anything but walls and heaps of rusting scrap−iron cast away there and mouldering own. But trying to pierce that darkness we became conscious, as it seemed, of innumerable eyes gazing, not at us, but through the archway where we stood; innumerable white eyeballs gleaming out of blackness. From behind us came a little laugh. It floated past through the archway, toward those eyes. Who was that? Who laughed in there? The old South itself—that incredible, fine, lost soul! That "old−time" thing of old ideals, blindfolded by its own history! That queer proud blend of simple chivalry and tyranny, of piety and the abhorrent thing! Who was it laughed there in the old slave−market— laughed at these white eyeballs glaring from out of the blackness of their dark cattle−pen? What poor departed soul in this House of Melancholy? But there was no ghost when we turned to look—only our old guide with her sweet smile.

"Yes, suh. Here they all came—'twas the finest hotel—before the war−time; old Southern families—buyin' an' sellin' their property. Yes, ma'am, very interesting! This way! And here were the bells to all the rooms. Broken, you see—all broken!"

And rather quickly we passed away, out of that "old−time place"; where something had laughed, and the drip, drip, drip of water down the walls was as the sound of a spirit grieving.

1912.

ROMANCE—THREE GLEAMS

On that New Year's morning when I drew up the blind it was still nearly dark, but for the faintest pink flush glancing out there on the horizon of black water. The far shore of the river's mouth was just soft dusk; and the dim trees below me were in perfect stillness. There was no lap of water. And then—I saw her, drifting in on the tide−the little ship, passaging below me, a happy ghost. Like no thing of this world she came, ending her flight, with sail−wings closing and her glowing lantern eyes. There was I know not what of stealthy joy about her thus creeping in to the unexpecting land. And I wished she would never pass, but go on gliding by down there for ever with her dark ropes, and her bright lanterns, and her mysterious felicity, so that I might have for ever in my heart the blessed feeling she brought me, coming like this out of that great mystery the sea. If only she need not change to solidity, but ever be this visitor from the unknown, this sacred bird, telling with her half− seen, trailing−down plume—sails the story of uncharted wonder. If only I might go on trembling, as I was, with the rapture of all I did not know and could not see, yet felt pressing against me and touching my face with its lips! To think of her at anchor in cold light was like flinging−to a door in the face of happiness. And just then she struck her bell; the faint silvery far−down sound fled away before her, and to every side, out into the utter hush, to discover echo. But nothing answered, as if fearing to break the spell of her coming, to brush with reality the dark sea dew from her sail−wings. But within me, in response, there began the song of all unknown things; the song so tenuous, so ecstatic, that seems to sweep and quiver across such thin golden strings, and like an eager dream dies too soon. The song of the secret−knowing wind that has peered through so great forests and over such wild sea; blown on so many faces, and in the jungles of the grass the song of all that the wind has seen and felt. The song of lives that I should never live; of the loves that I should never love singlng to me as though I should! And suddenly I felt that I could not bear my little ship of dreams to grow hard and grey, her bright lanterns drowned in the cold light, her dark ropes spidery and taut, her sea−wan sails all furled, and she no more en chanted; and turning away I let fall the curtain.

II

Then what happens to the moon? She, who, shy and veiled, slips out before dusk to take the air of heaven, wandering timidly among the columned clouds, and fugitive from the staring of the sun; she, who, when dusk has come, rules the sentient night with such chaste and icy spell—whither and how does she retreat?

I came on her one morning—I surprised her. She was stealing into a dark wintry wood, and five little stars were chasing her. She was orange−hooded, a light−o'−love dismissed—unashamed and unfatigued, having taken—all. And she was looking back with her almond eyes, across her dark−ivory shoulder, at Night where he still lay drowned in the sleep she had brought him. What a strange, slow, mocking look! So might Aphrodite herself have looked back at some weary lover, remembering the fire of his first embrace. Insatiate, smiling creature, slipping down to the rim of the world to her bath in the sweet waters of dawn, whence emerging, pure as a water lily, she would float in the cool sky till evening came again! And just then she saw me looking, and hid behind a holm−oak tree; but I could still see the gleam of one shoulder and her long narrow eyes pursuing me. I went up to the tree and parted its dark boughs to take her; but she had slipped behind another. I called to her to stand, if only for one moment. But she smiled and went slip ping on, and I ran thrusting through the wet bushes, leaping the fallen trunks. The scent of rotting leaves disturbed by my feet leaped out into the darkness, and birds, surprised, fluttered away. And still I ran—she slipping ever further into the grove, and ever looking back at me. And I thought: But I will catch you yet, you nymph of perdition! The wood will soon be passed, you will have no cover then! And from her eyes, and the scanty gleam of her flying limbs, I never looked away, not even when I stumbled or ran against tree trunks in my blind haste. And at every clearing I flew more furiously, thinking to seize all of her with my gaze before she could cross the glade; but ever she found some little low tree, some bush of birch ungrown, or the far top branches of the next grove to screen her flying body and preserve allurement. And all the time she was dipping, dipping to the rim of the world. And then I tripped; but, as I rose, I saw that she had lingered for me; her long sliding eyes were full, it seemed to me, of pity, as if she would have liked for me to have enjoyed the sight of her. I stood still, breathless, thinking that at last she would consent; but flinging back, up into the air, one dark−ivory arm, she sighed and vanished. And the breath of her sigh stirred all the birch−tree twigs just coloured with the dawn. Long I stood in that thicket gazing at the spot where she had leapt from me over the edge of the world−my heart quivering.

III

We embarked on the estuary steamer that winter morning just as daylight came full. The sun was on the wing scattering little white clouds, as an eagle might scatter doves. They scurried up before him with their broken feathers tipped and tinged with gold. In the air was a touch of frost, and a smoky mist−drift clung here and there above the reeds, blurring the shores of the lagoon so that we seemed to be steaming across boundless water, till some clump of trees would fling its top out of the fog, then fall back into whiteness.

And then, in that thick vapour, rounding I suppose some curve, we came suddenly into we knew not what—all white and moving it was, as if the mist were crazed; murmuring, too, with a sort of restless beating. We seemed to be passing through a ghost—the ghost of all the life that had sprung from this water and its, shores; we seemed to have left reality, to be travelling through live wonder.

And the fantastic thought sprang into my mind: I have died. This is the voyage of my soul in the wild. I am in the final wilderness of spirits—lost in the ghost robe that wraps the earth. There seemed in all this white murmuration to be millions of tiny hands stretching out to me, millions of whispering voices, of wistful eyes. I had no fear, but a curious baked eagerness, the strangest feeling of having lost myself and become part of this around me; exactly as if my own hands and voice and eyes had left me and were groping, and whispering, and gazing out there in the eeriness. I was no longer a man on an estuary steamer, but part of sentient ghostliness. Nor did I feel unhappy; it seemed as though I had never been anything but this Bedouin spirit wandering.

We passed through again into the stillness of plain mist, and all those eerie sensations went, leaving nothing but curiosity to know what this was that we had traversed. Then suddenly the sun came flaring out, and we saw behind us thousands and thousands of white gulls dipping, wheeling, brushing the water with their wings, bewitched with sun and mist. That was all. And yet that white− winged legion through whom we had ploughed our way were not, could never be, to me just gulls—there was more than mere sun−glamour gilding their misty plumes; there was the wizardry of my past wonder, the enchantment of romance.

1912.

MEMORIES

We set out to meet him at Waterloo Station on a dull day of February —I, who had owned his impetuous mother, knowing a little what to expect, while to my companion he would be all original. We stood there waiting (for the Salisbury train was late), and wondering with a warm, half−fearful eagerness what sort of new thread Life was going to twine into our skein. I think our chief dread was that he might have light eyes—those yellow Chinese eyes of the common, parti− coloured spaniel. And each new minute of the train's tardiness increased our anxious compassion: His first journey; his first separation from his mother; this black two−months' baby! Then the train ran in, and we hastened to look for him. "Have you a dog for us?"

"A dog! Not in this van. Ask the rearguard."

"Have you a dog for us?"

"That's right. From Salisbury. Here's your wild beast, Sir!"

>From behind a wooden crate we saw a long black muzzled nose poking round at us, and heard a faint hoarse whimpering.

I remember my first thought:

"Isn't his nose too long?"

But to my companion's heart it went at once, because it was swollen from crying and being pressed against things that he could not see through. We took him out—soft, wobbly, tearful; set him down on his four, as yet not quite simultaneous legs, and regarded him. Or, rather, my companion did, having her head on one side, and a quavering smile; and I regarded her, knowing that I should thereby get a truer impression of him.

He wandered a little round our legs, neither wagging his tail nor licking at our hands; then he looked up, and my companion said: "He's an angel!"

I was not so certain. He seemed hammer−headed, with no eyes at all, and little connection between his head, his body, and his legs. His ears were very long, as long as his poor nose; and gleaming down in the blackness of him I could see the same white star that disgraced his mother's chest.

Picking him up, we carried him to a four−wheeled cab, and took his muzzle off. His little dark−brown eyes were resolutely fixed on distance, and by his refusal to even smell the biscuits we had. brought to make him happy, we knew that the human being had not yet come into a life that had contained so far only a mother, a wood− shed, and four other soft, wobbly, black, hammer−headed angels, smelling of themselves, and warmth, and wood shavings. It was pleasant to feel that to us he would surrender an untouched love, that is, if he would surrender anything. Suppose he did not take to us!

And just then something must have stirred in him, for he turned up his swollen nose and stared at my companion, and a little later rubbed the dry pinkness of his tongue against my thumb. In that look, and that unconscious restless lick; he was trying hard to leave unhappiness behind, trying hard to feel that these new creatures with stroking paws and queer scents, were his mother; yet all the time he knew, I am sure, that they were something bigger, more permanently, desperately, his. The first sense of being owned, perhaps (who knows) of owning, had stirred in him. He would never again be quite the same unconscious creature.

A little way from the end of our journey we got out and dismissed the cab. He could not too soon know the scents and pavements of this London where the chief of his life must pass. I can see now his first bumble down that wide, back−water of a street, how continually and suddenly he sat down to make sure of his own legs, how continually he lost our heels. He showed us then in full perfection what was afterwards to be an inconvenient—if endearing— characteristic: At any call or whistle he would look in precisely the opposite direction. How many times all through his life have I not seen him, at my whistle, start violently and turn his tail to me, then, with nose thrown searchingly from side to side, begin to canter toward the horizon.

In that first walk, we met, fortunately, but one vehicle, a brewer's dray; he chose that moment to attend to the more serious affairs of life, sitting quietly before the horses' feet and requiring to be moved by hand. From the beginning he had his dignity, and was extremely difficult to lift, owing to the length of his middle distance.

What strange feelings must have stirred in his little white soul when he first smelled carpet! But it was all so strange to him that day— I doubt if he felt more than I did when I first travelled to my private school, reading

"Tales of a Grandfather," and plied with tracts and sherry by my 'father's man of business.

That night, indeed, for several nights, he slept with me, keeping me too warm down my back, and waking me now and then with quaint sleepy whimperings. Indeed, all through his life he flew a good deal in his sleep, fighting dogs and seeing ghosts, running after rabbits and thrown sticks; and to the last one never quite knew whether or no to rouse him when his four black feet began to jerk and quiver. His dreams were like our dreams, both good and bad; happy sometimes, sometimes tragic to weeping point.

He ceased to sleep with me the day we discovered that he was a perfect little colony, whose settlers were of an active species which I have never seen again. After that he had many beds, for circumstance ordained that his life should be nomadic, and it is to this I trace that philosophic indifference to place or property, which marked him out from most of his own kind. He learned early that for a black dog with long silky ears, a feathered tail, and head of great dignity, there was no home whatsoever, away from those creatures with special scents, who took liberties with his name, and alone of all created things were privileged to smack him with a slipper. He would sleep anywhere, so long as it was in their room, or so close outside it as to make no matter, for it was with him a principle that what he did not smell did not exist. I would I could hear again those long rubber−lipped snufflings of recognition underneath the door, with which each morning he would regale and reassure a spirit that grew with age more and more nervous and delicate about this matter of propinquity! For he was a dog of fixed ideas, things stamped on his mind were indelible; as, for example, his duty toward cats, for whom he had really a perverse affection, which had led to that first disastrous moment of his life, when he was brought up, poor bewildered puppy, from a brief excursion to the kitchen, with one eye closed and his cheek torn! He bore to his grave that jagged scratch across the eye. It was in dread of a repetition of this tragedy that he was instructed at the word "Cats" to rush forward with a special "tow−row−rowing," which he never used toward any other form of creature. To the end he cherished a hope that he would reach the cat; but never did; and if he had, we knew he would only have stood and wagged his tail; but I well remember once, when he returned, important, from some such sally, how dreadfully my companion startled a cat−loving friend by murmuring in her most honeyed voice: "Well, my darling, have you been killing pussies in the garden?"

His eye and nose were impeccable in their sense of form; indeed, he was very English in that matter: People must be just so; things smell properly; and affairs go on in the one right way. He could tolerate neither creatures in ragged clothes, nor children on their hands and knees, nor postmen, because, with their bags, they swelled−up on one side, and carried lanterns on their stomachs. He would never let the harmless creatures pass without religious barks. Naturally a believer in authority and routine, and distrusting spiritual adventure, he yet had curious fads that seemed to have nested in him, quite outside of all principle. He would, for instance, follow neither carriages nor horses, and if we tried to make him, at once left for home, where he would sit with nose raised to Heaven, emitting through it a most lugubrious, shrill noise. Then again, one must not place a stick, a slipper, a glove, or anything with which he could play, upon one's head—since such an action reduced him at once to frenzy. For so conservative a dog, his environment was sadly anarchistic. He never complained in words of our shifting habits, but curled his head round over his left paw and pressed his chin very hard against the ground whenever he smelled packing. What necessity, he seemed continually to be saying, what real necessity is there for change of any kind whatever? Here we were all together, and one day was like another, so that I knew where I was—and now you only know what will happen next; and I—I can't tell you whether I shall be with you when it happens! What strange, grieving minutes a dog passes at such times in the underground of his subconsciousness, refusing realisation, yet all the time only too well divining. Some careless word, some unmuted compassion in voice, the stealthy wrapping of a pair of boots, the unaccustomed shutting of a door that ought to be open, the removal from a down−stair room of an object always there—one tiny thing, and he knows for certain that he is not going too. He fights against the knowledge just as we do against what we cannot bear; he gives up hope, but not effort, protesting in the only way he knows of, and now and then heaving a great sigh. Those sighs of a dog! They go to the heart so much more deeply than the sighs of our own kind, because they are utterly unintended, regardless of effect, emerging from one who, heaving them, knows not that they have escaped him!

The words: "Yes—going too!" spoken in a certain tone, would call up in his eyes a still−questioning half−happiness, and from his tail a quiet flutter, but did not quite serve to put to rest either his doubt or his feeling that it was all unnecessary—until the cab arrived. Then he would pour himself out of door or window, and be found in the bottom of the vehicle, looking severely away from an admiring cabman. Once settled on our feet he

travelled with philosophy, but no digestion.

I think no dog was ever more indifferent to an outside world of human creatures; yet few dogs have made more conquests—especially among strange women, through whom, however, he had a habit of looking—very discouraging. He had, natheless, one or two particular friends, such as him to whom this book is dedicated, and a few persons whom he knew he had seen before, but, broadly speaking, there were in his world of men, only his mistress, and—the almighty.

Each August, till he was six, he was sent for health, and the assuagement of his hereditary instincts, up to a Scotch shooting, where he carried many birds in a very tender manner. Once he was compelled by Fate to remain there nearly a year; and we went up ourselves to fetch him home. Down the long avenue toward the keeper's cottage we walked: It was high autumn; there had been frost already, for the ground was fine with red and yellow leaves; and presently we saw himself coming; professionally questing among those leaves, and preceding his dear keeper with the businesslike self− containment of a sportsman; not too fat, glossy as a raven's wing, swinging his ears and sporran like a little Highlander. We approached him silently. Suddenly his nose went up from its imagined trail, and he came rushing at our legs. From him, as a garment drops from a man, dropped all his strange soberness; he became in a single instant one fluttering eagerness. He leaped from life to life in one bound, without hesitation, without regret. Not one sigh, not one look back, not the faintest token of gratitude or regret at leaving those good people who had tended him for a whole year, buttered oat− cake for him, allowed him to choose each night exactly where he would sleep. No, he just marched out beside us, as close as ever he could get, drawing us on in spirit, and not even attending to the scents, until the lodge gates were passed.

It was strictly in accordance with the perversity of things, and something in the nature of calamity that he had not been ours one year, when there came over me a dreadful but overmastering aversion from killing those birds and creatures of which he was so fond as soon as they were dead. And so I never knew him as a sportsman; for during that first year he was only an unbroken puppy, tied to my waist for fear of accidents, and carefully pulling me off every shot. They tell me he developed a lovely nose and perfect mouth, large enough to hold gingerly the biggest hare. I well believe it, remembering the qualities of his mother, whose character, however, in stability he far surpassed. But, as he grew every year more devoted to dead grouse and birds and rabbits, I liked them more and more alive; it was the only real breach between us, and we kept it out of sight. Ah! well; it is consoling to reflect that I should infallibly have ruined his sporting qualities, lacking that peculiar habit of meaning what one says, so necessary to keep dogs virtuous. But surely to have had him with me, quivering and alert, with his solemn, eager face, would have given a new joy to those crisp mornings when the hope of wings coming to the gun makes poignant in the sports man as nothing else will, an almost sensual love of Nature, a fierce delight in the soft glow of leaves, in the white birch stems and tracery of sparse twigs against blue sky, in the scents of sap and grass and gum and heather flowers; stivers the hair of him with keenness for interpreting each sound, and fills the very fern or moss he kneels on, the very trunk he leans against, with strange vibration.

Slowly Fate prepares for each of us the religion that lies coiled in our most secret nerves; with such we cannot trifle, we do not even try! But how shall a man grudge any one sensations he has so keenly felt? Let such as have never known those curious delights, uphold the hand of horror—for me there can be no such luxury. If I could, I would still perhaps be knowing them; but when once the joy of life in those winged and furry things has knocked at the very portals of one's spirit, the thought that by pressing a little iron twig one will rive that joy out of their vitals, is too hard to bear. Call it aestheticism, squeamishness, namby−pamby sentimentalism, what you will it is stronger than oneself!

Yes, after one had once watched with an eye that did not merely see, the thirsty gaping of a slowly dying bird, or a rabbit dragging a broken leg to a hole where he would lie for hours thinking of the fern to which he should never more come forth—after that, there was always the following little matter of arithmetic: Given, that all those who had been shooting were "good−fair" shots—which, Heaven knew, they never were—they yet missed one at least in four, and did not miss it very much; so that if seventy−five things were slain, there were also twenty−five that had been fired at, and, of those twenty−five, twelve and a half had "gotten it" somewhere in their bodies, and would "likely" die at their great leisure.

This was the sum that brought about the only cleavage in our lives; and so, as he grew older, and trying to part from each other we no longer could, he ceased going to Scotland. But after that I often felt, and especially when we heard guns, how the best and most secret instincts of him were being stifled. But what was to be done? In that

which was left of a clay pigeon he would take not the faintest interest—the scent of it was paltry. Yet always, even in his most cosseted and idle days, he managed to preserve the grave preoccupation of one professionally concerned with retrieving things that smell; and consoled himself with pastimes such as cricket, which he played in a manner highly specialised, following the ball up the moment it left the bowler's hand, and sometimes retrieving it before it reached the batsman. When remonstrated with, he would consider a little, hanging out a pink tongue and looking rather too eagerly at the ball, then canter slowly out to a sort of forward short leg. Why he always chose that particular position it is difficult to say; possibly he could lurk there better than anywhere else, the batsman's eye not being on him, and the bowler's not too much. As a fieldsman he was perfect, but for an occasional belief that he was not merely short leg, but slip, point, midoff, and wicket−keep; and perhaps a tendency to make the ball a little "jubey." But he worked tremendously, watching every movement; for he knew the game thoroughly, and seldom delayed it more than three minutes when he secured the ball. And if that ball were really lost, then indeed he took over the proceedings with an intensity and quiet vigour that destroyed many shrubs, and the solemn satisfaction which comes from being in the very centre of the stage.

But his most passionate delight was swimming in anything except the sea, for which, with its unpleasant noise and habit of tasting salt, he had little affection. I see him now, cleaving the Serpentine, with his air of "the world well lost," striving to reach my stick before it had touched water. Being only a large spaniel, too small for mere heroism, he saved no lives in the water but his own—and that, on one occasion, before our very eyes, from a dark trout stream, which was trying to wash him down into a black hole among the boulders.

The call of the wild−Spring running—whatever it is—that besets men and dogs, seldom attained full mastery over him; but one could often see it struggling against his devotion to the scent of us, and, watching that dumb contest, I have time and again wondered how far this civilisation of ours was justifiably imposed on him; how far the love for us that we had so carefully implanted could ever replace in him the satisfaction of his primitive wild yearnings: He was like a man, naturally polygamous, married to one loved woman.

It was surely not for nothing that Rover is dog's most common name, and would be ours, but for our too tenacious fear of losing something, to admit, even to ourselves, that we are hankering. There was a man who said: Strange that two such queerly opposite qualities as courage and hypocrisy are the leading characteristics of the Anglo−Saxon! But is not hypocrisy just a product of tenacity, which is again the lower part of courage? Is not hypocrisy but an active sense of property in one's good name, the clutching close of respectability at any price, the feeling that one must not part, even at the cost of truth, with what he has sweated so to gain? And so we Anglo−Saxons will not answer to the name of Rover, and treat our dogs so that they, too, hardly know their natures.

The history of his one wandering, for which no respectable reason can be assigned, will never, of course, be known. It was in London, of an October evening, when we were told he had slipped out and was not anywhere. Then began those four distressful hours of searching for that black needle n that blacker bundle of hay. Hours of real dismay and suffering for it is suffering, indeed, to feel a loved thing swallowed up in that hopeless haze of London streets. Stolen or run over? Which was worst? The neighbouring police stations visited, the Dog's Home notified, an order of five hundred "Lost Dog" bills placed in the printer's hands, the streets patrolled! And then, in a lull snatched for food, and still endeavouring to preserve some aspect of assurance, we heard the bark which meant: "Here is a door I cannot open!" We hurried forth, and there he was on the top doorstep—busy, unashamed, giving no explanations, asking for his supper; and very shortly after him came his five hundred "Lost Dog" bills. Long I sat looking at him that night after my companion had gone up, thinking of the evening, some years before, when there followed as that shadow of a spaniel who had been lost for eleven days. And my heart turned over within me. But he! He was asleep, for he knew not remorse.

Ah! and there was that other time, when it was reported to me, returning home at night, that he had gone out to find me; and I went forth again, disturbed, and whistling his special call to the empty fields. Suddenly out of the darkness I heard a rushing, and he came furiously dashing against my heels from he alone knew where he had been lurking and saying to himself: I will not go in till he comes! I could not scold, there was something too lyrical in the return of that live, lonely, rushing piece of blackness through the blacker night. After all, the vagary was but a variation in his practice when one was away at bed−time, of passionately scratching up his bed in protest, till it resembled nothing; for, in spite of his long and solemn face and the silkiness of his ears, there was much in him yet of the cave bear—he dug graves on the smallest provocations, in which he never buried anything.

He was not a "clever" dog; and guiltless of all tricks. Nor was he ever "shown." We did not even dream of subjecting him to this indignity. Was our dog a clown, a hobby, a fad, a fashion, a feather in our caps that we should subject him to periodic pennings in stuffy halls, that we should harry his faithful soul with such tomfoolery? He never even heard us talk about his lineage, deplore the length of his nose, or call him "clever−looking." We should have been ashamed to let him smell about us the tar−brush of a sense of property, to let him think we looked on him as an asset to earn us pelf or glory. We wished that there should be between us the spirit that was between the sheep dog and that farmer, who, when asked his dog's age, touched the old creature's head, and answered thus: "Teresa" (his daughter) "was born in November, and this one in August." That sheep dog had seen eighteen years when the great white day came for him, and his spirit passed away up, to cling with the wood−smoke round the dark rafters of the kitchen where he had lain so vast a time beside his master's boots. No, no! If a man does not soon pass beyond the thought "By what shall this dog profit me?" into the large state of simple gladness to be with dog, he shall never know the very essence of that companion ship which depends not on the points of dog, but on some strange and subtle mingling of mute spirits. For it is by muteness that a dog becomes for one so utterly beyond value; with him one is at peace, where words play no torturing tricks. When he just sits, loving, and knows that he is being loved, those are the moments that I think are precious to a dog; when, with his adoring soul coming through his eyes, he feels that you are really thinking of him. But he is touchingly tolerant of one's other occupations. The subject of these memories always knew when one was too absorbed in work to be so close to him as he thought proper; yet he never tried to hinder or distract, or asked for attention. It dinged his mood, of course, so that the red under his eyes and the folds of his crumply cheeks— which seemed to speak of a touch of bloodhound introduced a long way back into his breeding—drew deeper and more manifest. If he could have spoken at such times, he would have said: "I have been a long time alone, and I cannot always be asleep; but you know best, and I must not criticise."

He did not at all mind one's being absorbed in other humans; he seemed to enjoy the sounds of conversation lifting round him, and to know when they were sensible. He could not, for instance, stand actors or actresses giving readings of their parts, perceiving at once that the same had no connection with the minds and real feelings of the speakers; and, having wandered a little to show his disapproval, he would go to the door and stare at it till it opened and let him out. Once or twice, it is true, when an actor of large voice was declaiming an emotional passage, he so far relented as to go up to him and pant in his face. Music, too, made him restless, inclined to sigh, and to ask questions. Sometimes, at its first sound, he would cross to the window and remain there looking for Her. At others, he would simply go and lie on the loud pedal, and we never could tell whether it was from sentiment, or because he thought that in this way he heard less. At one special Nocturne of Chopin's he always whimpered. He was, indeed, of rather Polish temperament—very gay when he was gay, dark and brooding when he was not.

On the whole, perhaps his life was uneventful for so far−travelling a dog, though it held its moments of eccentricity, as when he leaped through the window of a four−wheeler into Kensington, or sat on a Dartmoor adder. But that was fortunately of a Sunday afternoon—when adder and all were torpid, so nothing happened, till a friend, who was following, lifted him off the creature with his large boot.

If only one could have known more of his private life—more of his relations with his own kind! I fancy he was always rather a dark dog to them, having so many thoughts about us that he could not share with any one, and being naturally fastidious, except with ladies, for whom he had a chivalrous and catholic taste, so that they often turned and snapped at him. He had, however, but one lasting love affair, for a liver−coloured lass of our village, not quite of his own caste, but a wholesome if somewhat elderly girl, with loving and sphinx−like eyes. Their children, alas, were not for this world, and soon departed.

Nor was he a fighting dog; but once attacked, he lacked a sense of values, being unable to distinguish between dogs that he could beat and dogs with whom he had "no earthly." It was, in fact, as well to interfere at once, especially in the matter of retrievers, for he never forgot having in his youth been attacked by a retriever from behind. No, he never forgot, and never forgave, an enemy. Only a month before that day of which I cannot speak, being very old and ill, he engaged an Irish terrier on whose impudence he had long had his eye, and routed him. And how a battle cheered his spirit! He was certainly no Christian; but, allowing for essential dog, he was very much a gentleman. And I do think that most of us who live on this earth these days would rather leave it with that label on us than the other. For to be a Christian, as Tolstoy understood the word—and no one else in our time has

had logic and love of truth enough to give it coherent meaning—is (to be quite sincere) not suited to men of Western blood. Whereas—to be a gentleman! It is a far cry, but perhaps it can be done. In him, at all events, there was no pettiness, no meanness, and no cruelty, and though he fell below his ideal at times, this never altered the true look of his eyes, nor the simple loyalty in his soul.

But what a crowd of memories come back, bringing with them the perfume of fallen days! What delights and glamour, what long hours of effort, discouragements, and secret fears did he not watch over— our black familiar; and with the sight and scent and touch of him, deepen or assuage! How many thousand walks did we not go together, so that we still turn to see if he is following at his padding gait, attentive to the invisible trails. Not the least hard thing to bear when they go from us, these quiet friends, is that they carry away with them so many years of our own lives. Yet, if they find warmth therein, who would grudge them those years that they have so guarded? Nothing else of us can they take to lie upon with outstretched paws and chin pressed to the ground; and, whatever they take, be sure they have deserved.

Do they know, as we do, that their time must come? Yes, they know, at rare moments. No other way can I interpret those pauses of his latter life, when, propped on his forefeet, he would sit for long minutes quite motionless—his head drooped, utterly withdrawn; then turn those eyes of his and look at me. That look said more plainly than all words could: "Yes, I know that I must go!" If we have spirits that persist—they have. If we know after our departure, who we were they do. No one, I think, who really longs for truth, can ever glibly say which it will be for dog and man persistence or extinction of our consciousness. There is but one thing certain—the childishness of fretting over that eternal question. Whichever it be, it must be right, the only possible thing. He felt that too, I know; but then, like his master, he was what is called a pessimist.

My companion tells me that, since he left us, he has once come back. It was Old Year's Night, and she was sad, when he came to her in visible shape of his black body, passing round the dining−table from the window−end, to his proper place beneath the table, at her feet. She saw him quite clearly; she heard the padding tap−tap of his paws and very toe−nails; she felt his warmth brushing hard against the front of her skirt. She thought then that he would settle down upon her feet, but something disturbed him, and he stood pausing, pressed against her, then moved out toward where I generally sit, but was not sitting that night.

She saw him stand there, as if considering; then at some sound or laugh, she became self−conscious, and slowly, very slowly, he was no longer there. Had he some message, some counsel to give, something he would say, that last night of the last year of all those he had watched over us? Will he come back again?

No stone stands over where he lies. It is on our hearts that his life is engraved.

1912.

FELICITY

When God is so good to the fields, of what use are words—those poor husks of sentiment! There is no painting Felicity on the wing! No way of bringing on to the canvas the flying glory of things! A single buttercup of the twenty million in one field is worth all these dry symbols—that can never body forth the very spirit of that froth of May breaking over the hedges, the choir of birds and bees, the lost−travelling down of the wind flowers, the white−throated swallows in their Odysseys. Just here there are no skylarks, but what joy of song and leaf; of lanes lighted with bright trees, the few oaks still golden brown, and the ashes still spiritual! Only the blackbirds and thrushes can sing−up this day, and cuckoos over the hill. The year has flown so fast that the apple−trees have dropped nearly all their bloom, and in "long meadow" the "daggers" are out early, beside the narrow bright streams. Orpheus sits there on a stone, when nobody is by, and pipes to the ponies; and Pan can often be seen dancing with his nymphs in the raised beech−grove where it is always twilight, if you lie still enough against the far bank.

Who can believe in growing old, so long as we are wrapped in this cloak of colour and wings and song; so long as this unimaginable vision is here for us to gaze at—the soft−faced sheep about us, and the wool−bags drying out along the fence, and great numbers of tiny ducks, so trustful that the crows have taken several.

Blue is the colour of youth, and all the blue flowers have a "fey" look. Everything seems young too young to work. There is but one thing busy, a starling, fetching grubs for its little family, above my head—it must take that flight at least two hundred times a day. The children should be very fat.

When the sky is so happy, and the flowers so luminous, it does not seem possible that the bright angels of this day shall pass into dark night, that slowly these wings shall close, and the cuckoo praise himself to sleep, mad midges dance−in the evening; the grass shiver with dew, wind die, and no bird sing . . . .

Yet so it is. Day has gone—the song and glamour and swoop of wings. Slowly, has passed the daily miracle. It is night. But Felicity has not withdrawn; she has but changed her robe for silence, velvet, and the pearl fan of the moon. Everything is sleeping, save only a single star, and the pansies. Why they should be more wakeful than the other flowers, I do not know. The expressions of their faces, if one bends down into the dusk, are sweeter and more cunning than ever. They have some compact, no doubt, in hand.

What a number of voices have given up the ghost to this night of but one voice—the murmur of the stream out there in darkness!

With what religion all has been done! Not one buttercup open; the yew−trees already with shadows flung down! No moths are abroad yet; it is too early in the year for nightjars; and the owls are quiet. But who shall say that in this silence, in this hovering wan light, in this air bereft of wings, and of all scent save freshness, there is less of the ineffable, less of that before which words are dumb?

It is strange how this tranquillity of night, that seems so final, is inhabited, if one keeps still enough. A lamb is bleating out there on the dim moor; a bird somewhere, a little one, about three fields away, makes the sweetest kind of chirruping; some cows are still cropping. There is a scent, too, underneath the freshness−sweet− brier, I think, and our Dutch honeysuckle; nothing else could so delicately twine itself with air. And even in this darkness the roses have colour, more beautiful perhaps than ever. If colour be, as they say, but the effect of light on various fibre, one may think of it as a tune, the song of thanksgiving that each form puts forth, to sun and moon and stars and fire. These moon−coloured roses are singing a most quiet song. I see all of a sudden that there are many more stars beside that one so red and watchful. The flown kite is there with its seven pale worlds; it has adventured very high and far to−night−with a company of others remoter still. . . .

This serenity of night! What could seem less likely ever more to move, and change again to day? Surely now the world has found its long sleep; and the pearly glimmer from the moon will last, and the precious silence never again yield to clamour; the grape−bloom of this mystery never more pale out into gold . . . .

And yet it is not so. The nightly miracle has passed. It is dawn. Faint light has come. I am waiting for the first sound. The sky as yet is like nothing but grey paper, with the shadows of wild geese passing. The trees are phantoms. And then it comes—that first call of a bird, startled at discovering day! Just one call—and now, here, there, on all the trees, the sudden answers swelling, of that most sweet and careless choir. Was irresponsibility

ever so divine as this, of birds waking? Then—saffron into the sky, and once more silence! What is it birds do after the first Chorale? Think of their sins and business? Or just sleep again? The trees are fast dropping unreality, and the cuckoos begin calling. Colour is burning up in the flowers already; the dew smells of them.

The miracle is ended, for the starling has begun its job; and the sun is fretting those dark, busy wings with gold. Full day has come again. But the face of it is a little strange, it is not like yesterday. Queer−to think, no day is like to a day that's past and no night like a night that's coming! Why, then, fear death, which is but night? Why care, if next day have different face and spirit? The sun has lighted buttercup−field now, the wind touches the lime− tree. Something passes over me away up there.

It is Felicity on her wings!

1912.